



MAUREEN GREAVES

ROGER CARSWELL

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Unit C, Tomlinson Road, Leyland, PR25 2DY, England

Email: info@10ofthose.com
Website: www.10ofthose.com

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Introduction

For most people Christmas is a time to be happy with family and friends, but for some there are deep scars from the past. Loneliness and pain can be real, even whilst celebrating the greatest gift humanity has been given. Maureen Greaves and her husband were headline news when he was brutally attacked just before midnight on 24 December 2012. He was walking to his local church where he was due to play the organ for the midnight service. That service would focus on Jesus, the Saviour of the world, yet just around the corner a key participant was fighting for his life. Where does “peace on earth and goodwill to men” fit in during a moment of outright evil?

Maureen Greaves tells her story ...



Christmas
EVE

God gave me a special gift on Christmas Eve 2012. Our youngest daughter, a missionary working in Mozambique whom we hadn't seen for a number of years, was home for Christmas. We had had four or five days together shopping and preparing for the big day. Christmas Eve itself had been a lovely time. We weren't drinkers, but decided to have a little drink of sherry.

**Alan played the organ at church,
and had done so every Christmas
Eve since we were married**

Alan accidentally tipped his glass over, spilling the drink onto his trousers. He was just about to go out of the house, but had to go and change his clothes. As he was leaving the house he gave me a kiss. It was a lovely moment.

Alan played the organ at church, and had done so every Christmas Eve since we were married. He came from a musical family: his mother was a music teacher and had played both the piano and the clarinet. His father

**If he hadn't returned
home he would have got to
church without being hurt**

played the cello and violin. Growing up, his house was filled with music, and he was very musical too.

Alan set off walking to church but turned around and came home again because it was a bitterly cold night so he wanted his hat. If he hadn't returned home he would have got to church without being hurt.

I never went with Alan to the Christmas Eve service but I always got into bed and

then waited for him to return. As I lay in bed I heard an ambulance go past my house. It was around midnight. I quietly prayed to God for the family, asking for Him to look after whoever was needing medical help. I thought that perhaps something tragic had happened to someone, like a heart attack or some other serious medical emergency.

Two young men, one of whom lived around the corner from us, had decided to go out for the night. They weren't drinking or on

**They were just young men
looking to have a good time**

drugs. They were just young men looking to have a good time. They have never disclosed why they did what they did. At some time during the evening they went to a local church, broke into its hut and stole two pickaxes.

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They removed the metal ends and were left with the wooden staffs. The police speculated that one also had a hammer, though it was never found. The police think that the two men, who were unemployed, may have been intending to break in somewhere and steal some presents. They walked around High Green – the part of Sheffield that we lived in

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the evening they went to a
local church, broke into its
hut and stole two pickaxes**

– and came to the end of our street, where they were caught on some cameras. They were walking alongside each other. They then decided to run towards Alan and start attacking him. It was all caught on CCTV.

They aimed for his head and no other part of his body. The pathologist told me that his head and his face were badly crushed. Even now, no one knows why they did it. Alan was left lying on the ground and was having an epileptic fit. Eventually someone, we do not know who it was, discovered him and dialled 999.



Beginnings

I met Alan when I was in a lecture room at college. I was sitting opposite the door when he walked in. I immediately thought, “This is the man I want to marry.” I had never met or spoken to him before, but as a Christian I had been praying for a husband!

I immediately thought, “This is the man I want to marry.”

I had to wait patiently for Alan to ask me out, but first of all I had to find out something about him, which for me was very important, and without which our relationship would never have started.

I had occasionally been to church as a child. My father was a labourer and there was a tradition with some Yorkshire men, who worked long hours during the week, that they would get up later on Sunday, then go and

buy a Sunday newspaper to read before going to the Working Men's Club, have lunch, then a nap before family time. My parents, who lived in a two-up and two-down with seven children (I was number three), just wanted to get us out of the house for some peace and quiet on a Sunday afternoon. So we were sent to the local church Sunday School. It was a wonderful place where they really looked after us.

