

# EXTREME GRACE



## Protected by Grace

by Dick Duerksen

The phone rang upstairs at 11:30 p.m. Saturday night, February 18, 1968. Tim and I ignored it, assuming that our physician landlord was getting another midnight call to the emergency room. Dr. Luthas answered the call and then walked across our ceiling, opened the sliding glass door, leaned over the railing, and called my name.

"Dick, the call's for you."

Tim and I were in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, as student missionaries. I was assistant chaplain at the hospital, and Tim was teaching at Antillian Union College. No one ever called us at 11:30 p.m.

I ran upstairs and picked up the phone.

"Dick," I recognized the voice of Elder Walt Blehm, Arizona Conference president and a good friend of our family.

"Sit down," he continued. "I have some bad news for you."

I sat and listened as he told me that my mother had been killed in an automobile accident, and that my father was in critical condition in a

California hospital. "You had better come home right away," he said.

I didn't sleep that night. Instead, I sat in our small living room and thought about my parents. The more I thought, the angrier I got. Why was God taking away the two people I loved the most! How could Mom be gone? Why hadn't I had a chance to say good-bye?

By morning, I was little more than a confused set of frayed nerves.

*She took the Bible, read the underlined verses, and then pointed to a phrase in the middle of verse 1; "God is protecting them from the evil to come."*

The Luthases loaned me money for an airline ticket to San Juan, and I gave an agent a bad check for the flight to San Francisco. He said he would hold it three days till I could find some money to cover it.

I stared out the window without seeing America. Somewhere over Colorado I dug into my bag and took out a small copy of *The Living Bible*, Kenneth Taylor's Bible paraphrase. I read aimlessly, seeing words and finding no meaning, my mind mixed with anger, remorse, and sadness. Then a phrase caught my heart.

"The righteous pass away; the godly often die before their time.

And no one seems to care or wonder why. No one seems to understand that God is protecting them from the evil to come. For the godly who die will rest in peace" Isaiah 57:1, 2.

I underlined the verses, and a new peace settled into my heart. Mom had died before her time. She was young, bright, a spiritual pillar, a champion of the underdog, and an awesome cook. And she was gone, taken from me long before I thought she should go.

There was a tap on my shoulder.

"Are you ok?" A TWA stewardess knelt beside my seat, concern eloquent on her face.

I mumbled something incoherent, and she sat down in the seat beside me.

"What are you reading?"

I poured out the whole story, punctuating it with tears.

She took the Bible, read the underlined verses, and then pointed to a phrase in the middle of verse 1; "God is protecting them from the evil to come."

"I do not know your mother," she said, "but I do know God, and I know that He can be trusted. Your mom is resting in peace—where God is protecting her from the trials ahead. That's reason for celebrating."

She squeezed my hand and went on about her stewardess duties, angel wings safely tucked into her uniform.

Dad came through the surgeries well, and is still preaching, teaching, and encouraging others.

Mom is still at peace, protected by Grace.