



Angel on Ice
By
Caleb McCoy



Before the beginning

I am the youngest child and the only boy. I have three older sisters, and I was born on April Fool's day. Yes, you can begin feeling sorry for me. I spent my childhood playing with Barbie dolls and my sisters dressing me in pink tutus. I might have actually liked it. On one very dreadful afternoon while playing on the trampoline, my sisters told me that I wasn't the real Caleb. Rather, I was the alien Caleb and the real Caleb was in a trash bag at the bottom of the pond. They took it one step further by telling me—the alien Caleb—that my alien mother would be coming back any day in her spaceship to take me home. Since that afternoon I have been deathly afraid of any type of blinking light in the night sky. Besides being called an alien

child and being forced to play with dolls, I had somewhat of a normal childhood.

I think one of the traits I received from my mother was the ability to express thoughts and feelings in written form. My mom left behind 23 journals and thousands of note cards with Bible verses, quotes, and thoughts—all in her beautiful handwriting. I found this letter about four months ago after cleaning out a closet. She wrote it to my dad on their anniversary three months after I was born:

July 4th, 1981

My dearest,

Happy Anniversary. Our 11th year as a team was one for the record books. I know we'll look back and laugh. I do believe the Lord gave us Caleb just for this time of our lives. The promises He has made are fact, and Caleb reminds us of this even when there are giants in the way. To God be the glory!

All my love,

Kia

My mom began skating as a seven-year-old in upstate New York and competed until she was in high school when a more rounded lifestyle became appealing to her. She continued to skate several times each week and participated in her club's competitions and skating shows. In her senior year in high school, she auditioned for Ice Capades and Ice Follies, eventually choosing Ice Capades. Two weeks after high school graduation, she left home to begin training in Atlantic City. She remained with this traveling show for what would be a year-and-a-half stint. During her time with Ice Capades, they taped two television shows that aired over the holidays. After she left the life on the road, she attended Penn State and married a couple of years later. My dad, Mike, played for the Green Bay Packers in the 70s and Mom was able to do some coaching in the area while living there; however, having four children tabled most of her personal skating opportunities. For almost 40 years her skates were sidelined. In 2010, Mom accompanied her sister, Monica, to the International Adult Figure Skating Championships in Oberstdorf, Germany, as her personal coach. My aunt, eight years her junior, was first taught how to skate by my mom on a homemade rink in their backyard in New York. Aunt Monica had continued to train through the years. Being an observer at the event

inspired my mom to contemplate returning to skating. Adult skaters from all over the world (ages 29–78) come together each May and enjoy themselves by sharing their talents in singles, pairs, dance, and synchronized events. On September 16th, 2010, Mom stepped back on the ice with new skates and began a most enjoyable and fulfilling season as an adult figure skater. She relied on her memory to reeducate herself, keeping a journal to chronicle her improvement and joy. Her goal was to compete in the Oberstdorf competition in May 2011, so she needed to have choreographed programs for both a freeskate and an artistic event. She chose her music and began to choreograph her programs. Then in January, her sister let her know she had a mere 30 days to prepare for a competition taking place in Paris in March of 2011; my aunt felt my mom needed a dress rehearsal before the big event in Germany. Despite being small, the Paris competition was the perfect situation for a 62-year-old embarking on her encore career! Mom did not know how she would respond when her name was announced, but she was pleasantly surprised by the lack of nerves and sense of complete joy she felt. The fact that her youngest child, the alien baby, was in the audience was also a special treat. She won both of her events and garnered the confidence to continue training for Oberstdorf.

When Mom returned home, she hired a coach to help her with the technical aspects of her skating in order to better prepare her for the International Championships in Oberstdorf. Her children and grandchildren were all very excited about what she was doing. When my aunt and mom left for Germany in May of 2011, they had three daughters and two granddaughters join them. Her efforts awarded her a second place in the artistic event and first place in the technical free skate. She and my Aunt Monica became “Team Spalding” in memory of their dad who died in 2001. He had been their driver to early morning practices and their biggest cheerleader. He himself had discovered a love of getting on the ice at a later age. When the family moved to Erie, Pennsylvania, in the mid-60s, my grandfather started ice skating. Within a year, he had passed the initial level for dance from the United States Figure Skating Association. In order to pass, he needed to skate with a professional level figure skater, so my mom joyfully agreed to be his partner—all on his 50th birthday. He always told his daughters to “Live it up!” With their adult skating, they were beginning to do exactly that—living it up!

The goal to return annually to the International Championships motivated my mom to continue improving and begin working on more difficult

elements for her programs, by adding more jumps and spins. With her coach's assistance, she slowly gained confidence with these new elements even though the muscle soreness and risk of falling increased. With two new programs in the works, my aunt and mom planned their 2012 competition schedule—adding an Easter weekend event in the Italian Alps followed by the next weekend in Paris to defend their titles. My mom chose the song “Amazing Grace” by Celtic Woman for her artistic program as a tribute to her dad. It was his favorite hymn. One month after these two events, they were in Germany for my mom's second and final appearance at the International Championships. This time she placed first in the artistic event and second in the technical freeskate. She had no idea that the soreness in her left quadriceps muscle would be diagnosed six weeks after returning home as a form of soft tissue sarcoma. Sarcoma makes up about one percent of all cancer diagnoses in adults, with about 14,000 new cases each year. 23-percent of the time sarcomas are cured by surgery and 30-percent of the time by surgery with chemotherapy and/or radiation. However, 50-percent of the time they are resistant to any form of treatment. My mom started feeling a soreness in her left thigh in March 2012. She thought she might have pulled something doing one of her sit spins, but the pain never went away—even with sport massage therapy. So

after returning from Germany at the end of May 2012, she decided to have her leg examined by an orthopedic specialist. The doctor was convinced that it was a hematoma and scheduled an MRI for verification. On June 14th, 2012, the MRI was taken on what was now a lump in her thigh—something that started out as just a simple sore muscle. She was referred to an orthopedic oncologist, and he even thought it was a hematoma but decided to do a biopsy. On July 7th, 2012, Mom received the news that it was cancer.

