

*"Seasons with My Higher Power" shares answers for Josie L. Parker's questions, in areas of relationship failures and discontent with life when her Higher Power reveals himself as a small man, HP, who teaches her about self-love.*

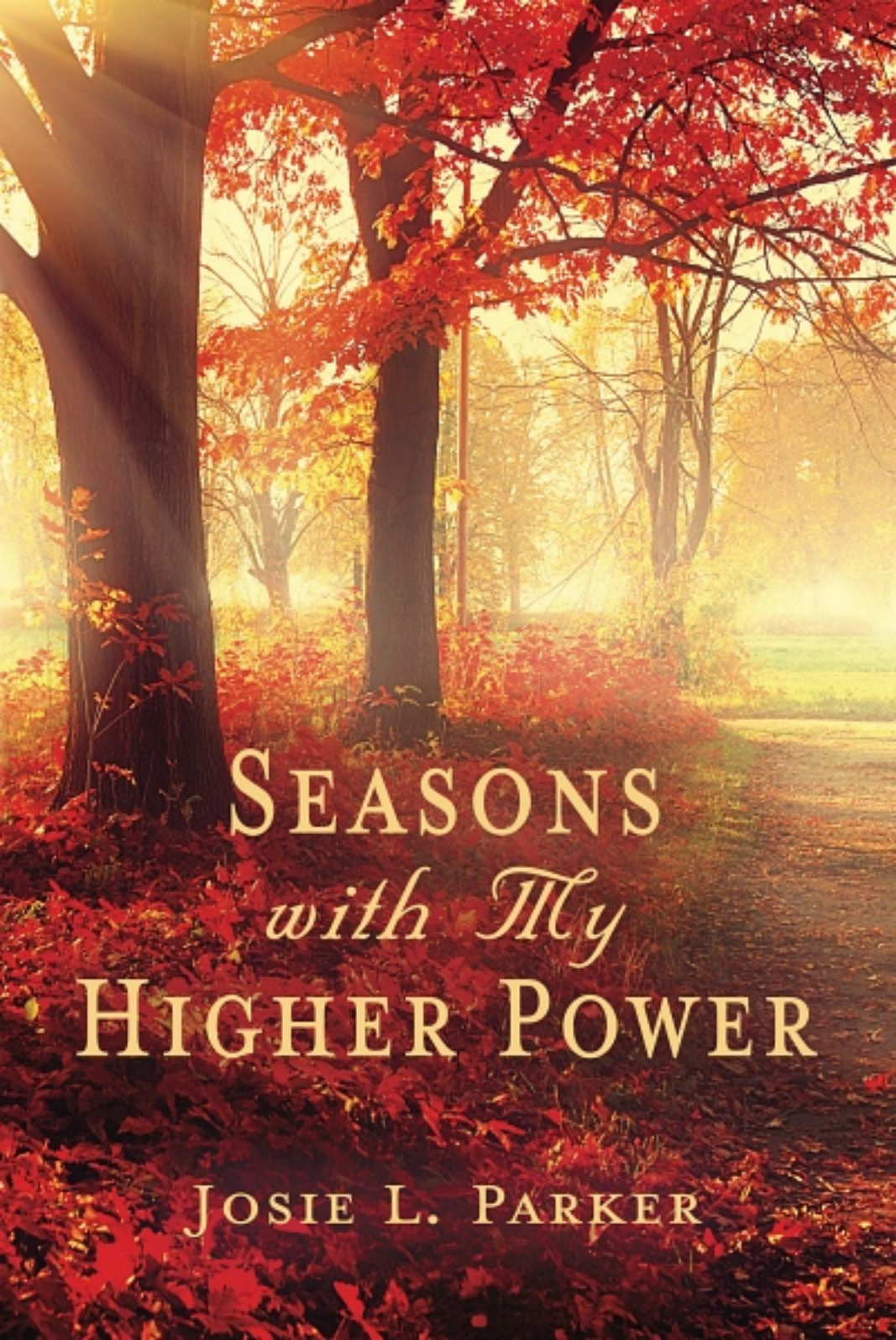
## **Seasons with My Higher Power**

By Josie L. Parker

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SEASONS  
*with My*  
HIGHER POWER

JOSIE L. PARKER

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Read more at [Josielparker.com](http://Josielparker.com)



# FORWARD

Top o' the mornin' to ye!

