



Yes, I Can!



Lynn McDaniel

Publishing Designs, Inc.
Huntsville, Alabama





Publishing Designs, Inc.
P.O. Box 3241
Huntsville, Alabama 35810

© 2003 Lynn McDaniel

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted without written permission from Publishing Designs, Inc., except for the inclusion of short quotations in a review.



Many of the names in this book have been changed. Mr. Bartow James is a fictitious name used to characterize the reactions of some who meet me along life's way.



Printed in the United States

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McDaniel, Lynn.
Yes, I Can! / Lynn McDaniel
304 pp.; 22.86cm.
Includes photographs.
1. Health. 2. Cerebral palsy—Patients—United States—Biography. 3. Physically handicapped—youth.
I. McDaniel, Lynn. II. Title.
ISBN 0-929540-36-0
362.1'96836

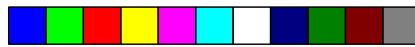




To my mother,
Annie Laurie Morris McDaniel,
who taught me to say,
“Yes, I can!”
This made me who I am.
I am eternally grateful.







Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	7
INTRODUCTION	9
CHAPTER 1	
Yes, Love Will Prevail	11
CHAPTER 2	
Yes, She'll Survive	24
CHAPTER 3	
Yes, We'll Face the Challenge	45
CHAPTER 4	
Yes, There Were Obstacles	64
CHAPTER 5	
Yes, There Were More Obstacles	73
CHAPTER 6	
Yes, with Obstacles Came Many Good Things	83
CHAPTER 7	
Yes, Good Things Were Abundant	92
CHAPTER 8	
Yes, There Were Frustrations	107
CHAPTER 9	
Yes, Improvements Were Coming	119
CHAPTER 10	
Yes, She Can Learn	128



CHAPTER 11	
Yes, She Must Touch Her Toes	142
CHAPTER 12	
Yes, She'll Touch Her Toes	163
CHAPTER 13	
Yes, We Will Build Sandcastles	173
CHAPTER 14	
Yes, Doors Will Open	180
CHAPTER 15	
Yes, I'll Learn to Button	188
CHAPTER 16	
Yes, There Was Music in Our House	198
CHAPTER 17	
Yes, I Can Ride a Tricycle	211
CHAPTER 18	
Yes, I Can Go to School	225
CHAPTER 19	
Yes, I'll Work Even Harder	229
CHAPTER 20	
Yes, the Greatest Gifts	233
CHAPTER 21	
Yes, I Can Be a Little Girl	241
CHAPTER 22	
Yes, I Can Go to School	252
CHAPTER 23	
Yes, I Can Have a Best Friend, Too	267
CHAPTER 24	
Mama, Look, I Can Walk	279
EPILOGUE	298



Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible if it were not for the notes that my mama, Annie Morris McDaniel, wrote about my very early life. I am indebted to her beyond words. The struggles of my life created an immense emotional web for her. For many years she dealt with a lot of guilt. Naturally, with guilt comes grief. Even more naturally, she grieved my imperfect makeup for a long, long time. Thus, she had to relive the pain as she made these notes for me. I deeply appreciate the struggles she endured so this book could be written. I am also amazed by her awesome courage that you will read about in these pages. Her physical strength leaves me totally speechless.

I am grateful to my daddy, the late E. E. “Gene” McDaniel, for giving me the gift of humor, enabling me to laugh at myself, and teaching me not to take life too seriously. Without this, I cannot imagine what path my life might have taken.

I am grateful to my sister, Karen McDaniel Weihs, for planting a seed within me in early childhood—the seed that produced the title of this book. My gratitude increases even more when I think of the many, many things she did that added good things to my childhood, in spite of the myriad of hardships that plagued us both.

There are many who have contributed to this realization of my dream. It takes many readers, tons of criticisms, some praise, and many, many editing endeavors to make a work like this a reality. My heart overflows with gratitude to these readers, without whose help this could not have been done. I am indebted beyond words to



my dear friend Peggy Pharr of Rock Hill, South Carolina, who read both the first and second writings of this book. To my dearest of friends, Margery Austin of Montgomery, Alabama; Lynette Carlucci and Dorris Biggar of Charleston, South Carolina; and Frank and Jane Shepard of Walterboro, South Carolina, who read the first writing of this book and encouraged me tremendously to “keep at it.” Again to Dorris Biggar, who tirelessly answered so many punctuation and grammar questions. I am indebted to many, many friends who have encouraged me over the years to complete this work. Their names are too numerous to mention.