**God loved me extravagantly,
perfectly and beautifully**

When I was a teenager I had been invited by a friend to go with her to church. There I was confronted with the most wonderful news: God loved me extravagantly, perfectly and beautifully. I was invited to go to see a Christian film at the church on Good Friday.

It came to a part depicting Jesus dying on the cross. It really struck home to me that He was dying for me. Yes, He was dying for everybody as He was dying for the world, but He was dying for me. I thought that this is the Christ that I want to follow and be with. This was not a half-hearted decision, because

**I thought that this is the Christ
that I want to follow and be with**

the thought of what Jesus had suffered on the cross for me meant I had to take this whole-heartedly.

So, I wanted to know that Alan had a similar experience and faith.

When I met Alan he was working in a Remand Centre with boys who had been to Court and were either kept on remand or being held in the Remand Home before

going to prison. On the very day Alan walked into college we were on an outing to look at a Residential Home. I hadn't planned it (honestly!) but I got onto the minibus, and who should be sitting next to me but Alan! On the way we passed my church, so I turned to him and said, "I'm a Christian, and

"I'm a Christian, and that's my church!" He replied, "Oh, I'm a Christian and I go to church too."

that's my church!" He replied, "Oh, I'm a Christian and I go to church too." I just said "Yeah ...!" But in every sense of the word I knew that he was going to be my husband. Sure enough, in time, he proposed. We were married for forty years and blessed with two sons and two daughters.

Alan was a Senior Social Worker. He had a deep love for God which showed in his work, in his care for people and in using his musical gifts in church. I worked with the Church Army, a branch of the Church of England, which trains up evangelists. Their theological college is in the centre of Sheffield.

As a couple we were nature lovers and enjoyed nothing better than being in the countryside walking and exploring. We enjoyed the theatre, especially comedy and musicals. Being with family and friends either for a meal or going for a walk together were always very precious to us. And because we were together, this Christmas was going to be very special.



THE
Breaking
NEWS

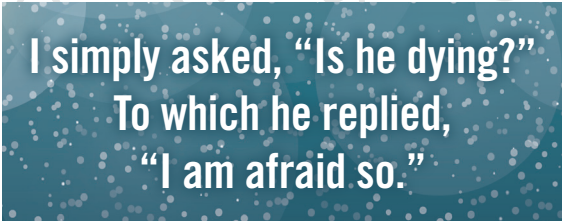
My doorbell rang just after midnight, and on answering I was met by two Police Officers. One of them told me, “Your husband has had an accident to his head, so let us take you to the hospital.” I replied, “No, no, let me go and get dressed and go for him and bring him back, because we are going to have

I was met by two Police Officers. One of them told me, “Your husband has had an accident to his head.”

a fabulous day tomorrow.” My daughter Alison came out of her bedroom and she wanted to know what was happening. I told her to go back to bed and get some sleep, and explained that I was going to pick up her dad from the hospital as he had hurt his head, and I wanted to get him back home

for tomorrow. So I dressed and drove to the hospital.

I had to wait in the waiting room as the consultant wasn't ready for me. As soon as he walked into the room I immediately knew it was bad news. He sat in front of me and said, "I am very sorry to have to tell you that your husband has been attacked. He has been very brutally attacked on his head." Then he stopped. I simply asked, "Is he dying?" To



**I simply asked, "Is he dying?"
To which he replied,
"I am afraid so."**

which he replied, "I am afraid so." The first thing I did was ask to go and see him.

On the short journey to the room where he was I prayed in my heart and mind to God, "Please Heavenly Father, be with me on this

journey, this very unexpected journey. And this great heartache I am going through, may it be for your glory.” I got to the room, and it really was quite horrific. His head was so swollen that I couldn’t recognise him. I just knew that he was dying.

Alan’s heart kept beating for another two and a half days. With my family I sat with him the whole time. It was very tough. Alan was not just my husband, friend and lover, but my spiritual partner. On our second date he took my hand and said, “Let’s pray about our future together.” Throughout our lives we prayed together, took church services together and talked about the Lord and our spiritual walk with Him. I was truly heartbroken at the loss of Alan. I felt it very deeply.



