

The Encourager

Helping People Live Courageously

VOL. TWO, NO. 1 SPRING 1996

THE HOPE OF Heaven

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Words of comfort and promise spoken by Jesus and recorded in John 14:1-3 (NIV).

“Life is a dream, and heaven’s reality.” For so many of the people Jan and I encourage, these are not just lyrics to a popular Christian song, they are an anchor. That’s why we felt compelled to do an issue on heaven. It’s a subject close to our hearts. It is the hope of every soul.

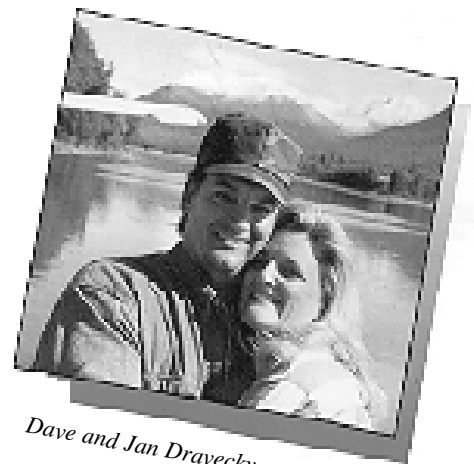
But I have to tell you, the reality of that hope didn’t come easily to me. When I was first diagnosed with cancer, I was scared. I didn’t want to die. I didn’t want to leave my wife and kids behind. Even though I was a Christian, I felt tremendous fear and anxiety.

I am not alone in the fear I felt when I faced death. Something deep within us tells us that death is not natural. We fight against it as if it is a foreign enemy, and in a sense it is. The Bible tells us that God has placed eternity into the heart of every person. In Ecclesiastes 3:11 we read that God “has set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done.” We long for life to go on, yet we are so attached to life on earth that we resist heaven, the true home Jesus has prepared for us.

So we struggle. On one hand we are scared, on the other hand there is heaven. We wrestle back and forth between the two. That is what happened to me. My feelings and beliefs wrestled within me. The apostle Paul’s phrase “to live is Christ and to die is gain,” which refers to the hope of heaven, kept going through my mind. I knew I would go to heaven, yet I couldn’t honestly repeat Paul’s words from my own heart. Death, even if it took me to heaven, didn’t seem like “gain” to me.

Yet the underlying truth of Paul’s statement held onto me and said, “Dave, you’re a child of God. Heaven is a very real place. It is the place you will go to if you die.” And when we face death, when we face the loss of loved ones, we desperately need a rock-solid hope. Jan describes our need for hope best: “The thought that this is all there is—we live and we die—was dreadful. When you realize how fragile life is, you search hard for the truth. You have to know what is real. You need a hope beyond this life.”

Heaven provides that hope for us and for many, many others. The reality of heaven doesn’t take away the pain of our suffering or our losses, but it assures us that our pain is temporary. Our heart and prayer is that the words and images in this issue will lift your eyes toward heaven, our eternal home.



Dave and Jan Dravecky

With every death of someone we love,
Our longing for heaven grows stronger—
Because that is where our heart is,
Taken there a piece at a time
By the ones we loved on this Earth.

When You Can’t Come Back
by Dave and Jan Dravecky



WILL I BE ABLE TO SEE YOU FROM

by Kim Jones

Heaven?

"Will I be able to see you from heaven?" Beve asked as we sat on the sofa, curled up under the afghan.

"Why do you always ask questions I can't answer?" I replied.

Never easily put off or detoured from her agenda, she pressed further, "Can I watch what you do every day?" Having lived a life entwined in the lives of others, this was a logical question to ask on the day before her second brain surgery to slow down an aggressive, cancerous tumor.

Again, I had no answer. But the fact that she asked me these questions so calmly and without a trace of fear confirmed what we both knew. She was going home to heaven. An unexpected, quiet peace filled the room. We curled up closer together.

This was a side of Beve I had not seen before. Heavenly conversations were not her usual fare. She was a concert in constant motion, catching up everything and everyone in her whirlwind of activity. Driven by her energetic personality and a fear she kept safely hidden, Beve extracted every moment out of life. Few people knew it, but Beve, like so many of us, was terrified of dying.