Heartfelt gratitude goes to James Andrews and Peggy Coulter with Publishing Designs, Inc. of Huntsville, Alabama. What a blessing they are!

A very, very special thanks goes to my dear friend and mentor, Jane McWhorter of Fayette, Alabama, who took time out of an extremely busy schedule to edit the first writing of this work. My deep appreciation for her encouragement to do this work cannot be put into words.

A special thanks goes to David Pharr of Rock Hill, South Carolina, for his immense encouragement to write this book. David sat in my living room quite late one night several years ago with his wife Peggy and me. While we were enjoying coffee and cookies, we discussed the writing of my first book. He totally changed the course of the conversation by saying, “There’s another book, Lynn, that you really need to write . . . You have a story that needs to be told.” I have not forgotten the comment or how much it meant to me.

Most important of all, I give thanks to our Almighty God for giving me the health and physical strength to overcome the trauma of a devastating accident shortly after I began writing this book so that this work might be realized.



Introduction

It is often said that everybody has a story. There is a story behind everybody's life, be it a large story or a small story. Within the covers of this book, you will find my story.

It is my prayer that this story will inspire you and help you in some way—whether your life is full of relative ease or whether you feel you carry just about all the burdens you can possibly carry. It is my desire that this book will help you to carry on—whether your physical body works perfectly, whether you sit in a wheelchair, whether you wear a back brace, or whether you use crutches to aid you in walking. I hope that if your life is full of plenty, or if you experience a life of want, there will be something in this story that will encourage you. If you are a parent of a child that has any kind of physical or mental disability, I especially hope that this book will help you.

Life isn't easy for anybody, but it is more difficult for some than it is for others. I sincerely hope that my story will help you to see that you are unique and that each of your children is unique. I trust you will see, regardless of your physical or mental state, that you have a talent to be creative in some way, and you have something special to contribute to society.

The times in which we are living are drastically different from the way they were just a generation ago. Our society values people in a totally different way—not at all like the way it once held human beings to be dear. The saddest part regarding the way that society has devalued people is that it has created ways to “elimi-



nate” any person who might not be perfect in some way. Everyone deserves a chance to experience life. Regardless of their physical or mental status, all have the ability to rise above their own circumstances and create their own story.

The writing of this book is just one of the many ways I have risen above my circumstances. This work has been my goal since my childhood. I have not wavered from this goal for an instant. It has not been easy, by any means. Any kind of writing is not an easy job. This book is the result of years of thinking, years of asking questions, and years of collecting facts. It is a realization of a dream.

Many of the names in this book have been changed. Mr. Bartow James is a fictitious name used to characterize the reactions of some who meet me along life’s way. None of the events recorded in this book are meant to hurt anyone—no, not anyone. When I expressed this concern in conversations with Mama during the long months of writing, she steadfastly told me time after time, “Tell the story, Lynn.”

That is what I tried to do. It has been a monumental task, to say the least. I am sure many things have been left out. I am also sure that some things have been added. But as a writer, I took Mama’s wonderful notes that she made for me, tossed them up and down, as it were, and added to them to make the story flow.

There is a title of a popular book that really describes my life. If I could choose a subtitle for this book, it would be *The Road Less Traveled*. To you, my beloved readers, I hope you will read on to find out why I consider my life as being on the road that is indeed less traveled than most!



CHAPTER ONE

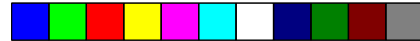
Yes, Love Will Prevail

I relished the tranquility of the early morning hour as I basked in the glow of the sun coming in the window. A fresh breeze disturbed my kitchen curtains as it blew through the open window and the sun's hues danced happily across my yellow kitchen walls. I poured myself a cup of freshly brewed coffee and lazily settled in my comfortable kitchen chair as I watched my Pomeranian happily chase her ball back and forth across the kitchen floor.