Christmas
MORNING

By Christmas morning, even before we had acclimatised to the news, there were liaison officers wanting as much information as possible to try to catch those who had attacked Alan. Apparently the first forty-eight hours after such an incident are the most crucial. The first thing they asked was if I knew anybody who could have done this. Clearly the police had to be sensitive but

**I was trying to hold
myself together while
looking after four children**

some time later they enquired if he had ever committed adultery, or if I had committed adultery. I understood why they had to ask these questions but they still caused great heartache. I was trying to hold myself

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together while looking after four children so it was very difficult.

We had the funeral, but I was amazed and perturbed to see how the press were so interested in two very ordinary people. In no way were we special. We were just a straightforward man and wife doing

**I was amazed and
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very normal things. At first I didn't want anything to do with the media coverage of what was going on. Both the police and our vicar took a lot of the pressure off me, but I spoke to the CEO of the Church Army who said that he would pray about it. Later he suggested to me that God was giving me a

unique opportunity to say what I think and tell them of my trust in an all-loving God who has Himself suffered with His own Son dying, paying the penalty of the world's sin. I had never dealt with the media let alone do any interviews with them. I was in regular contact with the police, trying to support my children and was in the middle of the deepest, unimaginable heartache. I didn't want journalists going to the residential home where our son Martin lived, nor the home where Alan worked; I feared that they could distort the story. So, I asked the media not to mention our children in their articles and to report faithfully the facts and how my relationship with God was the anchor which was keeping me. When they agreed, I told them the story.

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Questions

Newspapers, then magazines and many others came to my home or the church to interview me. I also held interviews over the phone. As well as wanting to know Alan's story there was also a genuine desire to know how and why I still believed in God. They asked if I questioned why God had allowed this.

I could answer and sincerely say that I have never felt angry with God. Ever since becoming a Christian I have believed, read and loved the Bible. It is God's message to all humanity and explains so much of what is going on in our world. We know that this world is not the one that God created. Rather, it is in rebellion against God and His laws for us all. Terrible things occur because the world has turned its back on God. We are bound up in the bundle of life, living in communities and amongst people who are saying "No" to the very One who has given us life, and His love in Jesus. To a greater or lesser extent, we

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have all contributed to the wrong that there is: we are all sinners! The Bible gives clear answers to many of the big questions we ask. But when it comes to God answering the “Why?” questions about individual situations, Christians trust what God has revealed to us in a general way. He has told us that He is God. He controls the earth and the sky. He is never taken by surprise, and though bad things happen to His people, He is our loving Father and He knows what He is doing.

Instead of asking, “Why?” I ask, “How am I going to get through this? How am I going to walk this journey? How am I going to manage all that is going to unfold before me next year? How am I going to look after the four children?” The “how” question is more important than the “why” question. As the years have unfolded since Alan’s death, there have been many opportunities for me to talk to others about Jesus Christ, in a way that I

could not have done before. That has been a plus for me because I want everyone to know Jesus in a personal way. I want them to trust Him as their Lord and Saviour as Alan did and as I do. God has brought good out of this evil act. He has not wasted all the tears and pain. I don't have answers as to why God allowed Alan to be murdered, but I do trust God – as I did many years before when our young daughter had ovarian cancer, so couldn't have children. Things happen in life. Working in the community I come across many families who have heartaches and suffer deep pain.

Christians are not separate from the world. All types of people suffer in one way or another. But, as a Christian, I have Someone who is walking the journey with me. God is there, and He makes all the difference. Whoever I meet knows that I have suffered but I can share with them that God's peace and presence with me has been real throughout the years.



Arrests

Two men were arrested three weeks after Alan died. One was 21 and the other 23. One lived around the corner from us. I didn't know them, but Alan used to play the piano at the school where one of them, Ashley, had two children attending. The police were absolutely convinced that these two men were guilty. A phone call came to me from the Liaison Officers asking if I wanted to go to the Magistrates Court.

Before that, and when Christmas had arrived, the family all gathered to say goodbye to Alan. Then I was left alone with Alan. It was then that it dawned on me that this was murder.