Just days after her initial diagnosis, Beve experienced a head-on confrontation with her fear. Facing the battle for her life, she turned to God, the only one who could help. Reaching out to Jesus Christ as her personal savior, she cried out from the depths of her soul, "God, I need you!" Instantly her body, tense from waves of anxiety and hours of tears, relaxed. Her troubled expression changed to one of peace and calm. She opened her eyes in amazement and said, "I met Jesus, Kim. He's real!"

One year later we celebrated Beve's 44th birthday. We were thankful that she was doing better than the doctors had

expected, but a few weeks after our celebration, the tide suddenly turned. The seizures and symptoms escalated. Within hours we sat in the doctor's office, awaiting the results of the latest brain scan. The news was grim, the outcome inescapable. Surgery to remove some of the tumor and buy a little time was scheduled immediately. "The valley of the shadow of death," we discovered, is a very real place.

We began to pray that God would prepare her to come home to Him, and He did. Several days after her surgery, Beve and I were alone in her hospital room. She woke up from a nap and said with absolute conviction, "When I close my eyes to pray, Jesus is standing right beside me." She went on to describe seeing the faces of her parents in her sleep. Although they had died years earlier, she seemed to know that she would see them again soon.

I don't recall what I said, but I remember how I felt. Beve was moving into a realm I didn't understand, a place where I couldn't go. Most amazing, she wasn't afraid. I found that I wasn't prepared to handle God's answer to my own prayers. God had not only replaced Beve's fear with peace, He had taken her by the hand and was gently leading her away.

Within days, Beve began to sleep more and converse less. The speed at which her cancer progressed stunned the surgeons. God, in His infinite mercy, shortened her time of suffering and ours. The night before Beve slipped into an irreversible coma, her room was filled with college students, friends of her youngest son. The room was silent. She was too weak to talk, and they were too overwhelmed to try. One young woman began reading Beve's favorite Bible verses. One in particular stood out:

I was not prepared to handle God's answer to my own prayers. God not only took Beve by the hand, He gently led her away.



Allen and Beve Geddes in the front of their Oregon Home

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18).

These words of hope filled the room, providing an anchor in a sea of sorrow. Like a dam bursting forth, emotions flowed uninhibited. I glanced at Beve, she was smiling. She wanted to speak, so I drew near to her face to hear what she wanted to say. With a weak and failing voice, yet one that was filled with the strength of fearless conviction, she uttered her last words to me: "Kim, tell them to live by these words."

And so I am.

Beve went home to heaven, peacefully, days later. Can she see us from heaven? I still don't know the answer, but I know Beve does.



Kim Jones is Ministry Coordinator for Outreach of Hope. For the twelve years they knew one another, Kim and Beve were best friends.

Through my seminary studies, personal Bible study, and twenty years of preaching, I had learned much about heaven. I believed in heaven and the Christian's future in heaven. I had comforted many grieving hearts with the hope of heaven. But it was the simple faith of my ten-year-old daughter and her subsequent peaceful death that brought to my heart a new understanding of the phenomenal truth that heaven is a very real place, a place not to be feared.

"Are you going to miss me, Mom?" Jessica asked as she cuddled next to her mother.

"Of course I'll miss you, Jessie."

"Well, I'm not going to miss you!"

Trying to hide her hurt, my wife asked, "Jessica, why on earth would you say that?"

"Well, Mom," she answered with matter-of-fact confidence, "a day in heaven is a thousand years on earth."

Those surprising words, that at first stung so sharply, were spoken with great wisdom and have come to provide long-lasting comfort to our family. My wife and I have clung to that truth expressed by our young daughter and have shared it with others who have faced the death of loved ones.

Jessica, our youngest daughter, seemed to be perfectly healthy. While we sat in a restaurant on a Monday afternoon, enjoying a family vacation, my wife Dianna casually put her arm around her to give her a hug. That was the first time anyone felt the lump near Jessica's collar bone. We took her to a doctor the next day and he immediately sent us home to see more doctors.

Within days we learned that Jessica had osteogenic sarcoma, a rare cancer that is fatal if not caught soon enough to amputate the originating site. By the time

Heaven . . . A VERY REAL PLACE

by Ron Eggert

Jessica's tumors were discovered, they had spread to her chest and lungs. Her doctor told us it would be only two to three months before the worst tumor would choke off her air supply.