I then turned to watch the joyful play of the stray cats and kittens outside my back door. They, too, were enjoying the warmth of the morning's sun. A flood of gratitude swept over me as I thought of how much I enjoy this old house and having a house to call my own. Many in my situation never know such luxury, especially not a home where strays of all kinds can call my very spacious back yard their home, too.

I sure brewed a good cup of coffee this morning, I thought, as I gave myself a pat on the back in a silly sort of way. Then my mind began darting from one thing to another as I thought about how busy the previous day had been. I began to plan the day that lay ahead when a knock at the back door interrupted my train of thought. The rap startled me, and the quiet of the morning made it sound even louder.

"We have a customer, Sara," I told my dog as I set my cup on the breakfast bar, walked into the office of my home-based word-processing business, and welcomed a new client.



“Good morning. Please come in,” I told my client as I walked around to the back of my desk.

“My name is Bartow James. A friend of mine suggested that I have you type a nine-page business report in a double-spaced format. I need it by Tuesday afternoon.”

Then seemingly bewildered that I didn’t speak normally, he asked, “Do you do the typing?”

“Yes, I do. This notebook shows a few samples of my work.”

“Huh?” He still seemed quite flustered with my physical handicap. “I can’t understand you.”

I again handed the notebook to him. “This notebook contains samples of my work,” I told him as plainly as my speech impediment allowed.

“How do you do this type of work with a speaking impediment?” he asked.

“Well, I do have a physical disability, but I try to keep a positive attitude. You know, typing is not done with the tongue,” I said politely, and laughed at my own humor.

“But I need to have this typed really well,” he told me firmly.

I said in my most professional tone while pointing to the notebook, “These are some samples of my work. You’ll see that I type really well. If you just give me a chance, I’ll show you what I can do.”

Mr. James looked through the book quickly. Then his demeanor turned to one of anger. “Look, lady, I don’t know why in the world someone like you is running a business like this, or why anyone like you would even think about running a business like this,” he exploded as he angrily knocked my paper-clip dispenser to the floor and watched as the paper clips scattered. Then he angrily slapped a stack of papers, which belonged to another client, and watched as the seventy-five sheets of paper went flying off the desk and across the office.

Then he continued, “I need a good typist! People like you have no business working because you haven’t got any brains!”



I sat perfectly still, totally stunned. Mr. James put his papers under his arm and sped out the door and down the steps without looking back, not even offering to help pick up the papers or the paper clips. I could hardly believe what I had just witnessed.

I remained motionless for several minutes after he slammed my door, listening to my dog bark ferociously at his behavior. In the twenty-two years I worked in the corporate world, and in the four years I had operated my home-based business, I had never encountered an attitude such as the one this man exhibited.

Grateful at this thought, I slowly rose to my feet and began picking up the papers. Then I swept up the paper clips. As I sat at my desk putting the papers back in the numerical order that my client had trustingly left them in the day before, I began thinking about Mr. James's attitude. *Here we are at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and yet there are still some people who have such archaic attitudes regarding those of us who have physical handicaps.. Yes, I could refuse to work. I could give up,* I thought to myself. Then I thought about the strong, strong will that my parents had instilled in me and the determination with which they raised me. It all began on the very first day of my life!

Yes, She'll Live!

Very shortly after my delivery, Mama was lying back in her hospital bed, going over and over the features she had seen in her sweet newborn. They laid me on her stomach very briefly, during which time she had studied my thick, black hair; my long, black eyelashes; and my long, slender fingers. Then the nurse quickly took me from her. Mama recalls that I wasn't crying, but the beauty of my black hair seemed to speak louder than that fact.

Daddy walked into Mama's room. Putting her thoughts on hold, she asked, "Did you see her, honey? Isn't she a beauty?"

Daddy didn't respond to Mama. He just took her hand and held it for, what seemed to Mama, a long time. He then walked over to the long window in Mama's room and gazed out, apparently lost within himself.



"Where's Dr. Hougasian?" Mama wanted to know.

"He's still in with our baby," Daddy answered in a low voice.

"That's quite a long time for him to be in with a newborn."

Suddenly, at that moment, she realized that something had gone terribly wrong during my birth process. Daddy turned and walked back over to Mama's bedside, and took her hand again. She noticed that Daddy's face had an ashen color to it.

"What's happened?" she asked Daddy.