On Christmas Day we would have gone to church, where I would have led the service, and had planned to sing, "Look to the skies, there's a celebration." Alan was going to preach. Reflecting on that, I thought that I would have prayed with the congregation, "Lord, forgive

us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” Alan would have preached about Jesus being the Saviour of the world, explaining what He was going to save His people from, and what He would save them to. Jesus was born to save people from their sin, and save all who trusted Him for an eternal home with God in heaven. Now, as a Christian, I wanted to forgive the men who had done this to Alan. If Jesus had died to forgive me, then my desire was that the murderers themselves might know God’s forgiveness ... and also mine. I prayed to God saying, “You can take the burden of this off me. I want to place the murderers in Your hands as You will deal with them in Your love, Your justice, and Your mercy. Please give me the grace to be willing to forgive them fully now and always. Please watch over them as they also go on this journey, which perhaps for them was unexpected too.” Praying like that made a great difference to me regarding

what was to happen and unfold in the coming months.

Christmas lunch, and the family games we planned to play, were all put on hold. Later, my presents to Alan were given by me to our four children.

After Alan died I wanted to go to the place on the street where he was attacked. Because Alan and I were known and loved in the area, people came up to me saying horrific things about the two men. I was able to say to everyone that I didn't want these young men to go to hell, and I didn't want hatred for them to spread across High Green. I would simply say, "If I can leave them in the hands of God, you can leave them in His hands too!" At Alan's funeral service I asked the church choir, to which Alan had belonged, to sing, "For God So Loved The World" from Steiner's "Crucifixion." It had been one of our favourite songs through the years.



The Trial

One of the men really didn't need to confess his guilt because there was so much evidence against him. But because the other one said he was innocent, there had to be a trial. His statement was that the other man ran up and battered Alan, and that he just stood and watched him. Even if this was true, it leaves the question as to what it means morally for someone to watch as a person is viciously attacked.

Before he went to trial we attended the Magistrates Court to hear them being sent for

**It was the first time I would
see these men face to face**

trial at the Crown Court. It was the first time I would see these men face to face. We were sitting on the back row of the court with the Police Liaison Officers, and on the front row

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were Ashley and Jonathan's families. We were sitting very close to each other. We were all distressed and crying. I was very conscious of their sadness because they were going through trials, just as I was. It was their sons being tried after all. As I waited I said to myself, "Now this is reality." Am I actually going to be able to sit here, looking into their eyes with forgiveness and a desire that they should trust Jesus, or was that attitude going to fail.

I went straight up to them and told them that I was praying for them and their sons, just as I was praying for justice for Alan

As a Police Officer moved forward to keep the press at bay I was taking a tissue to wipe my eyes when Ashley and Jonathan's mums came around the corner. The love and grace

of God was such that I went straight up to them and told them that I was praying for them and their sons, just as I was praying for justice for Alan. I definitely wanted justice for Alan, but I could feel the pain of these two women; there was no reason to judge them for what their sons had done. I had genuine concern for the men on trial. Later, when the trial came, the mothers and I were able to have a little bit of a conversation.

The trial, which lasted three and a half weeks, was very, very harrowing, emotional and heart breaking. There were moments when I thought it was going Jonathan's way. Because there were two different types of damage to Alan's head, I was convinced that both men had hit him. Most of Alan's skull had been hit inward, but something else had gone into his head breaking the skin and the bone. The pathologist testified that the damage at the front of Alan's head was most likely

caused by a hammer than a pick axe staff. One can believe what one wants when listening to lawyers and witnesses, but I went to the trial convinced that Ashley had actually killed Alan. But I prepared myself for both a “guilty” and “not guilty” verdict and sought, with God’s help and power, to handle myself by reacting as God Himself would want me to.

I prepared myself for both a “guilty” and “not guilty” verdict

At the very end of the trial in a highly charged moment, the Clerk stood and asked the Foreman of the jury if they had found Ashley guilty or not guilty of murder. The verdict, “not guilty” was given. Ashley’s family, as well as Ashley, jumped up with great joy and celebration. I was watching Alan’s barrister and the detective who was responsible for the case.

We had decided that as a family we would not show any emotion whichever way the verdict went as it would not have been fair to Ashley's family. So we sat impassive.