Cancer and its results were nothing new to Jessica. As a pastor, I had conducted many funerals for cancer victims, including services for dear friends who had become surrogate grandparents for our children who lived far from their own grandparents. So when Jessica was told that she had cancer, her first question was, "Am I going to die?"

Her question is one that no parent ever wants to hear or have to answer. We knew there would be no game playing or hiding the truth from Jessica. She was much too sharp for that. Besides, she had seen tears in the eyes of the nurses who knew her diagnosis, and we had been told that with her disease in its present state of advancement she had barely a 4 percent chance to live for one year. "We're going to do the best we can," was all we could promise her.

I don't know exactly how Jessica came to grasp the reality of heaven, but she certainly did. It must have been in Sunday school that she learned the truth of 2 Peter 3:8 (NIV), "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." I think our talks about the deaths of "Grandpa" Towne and "Grandma" Neva, "Papa" Ed and "Grandma" Doe, the dear saints who had befriended our children, added to her realization that heaven was a very real place. I believe the assurance of their presence in heaven did much to remove her fear. She already knew people who were in heaven and knew that they were waiting for her.

By God's grace and many answered prayers, Jessica lived with her cancer for three and one-half years. Through her whole struggle—the horrible chemotherapy, the final weakening stage—her confidence in what lay ahead for her

never wavered. I was amazed by how real heaven was to her. I was inspired by her complete peace. I found encouragement in her lack of fear or dread. Our hope, our comfort, and our strength for grieving were immeasurably enhanced by the powerful simplicity of her faith.

We will never forget our last evening with her. She was obviously near death and leaned across my chest. "I'm ready to go now, Daddy," she said.

"Do you mean to heaven?"

"Yes, Daddy. I'm ready to go over there."

We prayed together one last time, and, surrounded by her family, she slipped peacefully into a coma. A few hours later God gently took her home, where in a "short" time we will see her again.



The Eggert family enjoys an outing at the Dallas Arboretum: Jon, Jeremy, Jodi, Ron (standing), Dianna, and Jessica (seated).

Dave's "GIANTS"

A KID'S VIEW OF HEAVEN

Most of us have given some thought as to what heaven will be like. I sometimes imagine that—just maybe—heaven is going to be a beautiful baseball diamond. I picture myself standing on the mound with my left arm healed, pitching again. It's a nice thought. I'd like to share what some of my young friends think about heaven.

Dave Dravecky, 40

The best part of heaven is the party Jesus is going to give us. Lots of babies will be in heaven. If we need our dolls in heaven, Jesus will have them there.

Micah Leake, 3

There are roads of gold, gates of pearl, and after you have walked through the gates of pearl, I think you might see a humongous throne. I think the throne is made out of bricks of gold and outlined with pearls, decorated with emeralds—maybe even rubies! I don't know if I'm right, but I do know you will have to have bare feet.

Emily Edwards, 7

God says that heaven is perfect for everyone, and we each have our own idea of what perfect is. My dad died, so part of my perfect heaven would be to have my dad there with me. Best of all, we could see God whenever we wanted.

Taylor Andrews, 13

Heaven will be great. It will be more beautiful than any sunset. It will be like going to your favorite place all the time.

Tyler Knepper,

13

Heaven is a place where you can just have fun. It's a place where you can see your friends again. I'll be happy. I'll be able to put unpleasant times, bad days, seizure medicine . . . all that stuff behind me.

Benjamin Leake, 10

I think heaven would have fences in it with strawberries. David who fought Goliath would be there too. I think heaven would have blueberries and gold in it. Old people will be there and God's angels. There also will be a big, big feast that keeps everybody full.

Andrew Edwards, 3

In heaven there will be no sin to mess things up. Everyone will have a perfect, joyful, peaceful, and loving attitude.

Jacob Knepper, 16

Heaven will be sparkly . . . glittery . . . fresh air . . . angels around. Everyone will have an angel-pal to go around with.

Hannah Leake, 13

Heaven will be the greatest place ever, but mainly because Jesus will be there. To get to this great place, though, you must believe in Christ our Lord.

Heather Knepper, 11

Heaven will be like living in the clouds with Christ and you can rollerblade on streets of gold. Peter will give you fishing lessons. We'll all be able to fly. We'll play tag in the sky. The trees will be made of gold and the leaves of silver. My point is, heaven is going to be wonderful!