"You had a very difficult delivery, honey. The baby may not live. Her entire central nervous system has been affected. One of the nurses told me in the hallway that Dr. Hougasian wants to talk to both of us."

Mama and Daddy were in the room together, yet they were very far apart. It was at that moment Mama had her first optimistic thought toward me. She stated, "Well, a lot of women have difficult births, and their babies turn out just fine! It can't be all that bad!"

"Let's not get our hopes up, honey," he cautioned.

"Whatever it is, it can't be all that bad!" Mama said again. "I just simply feel that way in my heart."

The next few minutes seemed like an eternity to my parents. Daddy paced back and forth across the room a few times. Not wanting to make Mama nervous, he returned to stare out the window. Mama sensed his intense concern, but she did not allow it to mar her indomitable spirit.

"She's beautiful, isn't she?" Mama asked, looking for encouragement from the love of her life. She wanted Daddy to feel as optimistic as she did. "Did you notice her black hair?"

"Yes," Daddy agreed, "she is gorgeous! Did you notice her long fingers?"

Daddy was now back at Mama's bedside, stroking her hand and trying to remain calm. He kept glancing at the clock on the wall. Each single minute that passed seemed like fifteen to him. *Where is that doctor? What on earth is taking him so long?* Daddy kept these thoughts to himself.



"I'm glad we had another little girl," Mama told my Dad. "Karen will have a real playmate now. Do you think they will play well together, honey?"

"Sure they will," Daddy lovingly responded. "I can't wait for Karen to see her."

"Yeah," Mama laughed, "Karen will probably think the baby is a doll baby."

"Won't it be good to hear two little voices instead of just one?" By now, Daddy's anxiety seemed to have worn off a bit. He was looking forward, and Mama felt this was a good sign. Mama lovingly stroked his big hand. She smiled as he tenderly smiled back at her. "Our family is growing, honey."

Dr. Hougasian walked into Mama's room with a sunken and uneasy expression, unlike any my parents had ever seen in their long-time friend. His necktie was loosened a bit. His sleeves, although rolled up, were quite wrinkled. His hair was in total disarray. The growth of his beard looked unusually coarse. Mama didn't remember his looking that way when she saw him in the delivery room in the early morning hours.

"Did you have a lot of deliveries last night?" Mama asked. "You really look tired."

Dr. Hougasian looked at my parents, and he tried to speak. It was apparent, however, that his words were not coming easily. "Sometimes it is so hard to be a doctor, especially when it comes to bringing bad news to good folks like you. It becomes even harder when the bad news has to be given to old friends."

"C'mon, Doc," Mama reassured him. "Whatever it is, it sure can't be all that bad," Mama told her friend.

There Are Institutions for Babies Like Her . . .

"Well, the truth is," he stammered again looking for words, "*that* bad."

"Okay," Mama chided, "so it is. Tell us everything. Don't spare anything!"



Doctor Hougasian looked down at his feet, shuffling them back and forth. He paced the room back and forth a few times, and shuffled his feet some more. Mama felt sorry for him. He looked so sad. In the many times Mama had seen him in the past nine months, he had always worn such happy expressions.

Finally Dr. Hougasian turned to my parents: "You had a very difficult delivery. Your baby is going to be severely disabled. She might not even live. She was born breech because she did not turn normally in your womb."

"What does that mean?" Daddy asked.

"That is where the buttocks come first. The normal way is for the head to come first," the doctor explained. "When she came through the birth canal, her head got caught. The umbilical cord was wrapped around her neck, cutting off oxygen to her brain. She didn't breathe on her own for a while."

"How long is a while?" Mama asked, not fully believing what she was hearing.

"I'm not sure exactly. It may have been as long as thirty minutes."

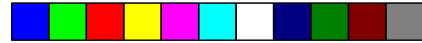
"Thirty minutes!" Mama turned her head away from the two men in order to fight back the tears more successfully.

"What exactly does this mean?" Daddy asked.

"It means that she has extensive brain damage. It's a birth defect known as cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy does not always occur at birth. Sometimes it occurs later in life as a result of brain trauma. In this case, it did occur at birth. It will cause her to have quite a bit of motor dysfunction, as well as affecting the entire central nervous system," the doctor continued. "The brain will not send the signals for her to do all the things we take for granted each day."

