



Middle Tennessee Women's Retreat The Vision

Middle Tennessee Women's Retreat began as the shared vision of Paul and Ann Downing. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, commitment to their dream, and hard work, plans were completed in 1991 for the first annual MTWR. It was to be held May 1, 2, and 3, 1992 in Nashville featuring Florence Littauer, Lana Bateman, and Emilie Barnes as well as music from The Downings. The brochures were sent to the printers to be ready for mailing in January. Paul and Ann could enjoy a family Christmas knowing everything was ready. This was God's retreat--what could possibly go wrong?

On December 29, 1991, Paul suffered cardiac arrest. His heart stopped as did Ann's world. After being revived by paramedics in the parking lot of their hotel in Winchester, Kentucky, Paul was flown by helicopter to Humana Hospital in Lexington. It was their first weekend on the road after Christmas but they never made it to the church.

The doctors said it would be a miracle if he lived through that night, he'd never make it. But he did! For the next fifty-six days Ann sat in the ICU waiting room of that hospital anxious to visit Paul every two hours for only a few minutes as hospital policy dictated with critically ill patients. Each night she slept on the floor of that small waiting room because she didn't want to leave him.

During that time there were countless medical emergencies, financial emergencies, decisions to be made, questions to be answered, lessons to be learned. After the first week Paul went into a coma. January singing and speaking engagements were cancelled. Ann was away from home, lonely and scared, however, she continued to live what she had been singing her whole life. She comforted the other patients' families giving them hope, then watched them leave the hospital with their loved ones while she remained there with hers. The doctors said there was no hope, but Ann personally knew the Hope. Her family was there as were others whom God had sent; cards, letters, phone calls, and prayers poured in.

MTWR brochures arrived from Nashville. By now all February dates for the Downings were being cancelled; but May was three months away. Not knowing if Paul would live or die, a decision had to be made so...MTWR brochures were mailed. Ann never stopped trusting God to perform a miracle. And He did. On February 23, 1992 Paul was completely healed as he slipped into the waiting arms of his Heavenly Father.

Time seemed to stop...funeral arrangements, viewing, funeral, graveside service, loneliness...days, weeks...phone calls, flowers, cards, letters, loneliness, and a broken heart.

Amazingly MTWR registrations were arriving daily. Even in her deepest grief Ann knew the retreat had to take place...And it did.

Seventy-five to eighty women attended that first retreat in 1992. What a time of healing for each one of us, especially for Ann. She shared the most vulnerable time of her life with us and so defined MTWR--a safe place to cry, laugh, talk, share, grieve, find support, confess, receive forgiveness, heal, meet new friends and draw closer to God.

Even though their shared dream passed away with Paul, their vision has become a reality. God promised to provide. And He did!

Dolly Simms