Isaac Allen Jones, 11

Heaven will have lots of angels that are singing and rejoicing. Everybody will be happy. There will be a big banquet table, a huge pearl gate, gold streets, and LOTS of music. Everybody will be in perfect health. There will be no tears, no pain, no problems. I am most looking forward to seeing Jesus and having no more pain.

Catherine Leake, 14

There is no sadness in heaven. There are big houses for the people in heaven that are all equal, so nobody feels better than someone else and no one is jealous.

Caitlin Sorenson, 10

Heaven will be a place with no sin and no worries, a place with no problems and no hurries.

Meghan Kalmus, 15

ENCOURAGEMENT ON DECK

Take some time to pray and think about what heaven means to you. Look for an opportunity to encourage someone with the good news about heaven.

Encouragement RETURNED TO SENDER!

Letters are a precious gift—to give and to receive. Many such gifts are mailed away each week at Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope. And we receive several in return that contain beautiful expressions of love and appreciation wrapped in kind words. The encouragement others share with us we share with you, because it is your prayers and support that makes the delivery of this mail possible . . . both ways. Thank you!

Heaven is a place all Christians look forward to, but because we have recently walked to heaven's door and put our son's hand into the Lord's hand, it has taken on a whole new meaning. Prior to Adam going to be with Jesus, he told his tutor that he was in a win-win situation. He said, "If God heals me, I'll be able to ride my bike and I win. If I die, I'll be with Jesus and I win. I win either way."

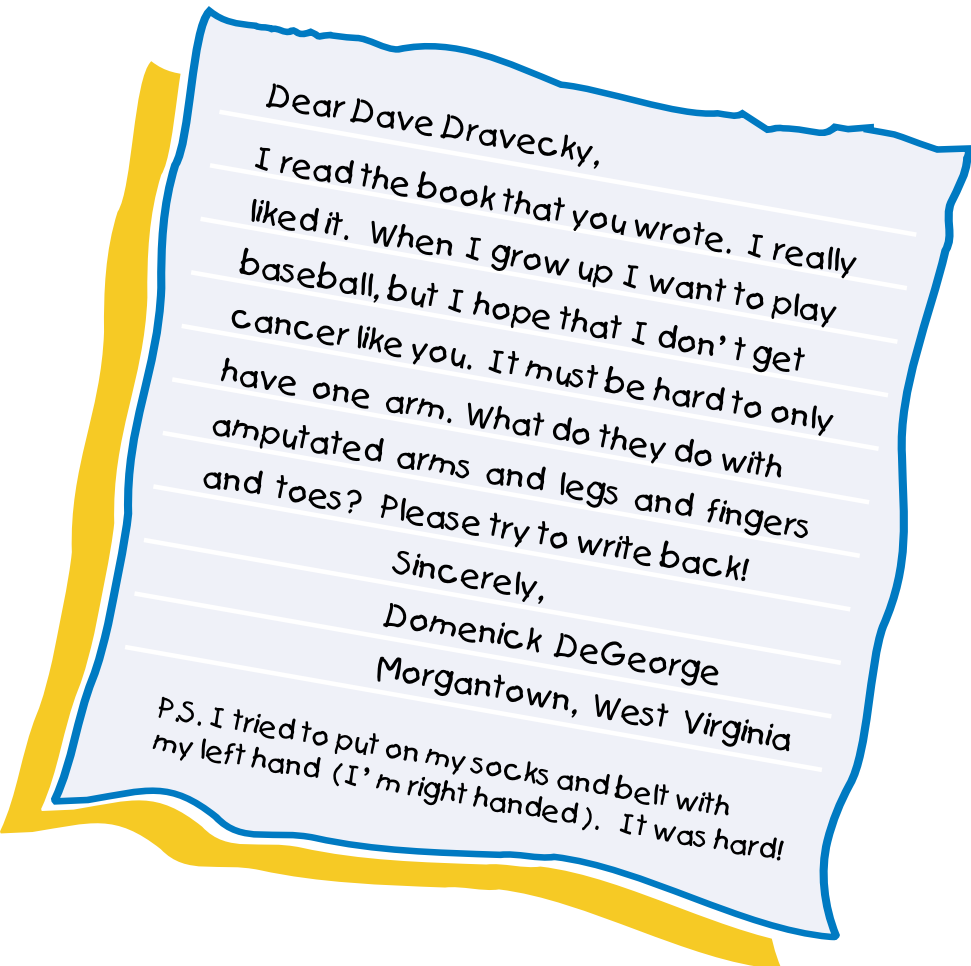
Yes, Adam won. Even though we miss him more than we can say, we know that just as we showed him the beauty of God's creation on earth, Adam someday will show us the place God has prepared for us.