"Like what kinds of things, specifically?" Daddy questioned.

"Like walking, talking, thinking, moving, turning over. She'll more than likely be retarded. We have her in an incubator for several minutes at a time. We'll do this several times throughout the day and night."



“What does the incubator do?” Mama inquired.

“The incubator helps to maintain the same temperature that she had when she was inside your womb. We are hoping this will restore some of the damaged brain cells. We have placed her on a resuscitator to draw mucus out of her lungs and help her breathe. Hopefully, this will prevent any bronchial infections. It is an absolute wonder that she is even alive.”

Dr. Hougasian turned to leave, then paused: “Don’t get your hopes up. Look on the bright side. There are places for babies like her. Take her to an institution, go home, and forget you ever had her.”

Love Will Prevail!

My parents stared at each other in utter disbelief, totally dismayed that their long-time friend could be so heartless as to even suggest that they give up their baby. They remained quiet for several minutes. Daddy stood holding Mama’s hand for a while as he stared into space. He walked to the window and stared, as if the world outside would make the reality inside to go away. Mama watched his face become more sunken minute by minute.

Cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy. Never heard those words together in all of my life! How could this be? Can it be something I did wrong while I carried her within me these nine months? Mama thought to herself, not wanting Daddy to know her questioning. “Honey, have you ever heard of cerebral palsy?”

“No, I haven’t,” Daddy responded. The two continued on together in silence for a while longer.

“Honey,” Mama finally broke the deafening silence as she broke into sobs, “I can’t give up my baby. I just can’t do it.”

Daddy hurried to her bedside, taking Mama into his arms. The two sobbed together.

“No!” Mama released her hug on Daddy. Her determined spirit showed through the tears and she began wiping her face with her hands. “I can’t cry like this. There’s too much to be done. If we take



her home and love her, she'll be all right. Love will prevail. If we have enough love, that will see us through anything. We can do it, can't we?"

"Yes, honey. Love will indeed prevail."

"We *will* raise this child. We *will* take her home, and we *will* raise her!" It was this spirit of determination that carried Mama through year after year of turmoil and tribulation. Even though Daddy supported her in all her decisions, it was her spirit that lightened their often dark and forlorn paths.

After exchanging more words of consolation, Daddy left the hospital to check on my three-year-old sister who had been left in the care of a neighbor. Mama lay in her bed, listening to all of the noise of that busy area of the hospital. She suddenly felt very tired, and she tried to free her mind of the many questions that were filling it so she might rest. However, nothing could keep her from listening to every plaintive cry of the infants in the nursery. She wondered if some of those cries might be the cries of her sweet baby. Every time Mama started to doze off, she heard footsteps running. She would arise with a start, wondering if it might be more oxygen for me.

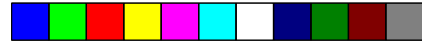
Long paths of hot tears flowed down Mama's face that night. She tossed and turned in her bed, completely restless. Thoughts continued to flow through her mind. She was trying to get used to the fact that her baby was not normal.

But, then, what is normal? she asked herself. *There are many in this world who are not normal by the world's standards. They get along just fine in the world. And so will our baby.* Mama put on her robe and walked the short distance to the viewing window of the nursery. As soon as she walked up to the window, one of the nurses came out to greet her.

"There's your beautiful baby girl," she pointed to the only infant who lay in an incubator. "You feel free to come visit your sweet baby at any time."

Mama nodded. "Thank you. You must be a mama yourself."

"How can you tell that?" the nurse asked.



“Because you’re so full of love,” Mama answered, grateful that such a sweet person was taking care of me.

Mama stood at the window a long time, studying me, looking for a movement of some kind: an eyelid, a tiny finger, just anything. She saw me only lying there, just as still as I could possibly be.

Mama went back to her room, where bravely she faced the remainder of a long, restless, and lonely night. She tossed back and forth through the night, asking endless questions in her mind. *What will become of this baby girl? Can I provide enough nurturing to make those damaged brain cells function? Will Karen understand? Will she grow to love her, or will she resent her?* The blackness of the night seemed never-ending, as did the questions that refused to leave her mind and allow her to rest.

God Never Promised Completeness . . .

