

Comfort in the Crumbs

Brenda Critch prayed for a child, but after two miscarriages and health problems it didn't seem possible. Until God sent her a message of hope in an unlikely place *By: Barbara Dickson*



Brenda displays the pie plate

Brenda had always believed that God spoke through circumstances and people. But a pie plate?

Brenda Critch smiles as she gazes on the old tin pie plate perched reverently on her window sill. Most people wouldn't count a cheap throwaway dish as a treasure, but for Brenda this silvery plate not only represents hope, but holds a precious promise from God.

It was only five years ago when, weary and discouraged, Brenda stood over her kitchen sink in Toronto, Ontario, one quiet Sunday evening in October 1999, and rinsed away the stubborn, sticky remains of a key lime pie.

As Brenda watched the tiny bits of pie wash down the drain, she felt somehow that all her dreams clung to the disappearing crumbs. Her only consolation was in knowing she at least had the pleasure of enjoying the last two pieces of pie, eaten right from the tin dish.

Just moments before, as she had absent-mindedly rubbed the dishcloth over the plate's surface, she had been struggling

to organize her haggard thoughts for the upcoming week. The next day would begin another grueling round of fertility testing. She had already suffered the tragedy of two miscarriages and, at that time, her blood tests indicated she was borderline menopausal at 36 years of age.

"The news took the life right out of me," Brenda remembers.

Her barrenness had been only one of many physical ailments she had been forced to face. She had been fighting illness for almost 10 years. In 1989 she was diagnosed with the Epstein-Barr virus and with mononucleosis. By 1991 Brenda's health had continued to deteriorate with a variety of problems including symptoms of heart disease. After seeing specialists and undergoing medical tests, her doctors were unable to give a diagnosis. However, later that year a medical internist diagnosed her with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). She was so worn out, her future held little promise of health or joy.

She ran her soapy hands across the plate, distracted by her thoughts and utterly unaware that this simple tin dish was about to speak to her heart and change her life.

Brenda swept the last few crumbs away that stuck to the dish. She intended to toss the plate away, but as she walked toward the recycle bin to throw it out, light glanced off its shiny silver bottom and an inscription caught her eye. She took a closer look. Etched in fine script in the middle of the pie tin were the words: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6 *KJV*).

She reread the message several times, running her fingers over the raised type.

Brenda with Jacob: God restored her hope for a child



The pie had been purchased at the local supermarket, a food store chain certainly not affiliated with any religious organization. Yet there was no denying the obvious. A promise from the Bible had been carved into the tin.

Brenda, feeling tired and defeated on that cool autumn night, was more than ready for reassurance that everything would work out in her life. She had always believed that God spoke through circumstances and people. But a pie plate?

In the ensuing years after she became ill, Brenda suffered incapacitating fatigue and often lacked the stamina to perform even the simplest of tasks such as getting dressed. Working full time was impossible. This fact only added to her sadness as Brenda and her husband, Shawn, were ordained ministers with The Salvation Army.

They had tried to live out the Salvation Army's motto: Heart to God and Hand to Man, but her deteriorating health threatened to force them out of ministry. She loved God and had given her life in full-time service to Him, in helping humanity. But sadly, while she had dedicated her life to helping others, she was unable to help herself.

Brenda's and Shawn's longing to have children only added to their misery. With the diagnosis of CFS and the severely depleted energy levels, they were very fearful of starting a family.

"How could I hope to care for a child when I could barely take care of myself?" Brenda recalls asking, her heart breaking.

In 1992 Brenda sought alternative medical options to help restore her health. She took homeopathic and herbal mixtures, had all the silver fillings removed from her teeth and received acupuncture treatments. By January 1998 she had managed to revive her energy level enough to work four afternoons per week, and her naturopath told her cautiously that she might be well enough to bear children.

Yet, almost two years later, as Brenda clutched an empty tin pie plate, her tired arms cradled no child and the days ahead hinted that even hope might be too much to ask for.

"All through my illness I thought God had assured me that I would have children," she recalls.

Brenda reread the imprinted words. Trust in the Lord. Could she? Was God still trustworthy? The verses promised that

God would direct her paths and show her the way. Could God help restore her hope for a child?

The next morning she drove to the hospital where she was informed that there were two egg follicles growing. The doctors hadn't expected even one. With an optimistic nod, the doctor suggested that Brenda and Shawn return home and attempt to have a baby the old-fashioned way.

Two weeks later, a bright blue wand confirmed a fragile hope—another little one was coming. But Brenda's joy was mixed with concern. She had already lost two babies. Could she carry this precious child to term?

Brenda began to bleed four weeks later and for the next five weeks she lived daily with the real possibility of losing her third baby. But the words of God, found in the centre of a key lime pie plate, whispered through her fear. Lean on God. Trust in Him. Step out in confidence. Don't try to figure out everything on your own. Brenda decided she would accept whatever God allowed.

Miraculously, the bleeding stopped. She continued through her pregnancy and delivered a beautiful son, Jacob William, on July 17, 2000.

It seems the pie's final destination, a shelf at a grocery store in Toronto, was truly a miracle in itself. The dessert, intended for a small southern American religious market, should have never left the United States.

Ken Charleton, a representative of the President's Choice food product line in Canada, says: "It was a very rare occurrence." He suggests it was a singular innocent mix-up on a busy production line.

Brenda knows better. She knows beyond a doubt that God chose a unique way to reassure her—a gentle, sweet reminder straight from Heaven tucked in amongst the crumbs of an insignificant key lime pie. Her life was in His hands and He would take care of her.

Today, Jacob is a bright, energetic four-year-old who blissfully saps his mom's energy. But Brenda doesn't mind. While the fatigue is chronic, her health remains stable and she and Shawn still minister on behalf of The Salvation Army in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

That simple message in the pie plate is for you, too. Trust in the Lord, and He will show you the way.



Jacob is a bright, energetic child

Brenda's joy was mixed with concern. Could she carry this precious child to term?



Shawn and Jacob