Adam's earthly Dad and Mom,
Jon and Barb Gustafson,
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Thank you for all your love, prayers, concern, phone calls, letters, and tangible gifts to our family this past year. I am so grateful that the Lord orchestrated our meeting one another. Facing the challenge of cancer and the possibility of death are always easier when you have someone walking with you, praying, and holding your hand. You have done that through Outreach of Hope.

It's been almost four months since Adam went home to be with Jesus, yet in so many ways it seems like last week. Waves of grief and sadness still roll over our family. I suppose that's part of working through the grief and acceptance that Adam has obtained the highest achievement of the Christian walk—the promised eternal life with Jesus. I can just hear him saying, "I got here first!!!!" He always did like to be first in things! Despite the periods of grief, God has covered us with grace to go on. We still struggle with hopelessness and depression at times, so we appreciate your continued prayers. Pray also for that deeper walk the Lord desires of us all.

Candy Cooper
Arlington, Texas



Dear Dave Dravecky,
I read the book that you wrote. I really liked it. When I grow up I want to play baseball, but I hope that I don't get cancer like you. It must be hard to only have one arm. What do they do with amputated arms and legs and fingers and toes? Please try to write back!

Sincerely,
Domenick DeGeorge
Morgantown, West Virginia

P.S. I tried to put on my socks and belt with my left hand (I'm right handed). It was hard!

LOSING HERE . . . BUT GAINING

Heaven

by Joni Eareckson Tada



“Let’s not get too settled in, too satisfied with the good things down here on earth. They are only the tinkling sounds of the orchestra warming up. The real song is about to break into a heavenly symphony, and its prelude is only a few moments away.”

from *Heaven . . . Your Real Home*



To purchase a copy of *Heaven . . . Your Real Home*, visit your local Christian bookstore or write “Heaven” in the special offer box on the return envelope and enclose \$20.

Joni Eareckson Tada has lived in a wheelchair for more than 28 years. That’s a lot of time to ponder heaven and that’s why Joni has written a new book called Heaven . . . Your Real Home. In it, she shares more insights about heavenly glories, encouraging us to see that every spiritual investment we make here on earth has a direct bearing on our heavenly joy.

Last week I ran into a good friend whose husband recently had died. It wasn’t easy to converse on the noisy sidewalk where passers-by jostled us, but there was one subject about which we found it very easy to talk: heaven.

Heaven always seems to be on the hearts of those who have experienced loss. But why? Why is it that heaven gets our hearts pumped after we suffer the loss of a loved one, the loss of our health, or even the loss of our dreams for our child?

One reason is that suffering makes us want to go to heaven. Broken homes, broken bodies, and broken hearts crush our illusions that earth can keep its promises, that it can really satisfy us. Only the hope of heaven can truly move our passions off this world, which God knows could never fulfill us anyway, and fix them where they will find their glorious fulfillment.

When we finally realize that the hopes we have cherished will never come true, that a loved one is gone from this life forever, that a child’s diagnosis of inoperable cancer will never change, or that we will never be as successful as we had once imagined, our sights are lifted heavenward.

My hope of running through earthly meadows and splashing my feet in a stream will never come true on earth, but it will in heaven. My dream of hugging a loved one and actually *feeling* his or her embrace will never come true on earth, but it will when we stand together before Jesus.

The art of living with suffering is the art of readjusting our expectations in the here and now. A broken heart leads to the true contentment of asking less of this life because more is coming in the next. But asking less of this life is not bad, it’s good. Suppose you had never in your life known pain—no sore back, twisted ankle, cut finger, or decayed molars. What if you never had to use crutches, a walker, or wear a brace? How could you appreciate the scarred hands with which Christ will greet you?