Mama watched the new day dawn and turn into a beautiful sunny day. *A new day: a new attitude!* Her youthful, determined spirit returned to her once again. *I will learn all I can from these wonderful nurses and doctors in order to care for this child.*

Then Mama brushed her long brunette hair and tied it in a ponytail with a pretty, pink ribbon. She tied her robe around her and walked to the nursery window to visit me. Once again, one of the nurses came out into the hall.

“Any change?” Mama asked anxiously.

The nurse shook her head negatively. “The minute that there is, you can be sure you’ll be the first to know. You can visit her as long as you’d like.”

Again, Mama studied me for a long time, looking for just the slightest movement. The sound of the breakfast carts rolling down the hall did not even break her concentration. She remained standing at the nursery window as the first visitors of the day began to gather to watch their own. Then, two familiar faces appeared next to her. It was her parents, my grandparents. Edgar and Dosia Morris had rushed to the hospital with a sense of urgency.



“Hi,” Mama greeted, so glad to see the two people who meant the most to her in the world, besides my daddy. “Did you see her? Isn’t she beautiful? What do you think of those long fingers? Won’t she be a wonderful playmate for Karen?”

Mama’s parents did not say anything for several minutes. They just stood by her, looking at her. Grandmama had given birth to thirteen children. One of them had died during childbirth and one died just shortly after. Mama guessed they were thinking of the two they had lost. She did not want them to think of their lost babies just now. Yet, she did not know what to say that might change the direction of their thoughts. Mama truly loathed the sadness on their faces. They were always such happy people—especially Grandmama. With a family the size of theirs, she had the responsibility of keeping smiles on everyone’s face. Now, there was not the hint of a smile, not even in the corners of her mouth.

My baby can’t be that bad off, Mama thought to herself again. *Why can’t they encourage me?* Mama wanted more than anything to hear positive words from the two people who were so dear to her.

Then Grandmama spoke: “Honey, God never promised completeness in all things.”

Mama was bewildered at the way she just blurted it out.

“You won’t get to raise this one, honey. You need to set your hopes on another one to come,” my grandmother declared.

Mama didn’t think her baby looked that bad off. She was sure Grandmama meant no harm by her remarks. That was just her way of dealing with the situation. Besides, maybe she was trying to soften the blow for Mama.

Mama and her mother walked back to her room. Granddaddy came in several minutes later. He told Mama almost the same thing that Grandmama had said. Mama expected it out of him, because he had always used reverse psychology on his children. This time, however, his tone of voice was different from what she usually heard from her father. It was not sad, yet it was not joyous.



Mama's heart was broken that morning, because she was looking to these two people to give her the most support. She wanted them to say exactly the opposite of what they said. She so much wanted to hear her parents say what a beautiful baby I was, how they loved my thick, black hair, and how long and slender my fingers were—all of the things that grandparents were supposed to notice. But they didn't. Accepting their way of thinking was just not possible for Mama.

My grandparents left Mama's room and went to the viewing window of the nursery where all the new grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends gathered to "oooh" and "aaah" at the beauty of their new family members. Mama lay in her bed, going over and over in her mind the words that her parents had spoken to her. Disappointment overwhelmed her. Hot, bitter tears returned and streamed down her face. She felt so alone. *Why are they acting like this has never happened to anyone before? Doesn't anyone understand that other babies with brain damage have survived in this world? If they can survive, then my baby can, too,* Mama told herself again and again.

Just Like the Baby Birds

Mama got out of bed as quickly as her sore body would allow. *I can't do this. I have to be positive—no matter what others may say. If people see me crying, then they will not be supportive.* Many thoughts were going through her mind as she brushed her hair again, washed her face, and put on her robe. She walked to join her parents at the viewing window. She wanted more than anything to have the chance to hold me so she could let me know how much I was loved. Since she knew she couldn't have that luxury, she settled in her mind to just visit me with her eyes and her heart.

Mama saw her dear parents standing at the viewing window, looking on without a word. Nuzzling her way in between the two of them, Mama took hold of her daddy's hand. His hand was always warm and strong. To her utter surprise, she found it completely



cold and clammy. *What could he possibly see among these sweet, innocent babies to make his hands feel like this?* she wondered to herself.