This book is a compilation of my mom's journals—it starts with a brief section of journal entries where my mom tracks her return to skating. She called it her "Journal of a Comeback." But most specifically the book follows her entries from February 2012 to February 2013. These were the months leading up to and following her diagnosis. They focus primarily on her steadfast love for life, the insights, joy and wisdom she gained by spending time in the Word with her Father, and her enduring trust in God's sovereignty despite the news of her condition. I have given each month during that year its own chapter. Sprinkled in with these entries, I have also included some from Mom's earlier journals. Any journal dates that are bold and in block format were written outside the February 2012 to February 2013 time frame. I have chosen these earlier entries because they touch on

notable themes that ran through Mom's journals and her life. These themes include Mom's reflections on overcoming her first bout of cancer in 1997, her daddy, her great-grandmother and grandmother, her fascination with full moons, and her "happy room," among others. Everything you will read is an entry from Mom's journals, with one exception—the "updates" I wrote to inform family and friends of my mom's progression during the cancer journey. These recount the information from the doctors and provide a little more depth from my perspective on caring for my mom. These entries do not begin until August 2012. They will be labeled as "Updates" and will, just as Mom's older journal entries, be bold and in block format.

I would also like to introduce you to our immediate family so that when you see a name, you will know to whom Mom is referring. In her journals, she writes excitedly about the faith heritage she received from her great-grandmother, Rose Secoy Moore, and she also highlights memories of her grandmother, Gladys Dowling. Both these women are linked to her through her mother's side of the family. Her parents, David and Rose Spalding, have four kids—Brian, Kiara (affectionately known as "Kia," my mom), Kevin, and Monica. My mom married Michael "Mike" McCoy. They too have four kids—Molly, Maggie, Katie, and Caleb (that's me, the alien baby). Molly and

Jason Evans eloped, much to my mother's surprise, and they have been happily married for the past 18 years. They have four kids—Kylie, Kaitlyn, Karson, and Kasen, as well as a dog named Champ. Following the trend, Maggie and Jeff Henson eloped as well. They are both serving our country in the United States Army, have been happily married for two-and-a-half years, and have a dog named Duke. Katie is Mom's only daughter to have had a proper wedding. She married Randy Barnett eight-and-a-half years ago, and they have three kids—Rody, Anna Kate, and David McCoy. They named David "Coy" for short, because Katie doesn't believe I will get married and have a son to pass along the family name. Of course, she is kidding. I think.

In August of 2012, I returned to the states from France, where I work at a Christian camp. It is a tradition for all of us to spend time together at the end of the summer at a family camp on Lake Erie. My parents could not make it that year, because my mom had just started radiation treatments. Things went downhill pretty quickly after that, and Dad asked me if I would stay home to be Mom's primary caregiver. My mom didn't want my dad to cancel his already booked schedule of speaking to students in Catholic Schools about the message of faith, hope and encouragement. I didn't

hesitate to say yes. I cherish the time I spent with my mom—cooking for her, helping with physical therapy, and when she felt well enough, taking her for walks in her wheelchair during the last glimpses of daylight.

The day she passed away my sister, Molly, speaking of me being the caregiver, told me, “It was supposed to be you.” Up until that point, I had never really felt a purpose for my life. I never felt that I was doing something for which I was really passionate. My sister’s statement hit me. *What if life didn’t work out the way I thought because I was supposed to be there for my mom during that time?* All the times it hadn’t worked out with a girl, and then making the decision not to go to graduate school, perhaps happened for a reason. I wouldn’t have been able to spend time with my mom if I had a family or if I had been in any other life situation. In the days following Mom’s passing, as I began reading her journals and then decided to read selections during her celebration service, I knew I had to compile her writings into a book.

I know it was my mother’s prayers that got me through many dark valleys and deep doubts. It is difficult not being able to talk to her every week when I would call her from France. The following is one of her prayers for me:

June 3rd, 2003

As Caleb leaves today for Europe, I pray You open his eyes to the truth of who You've created him to be. Remember Lord, I did not ask You for this child—I did not even expect to have another—but You created him without any help from me. I know You have a unique plan for him as is evident in the way You have made him. I pray You give him new eyes as he sees new sights in Your creation. I pray You grow his roots deeper into the understanding of Your love and the amazing power You have gifted him with. Meet the longings of his heart as he trusts in You. May he see signs of Your goodness everywhere he goes and when he returns to us in six weeks, he'll have renewed hope and sense of purpose!

As you read this book, my mom's journals, my prayer for you is that your roots would grow deeper in the understanding of God's love for you. Regardless of your background and the battles you are facing right now, may you fully trust in God's sovereignty for your life.