Suddenly, the Foreman of the jury said, "We do find him guilty of manslaughter." Ashley's family almost dropped to the ground crying. Ashley was stunned. Jonathan was sentenced to life imprisonment, with the condition that he serves twenty-five years before parole could be considered. Ashley got nine years for manslaughter. A number of people have said to me that that was too short a sentence. It didn't really matter to me because I believe we live with what we do, and only Ashley knows why he did what he did. In my mind and in prayer I have committed him into God's hands and I don't need to worry about the sentence. He has now served his time and he is out of prison. He is not allowed to come near to where I live.



The
PRESENT

I am certain Alan has gone to be with God, his Heavenly Father, in heaven. That certainty is not based on how Alan lived his life or even because of how he died. Neither is it based on what the vicar, or his friends and family said about him. I am sure he is in heaven

**The Scriptures are very clear
that those who put their trust in
Jesus Christ will be forgiven**

because of the promises of God in the Bible. The Scriptures are very clear that those who put their trust in Jesus Christ will be forgiven. Trusting that when Jesus died He was carrying on Himself the sin of the world, paying its penalty, brings us to know God. Jesus died for us, then three days later He rose from the dead. The living Saviour promises a place in heaven to any who will call on the Lord Jesus

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to be saved. Heaven is not a reward, but a gift, purchased by Jesus, and given to those who receive Him as Lord and Saviour. Alan was a true believer in Jesus Christ. He knew Him as his Saviour, and had walked his life with Jesus. He is now living in heaven. If Jonathan and Ashley were to ask Jesus Christ to forgive them and to become their personal Lord and Saviour, they too would go to heaven when they die. I pray constantly for Ashley and Jonathan.

Alan regularly bought me flowers

The way we as a family have come out of this has been tremendous. Neither I, nor the children, have needed counselling. Alan regularly bought me flowers. I would walk into the house and there would be a bouquet of flowers. Every Christmas Day morning there would be flowers. One of the things that happened after his death is that flowers

constantly flowed into the house week after week. It seemed to me that this was a reminder that God is with me as it was such a lovely thing that Alan did; but the tokens of love have not ceased. I am evidence that God has been with me in every aspect of this unexpected journey. He has brought me through it extremely well, and I have had a very happy life, both before, and since Alan's death.

I live close by the place where the attack took place. It reminds me that there is nothing a human being has committed that cannot be forgiven by God. I have asked God to deal with those two men in His mercy and justice and love. It would be wonderful if one day they became Christians and found forgiveness and new life in Jesus.

Each Christmas Day I walk to church in the morning and I stop at the place where it happened and I remind myself that I am praying for their salvation.



Maureen's
PRAYER

Maureen's prayer is that this little book might also be of help in you coming to know God's forgiveness and the certainty of a relationship with Him which lasts throughout time, through death and then into eternity. John, one of Jesus' disciples, summed up the reason why God sent Jesus into the world: "The Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world." This was the message that the angels delivered to rough, rugged shepherds at the time of Jesus' birth: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." And it is the reason why wise men came from the East to worship Jesus, the King of the Jews.

At Christmas we remember that God, who brought all things into being, came into our

world. Though there was no room for Him in the inn and though He was reviled and rejected by so many throughout His life, He still loved the world and died for it. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." The baby who lay in a wooden crib, was, as a man, to lie on a wooden cross. Suffering there, Jesus took on Himself the sins which hit the headlines as well as those which just make our hearts hard towards God. They all keep God at a distance from us. Jesus died to forgive and change that.

Jesus did what Alan Greaves could not. By His own power He rose from the dead. Today He offers forgiveness and a new life

to all who will turn from their own sinful ways and ask Him to be their Lord and Saviour. It is easy to rashly say about someone that they should "go to hell," but hell is an awful place where people pay for their own sin and their rejection of God. Heaven, on the other hand, is a place where there is no sin. In reality all sinners should be barred from it. But it is God's love that has reached out to us, and provided a way of forgiveness that is open to all. Alan, Maureen and their family each came to a time in their lives when they asked Jesus to become their Lord and Saviour. Today, will you do that? Whatever happens in your life you can find in Jesus, new, spiritual, eternal life if you trust Him.