It's 5 a.m. somewhere, as I like to say. Wanna talk? Communin' with a Higher Power, like me, is filled with endless possibilities. I feel ye heart's cry when ye pray, sing, meditate, read a book that speaks to ye soul, or spend time in nature. I read ye journals. Feel ye tears. Feed ye hope.

I listen and enjoy findin' creative ways of sharin' my love and acceptance with ye. At times, ye may sense I am near. If ye don't, that's fine. Arrangin' events and situations to help ye grow is my specialty. I'd love hangin' out with ye today. What do ye say? Since I am in more than one place at a time, ye and I can be friends while I'm also spendin' time with billions of others.

On a rainy day or during an airport layover, ye may also enjoy takin' a look at how Josie L. Parker, author of this book, found me.

As a daughter raised by a co-dependent mother and an "absent-for-the-most-part" father, Josie spent decades searchin' high and low for someone to love her, while not havin' a clue how to love herself. Later in life, Josie became entangled in a rowdy scenario which threatened her safety, leadin' to deeper emotional pain. Those were tough years. When Josie teetered on the edge of insanity.

After she found herself mired down in a deep hole of despair, the lost woman looked up and discovered I'd been with her all along.

*Josie L. Parker*

Josie is mendin' now. She calls it recovery. I call it a rejuvenated friendship. Whatever you call it, the grand process is helpin' her transition from an old way of doin' life into a new way of thinkin.'

This style of journal writin' (not your typical pre-teen diary) becomes a year of self-discovery as Josie learns 'tis possible to have peace in a chaotic world.

I love the part where Josie and I become besties. She discovers 'tis my hand be holdin' hers in both sunshine and rain.

Lookin' for serenity and love yourself? I'm always just a thought away.

Lovingly,

HP, aka Higher Power

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The names and identifying details of individuals have been changed to protect their privacy.

## **FAMILY MEMBERS**

Dad (82) and Mom (deceased) = Josie's parents

Glen = Josie's husband

Anna = Josie's daughter

Tim Sr. = Josie's son-in-law

Timmy = Josie's grandson

Ben = Josie's son

Larry = Josie's foster son (deceased)

Carl = Josie's oldest brother

Danny = Josie's youngest brother

Charles = Glen's father

Frances = Glen's mother

Jon Mark = Glen's son

Tonya = Glen's daughter

Sarah = Glen's granddaughter

# AUTUMN

Discovery along the trail of life: Blaming others hasn't helped matters so far. Wonder why I'm still doing it?



## NOVEMBER

An edgy, extraordinarily expectant energy is coursing through my veins. Time to escape from the real world. Donning waffle stomper boots, with walking stick in hand, I stroll toward an inconspicuous break in the greenery, slipping onto a trail head to revisit my forest paradise.

The pull is strong. Strong as an addict rushing toward her fix. Only this craving involves earthen aromas of damp dirt and crunchy leaves on a fine, autumn day – a cherished rendezvous with nature.

Unknown to me, a surprise encounter from another dimension is around the corner. This day will become, not just another 24 hours, but a defining moment in time.

Keeping to my routine route, I head to the place of my dreams. It's at the end of Firebreak Trail, aptly named because our local firemen dug the trail to cut off a small wildfire which threatened to take the woods several years ago.

Reminiscent thoughts flow with each step.

Yes, life has knocked me around, but that's no reason to blame others. I'm tired of holding myself in check, waiting to exhale. Time to start living life to the fullest.

My feelings and thoughts are hopeful since I recently admitted I am powerless over my personal demon - trying to control others. I believe there is Someone Bigger than me who can help me do more than just survive my dysfunctional life, yet I'm still uncertain about many things.

Fresh thought of the day: Strive toward crisp, new strategies of staying in the moment and taking one day at a time. Let me

change that to one minute, no, one second at a time. (Whatever works, right?)

Doing my best to keep from digging up the past or racing toward the unknown, I make up my mind this afternoon to concentrate on nature's little details.

My eyes squint as strong-willed sunbeams bounce off yellow and rusty orange leaves to highlight a number of hardwoods. A sweep of my vision creates mental photographs of evergreens and golden wild flowers. As I reach the untamed area made of two hills separated by a small valley, the trail suddenly stops at an overlook. After tramping a patch of brittle, beige grass, there is a clear space to sit on the south bank of the ravine. I settle in at the wild area, viewing a massive tangle of natural shrubs and thorny vines in front of me. In contrast, a myriad of tiny ferns and mosses show off their delicate beauty on each side of the embankment.