Jesus will be the only one in heaven who will bear the scars of life on earth, the print of nails in His hands. If Jesus went through so much suffering to secure for us that which we don’t deserve, why do we complain when we endure on earth only a tiny fraction of what He went through on our behalf?

If, instead, we stifle our complaints and rejoice in the privilege of participating in the sufferings of Christ, we will be overjoyed. That’s the key! Overjoyed when His glory bursts on the scene. As the Bible says in Romans 8:17, “we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

True, we may not be able to make sense out of our senseless suffering. We may not understand the reasons why. But we can grab hold of faith to see that every hardship and disappointment we’re going through is meant to crush the hopes we cherish on earth. (I don’t think we’re meant to become too comfortable in a place destined for decay, do you?) Hardships are meant to lift our sights toward heaven. There we will be given the key to unlock the mystery of suffering. One day there will be no more tears and grief. One day it will all be made plain. And if we hold on with an uncomplaining spirit, then we will share in His glory.



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT

Heaven?

Everyone has some idea of what heaven is like, but no one knows exactly what heaven is like. As a result, we have created many different images of heaven and what it means. Since heaven is God's idea, let's see what He says about it in His Word, the Bible.*

Heaven is the place where God lives.

The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people, and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place (2 Chronicles 30:27 *NIV*).

Heaven is a place God wants to share with us forever.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words (1 Thessalonians 4: 16-18 *NIV*).

Heaven is filled with the glory of God.

The city [heaven] does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light . . . The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there (Revelation

21:23-25 *NIV*).

Heaven is incredibly beautiful.

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Corinthians 2:9 *NIV*).

It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates . . . The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone . . . The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. . . . Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city . . . (Revelation 21:11-22:2 *NIV*).

Heaven is a place of blessing.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . .

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. . . .

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . .

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven (Matthew 5:3-12 *NIV*).

Heaven is a place where sin, death, suffering, and pain are not allowed to enter.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. . . . Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful (Revelation 21:4, 27 *NIV*).

Who can go to heaven?

No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man [Jesus] . . . everyone who believes in him may have eternal life (John 3:13-15 *NIV*).

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9 *NIV*).

God's greatest desire is for all of His children to spend eternity with Him in this awesome place. If you aren't sure about your eternal destiny, please talk with a trusted pastor, Christian friend, or call the Outreach of Hope.

*These are just a few of the verses in the Bible that tell us what we know about heaven. There are many more!



With loving thoughts . . .

we dedicate this issue of The Encourager to the families of the precious people whose journey from this life to the next touched us during the past year.



In a Special Land

*If I could sit beside you
I would gently hold your hand.
I'd comfort you and tell you of
a very special land.*

*A land with joy and laughter where
the angels fill the air;
a land of such great beauty that
the Earth cannot compare.*

*I know in all your sorrow how
you wish me back with you,
though I with life beyond your thoughts
can give you just a view.*

*So do not put your trust in men
for mortals cannot save.
But put your trust in Jesus Christ
the victor of the grave.*

*Then whether it is days or years
until I hold your hand—
take comfort, for the Lord and I
are in a special land.*

*by Carla Muir
In loving memory of
Karen Larsen*

Our Mission

Offering hope and encouragement through Jesus Christ to those suffering from cancer or amputation. Our mission is accomplished as we provide comfort to those who suffer through prayer support, personal contact, correspondence, resource referral, and the gift of encouraging literature.

The Encourager is free, a gift from us to you. Now that you've read it, become an encourager yourself and share this gift with someone you know who needs uplifting. Don't throw the gift away . . . pass it along!

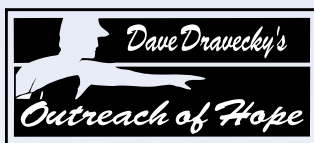
PRESIDENT Dave Dravecky

EDITORS Stephen & Amanda
Sorenson

DESIGNER Beverly Seefeldt

©1996 Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope

Outreach of Hope must pay return postage on all forwarded and non-forwardable mail. To keep postage costs down, please notify us on the return envelope provided or call the office if your address changes or you no longer wish to receive *The Encourager*. Thank you for helping us be good stewards



13840 Gleneagle Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80921

719 481-3528
FAX 719 481-4689

The Encourager
Helping People Live Courageously

Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope
13840 Gleneagle Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80921

The Dave Dravecky Foundation
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED