

Meghan O'Meara's Bowl

Meghan shook inside, as she listened over the phone, to her daughter explain her dad's plan of attending her brother's wedding, and to stay in his home. Their son was excited to have the family together, but the familiar, cold fear slammed through Meghan's mind. It crippled her thoughts, then threatened to push her over the edge of reason into panic. Dizzy and weak before the phone call ended, she managed to tell her daughter, "Okay...I'll schedule my flight. I love you."

Meghan's heart raced after the phone call. She could not catch her breath. Her ears rang, and tears filled her eyes. The realization that she was not completely free of panic attacks devastated her, because of her psychiatrist's assurance that Anxiety Disorder could be healed.

Meghan's years of work to address her fears and erase the mental pain—through counseling, medication, and scripture memorization—seemed futile.

*Father God, I thought that if I trusted Your promise to never leave me, I would be set free from fear. Do I lack faith? Are doubts forcing me back into a mental prison cell? No! Lord Jesus, help me! Lord God, help me to remember Your promises. I don't want to feel or reveal my trauma. Father, do You expect me to do this? Is this really Your plan? If it is, then give me Your strength. Grant me peace.*

Meghan's ex-husband, Jim, arranged to be present for several days leading up to their son's wedding. Meghan longed to celebrate with all of their children. The dreaded close contact with Jim almost eclipsed her excitement. Their thirty-year history with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) resurfaced.

Fear that his loved ones would be injured once ruled Jim's life. His occupation exposed him to many horrendous accidents and crimes against innocent children. As a consequence, he

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forbade his children to climb trees, swim, go places with other families, or attend sleepovers unless he or Meghan were present.

Motivated by love for his family, Jim sought help, was diagnosed, and began a new treatment option—Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). This was a procedure developed to resolve the destructive issues from PTSD symptoms: suicide, anxiety, anger, guilt, depression, phobias, and self-esteem difficulties related to past and present life events.

EMDR takes place in the mind of the individual, with the use of a light-strip movement to pace the memories without relating every detail of the memory to the therapist. The goal of healing is to remember traumatic events without the mental vivid pictures. Jim participated in EMDR to blur his memories during recall, and it was successful!

*I do thank You, my God, for saving Jim. It was so awful to live with his rage and to feel invisible. My Lord Jesus, You witnessed the days we both battled his memories. His reactions to everyday life were like land mines which could explode at any moment.*

Several years after EMDR, Jim discovered his need to be healed from the deep emotional devastation of PTSD. Helpless to repair the deep wounds from PTSD, Jim's behavior ravaged his family relationships—their marriage ended in divorce. Meghan understood the reasons for his behavior and did not blame him, but she was relieved to escape. When she refused reconciliation with Jim, he accused her of unforgiveness. Meghan believed she had worked through the past rather well, even though Jim was unconvinced.

*Lord God, can I just keep hiding my feelings? I especially don't want my children to know how their dad's illness created anxiety, nightmares, and maybe unforgiveness in me.*

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Now, seven years post-divorce, Meghan lay on the floor of her living room and confessed to God her struggle to forgive Jim. She shuddered with tears. The pain in her chest overwhelmed her. She wanted to be free of memories that shackled her to the past. Would her children relive those memories if her pain was exposed? Her protection of them contributed to her anxiety attacks.

A few years after Jim left, Meghan's mind sensed it was safe to feel her deeply buried emotions from Jim's PTSD. Anti-anxiety medication helped her recover from fear, anger, frustration, and abandonment. As she prayed Biblical verses on trust, she slowly relaxed.

*"Father God, I prayed for many years for You to heal him—please help me. Give me courage to be near him. I need some prayer support from others. Who can I trust?"*

Meghan chose two of her close friends and her women's Bible study group to pray with her. The subject of the Bible study was "The Throne Room of the Father," where the group read the Scripture, "He stepped forward and took the scroll from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. And when He took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people." (*Revelation 5:7-8 NLT*)

Meghan quickly jotted notes in her workbook—*My prayers are kept in a gold prayer bowl to burn continually with an aroma as incense before God's throne? Wow, He remembers them day and night!*

Astonished, Meghan added more thoughts—*He remembers and forgives me, even though I offend and hurt Him? What memories am I wrestling with? Do I forgive? I pray for forgiveness...* "Accept my prayer as incense offered to You, and my upraised hands as an evening offering." (*Psalms 141:2 NLT*)

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Afterward, Meghan revealed her struggle. "In three months, Jim and I will be in the same house again. I believe God is giving me time to gather courage and maybe to forgive him? I really think that I have...God's mercy set me free and my mercy sets other people free. Let's fill up a prayer bowl. Will you ladies please pray with me? I need help." They nodded and prayed. Meghan's load of fear lifted as if the gold bowl held her burden.

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The week of the wedding celebration arrived. Meghan's children shared the fun memories of their childhood as they reminisced. She was grateful for the reminder of good times.

While at her son's home, each morning, Meghan tiptoed downstairs for coffee and devotions. Like clockwork, Jim brought his Bible a few moments later and joined her. She felt leery, but not afraid. After brief, casual conversations, she would open her workbook. He told her about his church and his new relationships. Although polite, Meghan felt slightly irritated by Jim's interruptions.

*God help me to endure this time.*

During his chatter one morning she heard in her mind, *LISTEN to him*. Meghan lifted her eyes from the Bible, refocused on Jim and tuned her ears to his voice.

"I can't believe the Lord healed me." Jim's eyes lit up with joy. "He promised He would, and then He did it on Good Friday!"

"Praise God!" Meghan's words reverberated like an ancient chant. Suddenly, in her mind's eye, a checklist with twenty-eight years of her petitions to God on Jim's behalf. It floated up from a gold bowl for her to read—

*Please heal him.*

*Please help him to be close to his children.*

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*Please keep him from suicide.*

*Please send other Christians to encourage him.*

*Please free him from mental chains.*

*Please give him hope.*

*Please help him to reach his full potential God.*

Huge black check marks appeared to the left of each request as a Voice spoke, "It has been done. All your prayers for this man have been answered."

Meghan gasped, wide eyed. "I believe you're healed," she whispered. "In my mind, I saw my prayer list for you. Each request was checked."

Jim stared, and stepped toward her. He begged, "Forgive me for the terrible things I did to our family."

Meghan arose from her chair. "I struggled to understand the depth of your misery and to forgive you. God preserved each of us from complete destruction. He answered my prayers, and He wants me to forgive you. I made mistakes and helped to destroy our marriage, too. Please forgive me for my part."

They embraced. He whispered through tears, "Thank you."

The power of forgiveness and God's healing transformation brought reconciliation. Many friends and family witnessed peace between them, and their testimony of God's mercy impacted their world.

A happy girl—the youngest of four—Erin grew up in a California foothill town. Her black and white watercolor illustrations were published in the book, *Little Known Tales in California History*. Wall murals were her business for years. Her vivid imagination continues to find expression in creative stories.