Mama looked at the window to enjoy a visual visit with me. No one on earth could have prepared her for what she saw. Suddenly, the palms of her own hands became cold and clammy, and her knees became weak. She grabbed her daddy's arm to support herself. The nurses were feeding me with, of all things, an eyedropper!

"What on earth?" Mama asked whoever would hear. She was totally flabbergasted by what she saw. The nurse who was feeding me noticed Mama and the look of utter shock on her face. The immediate attention that the nurse gave to Mama somewhat strengthened her, and, once again, she supported herself. *Whatever I have to face, I will be strong*, she told herself.

As soon as she finished feeding me, the nurse laid me down very carefully. She handled me even more carefully than one handles the finest of china. Then she came out to where Mama was standing.

"Why are you feeding my baby with an *eyedropper*?" Mama asked immediately as she fought back the tears.

The nurse was warm and gracious. She put her arm around Mama's waist. "Let's take a little walk, Ms. Ann." Mama had affectionately become known by that name. She assumed that the nurse wanted to get her away from the crowd at the window so she could talk more freely. "I understand your surprise and alarm, but we do have our reasons. Let me explain."

Mama fell in love with this nurse. She was so warm.

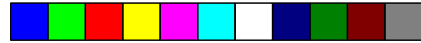
"When your baby was born yesterday, she lost most of her motor functioning."

"Yes, I know that, but what does that have to do with the *eyedropper*?" Mama asked.

"The ability to swallow is a motor function, Ms. Ann," she explained tenderly.

"You mean my baby can't even swallow?"

"No, Ms. Ann, she can't," the nurse replied. "Since the umbili-



cal cord was wrapped so tightly around her throat during the birthing process, the throat muscles were damaged the most.”

“Oh, my!” Mama responded as she backed up against the wall, allowing it to support her.

“Now you needn’t worry, Ms. Ann. The eyedropper will, hopefully, teach her throat muscles to work.”

“You mean, like the baby birds?” Mama asked anxiously. “Isn’t that kinda like the way the mama bird teaches her young to swallow?”

“As a matter of fact, it is,” the nurse agreed with a smile. “Hadn’t thought of it that way!”

Mama hugged the nurse. “Thank you for being so sweet to come out and explain all of this to me. Thank you especially for being so sweet to my baby. It’s comforting to see that she is in such good hands.”

Mama again took her place between her parents. “It’s gonna be all right,” she announced to her parents. “They’re using an eyedropper to train the muscles in her throat to work so she can learn to swallow on her own. Isn’t that a neat idea?”

Her parents expressed bewilderment. Not even a hint of a smile graced their aging faces.

“Hey, smile,” Mama reassured them. “That’s how mama birds train their young to swallow. If it works for the baby birds, it’ll work for our baby, too.”

Granddaddy looked at Mama and said, “Child, you pray and seek, and you’ll find a way with God’s help. Remember, we lost a child, and that was our way of enduring our loss.” At that, they turned and left Mama standing at the nursery window alone.



CHAPTER TWO

Yes, She'll Survive

As soon as Mama heard the sound of the supper carts being rolled down the hall, she began to feel hungry. Her thoughts had been with me continually throughout the day. She hadn't even taken the time to think much about her own well-being. *I guess I'd better get to my room so they won't pass me by with my supper tray*, she said to herself.

The nursery attendants were very kind to Mama. Since she spent so much time visiting me at the nursery window, Mama got to know them on a first-name basis. It seemed everyone knew that she had a very sick infant, so they gave her quite a lot of special attention. She never asked for anything special, nor did she expect it. She didn't want her baby to be considered as "the sick one." Instead, she wanted everyone to see me for the beautiful baby that I was in her eyes.

After Mama finished her evening meal, she lay back on her pillows. She kept going over and over in her mind the things her parents had said to her. She was heartbroken that those two dear people were not as supportive as she hoped. *What did Mother mean when she said, "We're not promised completeness"? Completeness in what? Why didn't Mother tell me the baby couldn't swallow?* she wondered in her heart. *Perhaps she didn't know the baby couldn't swallow, or maybe she just didn't have the heart to give me that news.*

Well, maybe Lynn can't swallow now, but she will. Time. That's what she needs. Time. That's what we all need. In time, these things will improve.

Dr. Hougasian came to see Mama later that evening. "Do you