Wearing jeans and a light t-shirt, I'm aware of the day's diminishing sun rays. The orb's fingers make their way around tall cedars and oaks, warming the left side of my body while pushing back a slight chill creeping in on the right. Heat and cold seek dominance across my skin, creating chills of pleasure up my spine. A rare and enjoyable experience.

After a cleansing breath and a satisfied sigh, I lay on my back, hands crossed behind my head, briefly looking into the fading canopy above. Three leaves lazily waltz toward earth.

Closing my eyes, my thoughts begin to drift.

A slight rustle in the leaves barely gets my attention. I imagine a bird or a chipmunk, maybe a squirrel, taking care of their own dietary needs while searching for acorns. The noise gets louder and closer, so I open one eye.

I'm taken aback by the sight of a middle-aged, miniature person standing about six feet away. He's a pudgy elf, nearly four feet tall, now making his way boldly toward me, kicking leaves out of his way as he comes closer, and looking around at the beauty of the natural world.

Sitting up, I rub both eyes in disbelief. I am not afraid, but curious about the tiny man. Have I fallen asleep in the forest and this is all a dream? I viciously dig my fingers into the soil of the forest floor, pulling them out to view black dirt under my nails. I'm awake, all right.

The vibrant creature walks confidently as if he owns the earth. His face is clean-shaven with a narrow chin and prominent nose. He has milky chocolate eyes that seem vaguely familiar. Ah, yes, like my mother's.

He speaks with an Irish accent, and grins like he knows a secret.

"Not wantin' to startle ye, my dear, but ye seem to need company."

Unsure of how to respond, I smile and stare, unable to take my eyes off his gentle countenance.

"I appear to be a small man, but I'm flexible. I can take on any appearance. Ye may have guessed...I am ye Higher Power."

"No way! I mean, that's hard to believe. I never would've thought you'd be standing here talking to me."

"I've known ye all your life, Josie. You're unique, just as all my earthly friends. I want to hang out with ye and encourage ye. I chose to take the shape of a dwarf-sized Celtic man because it seems ye'll feel comfy talking to a little bloke with a sense of humor. After all, ye're a quarter Irish yourself."

"Yes, it's true."

I am surprised at the information this little guy has on me. I find myself prattling on about my genetics.

“I have a lot of Irish and British in me, with a little French, German and Swedish thrown in the mix, but then you know that.”

I giggle. No matter what I say, this elfin portrayal of divinity is going to know it already. I continue chattering to my new friend in the forest.

“Most of my life I heard my parents say I had a Native American great-great-grandmother. I have olive skin, high cheek bones and straight, brown hair, so I figured it must be true. Last year, I got my DNA tested and the results proved otherwise. That sort of messed with my head for a few weeks. I had previously believed my connection with nature was from my Native American roots. The DNA results helped me get a grip on reality and start accepting my ancestry for what it truly is.”

“Aye, ye’ve enough Irish blood to dance a jig, darlin.’ Scoot over and make room for me on your bank of dreams. I’m ready to throw a little joy your way, girlie.”

Wide-eyed now, and tickled by his impish ways, I move down a bit and prepare to listen to the heart-felt words of my Higher Power.

He looks around at the lay of the land, with its nearly naked tree limbs and dry creek gully.

“Ah, ‘tis beautiful here, but then I’m partial to Earth with its majestic trees, and all its creatures great and small. What’s on ye heart today, luv?”

Believe it or not, talking with my Higher Power is easy.

“Well, I had just been thinking about my life and how many different chapters there have been. Sometimes I wanted to be

perfect and a good girl. Other times I wanted to break all the rules. And during so many years I just felt hurt and confused.”

“Ye can tell me anything, Josie.”

“I seem to have a lot of trouble with my emotions. Things that should make me angry don’t. And little things that could easily be overlooked drive me crazy. What’s wrong with me? Am I a mental case?”

“You are not, darlin.’ Take a deep breath. Change grows gently. Divine light clarifies things, but it all takes time. I’m here now, ye’ll be smilin’ in no time. Wanna talk about perfectionism?”

“Funny you should mention it, all my childhood I strove to be perfect. I even believed it was a helpful attribute, striving to get everything perfectly done. But now I see otherwise. When I make a mistake as a perfectionist, I am compelled to punish myself and say mean things about myself in my own head.”

“Because ye are aware of it, ye are on a positive path forward.”

“That’s good to know. Um, I’d love to have a name for you. Is it okay if I call you HP?”

“Aye, that’d be grand, Josie.”

“I remember when I started praying to you in earnest, HP. I was 10. I was always asking you to fix something in my family. A lot has happened since then. After 60 years, I’m starting to recognize patterns in my own behavior that I learned while growing up in an alcoholic home. Recovery classes help a lot. But sometimes everything still feels overwhelming.”

“Wanna know a secret, lassie?”

HP has my full attention.

“Let’s follow your goal from earlier, and stay in the moment. Stay with me in the ‘right now,’ okay?”

I can't help but grin. Of course, HP would know my hopes of attaining personal recovery from my dysfunctional upbringing.

"Look around, dear. Ye might ask why I would be wearing this t-shirt?"

In addition to brown shoes and blue jeans, HP is clad in a bright yellow t-shirt with the words "Goat milk is for kids."

"Ok, this is an easy riddle. The shirt reminds me of my mother. In fact, Mom had the same t-shirt a couple decades ago when she and Dad were raising goats."

"Do ye recall that she ordered two toddler-sized, identical shirts for your daughter and son, Anna and Ben?"

"Yes, she was a sweetheart. She loved to take her grandchildren to the barnyard to see the baby goats in the spring."

There is a long pause as I realize HP has just slipped our conversation into the past.

"Ye inherited your mother's sweetness, lass. To bring everything back to now, the flow of love from her is now in ye. And all of it comes from..."

"Let me guess, HP. From you!"

"There is much light on this dark Earth, luv. Look for it."

A drop in temperature gets my attention as the sun slips lower in the sky. A breeze makes me shiver.

"Ye don't have a sweater, dear. It's a perfect time for ye to get back to your warm home. Glen is expecting you."

"Oh, yes, my husband will love to hear about my woodland adventures today! HP, you have just changed my life. Can we meet again tomorrow?"

"We can, Josie. And remember, I'm always a whisper away."

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I can hardly wait to get to the ravine this afternoon. HP appears as soon as I get seated.

“How are ye, my dear?”

“Honestly, not that good. I’m ashamed at how quickly my moods change.”

My mind was recalling severe health problems Mom dealt with in her mid-70s while osteoporosis stole her quality of life. I grieved her “loss” a full year before she actually passed away. Watching her live with pain hurt my heart.

“I’m feeling sad about my mother’s last few years of life. I remember yesterday you promised joy.”

“Aye, I did. Tell me about the good times with ye mother, luv.”

“Okay, that’ll be easy. There were so many. Well, our family lived in 15 different homes during my first 14 years of life, so things were never routine for long. When I was a young girl, I felt like an extension of my mother, not like a separate person. Whenever Mom felt satisfied with our circumstances, I did too. I remember when that feeling changed though. I was at summer camp. We lived in Europe at the time. Of course, you know that. Anyway, I was singing worship songs in a big tent with dozens of pre-teens. For some reason I could hear my own voice above all the other voices, how it resonated with a unique sound. At that moment, I felt like my own person.”

HP nodded, raised one eyebrow and waited for me to continue.

“Growing up, I talked to Mom a lot. I told her everything I could recall from my day. I confided in her when I had a crush on a boy and cried with pain while describing how a teacher yelled at the class. I remember the day, I was 15 at the time, when I said to Mom, ‘There are actually quite a few thoughts in my head that I haven’t shared with you.’ That was a strange feeling for me.



Looking back, I can see how co-dependent I was on Mom. I continually looked for self-acceptance and love from her. Mom's acceptance gave my life value. She was the main person I relied on, my rock, my security, my friend."

After a pause, I continue.

"Dad, on the other hand, was the wild card of my family, sometimes funny and playful, other times loud, critical and scary."

HP looked at me gently, nodding his head slightly. There was a long quiet moment where he seemed to be considering his next words carefully.

"'Tis nobody's fault, darlin,' but ye descended from a family tree with broken fruit. To lighten things up, ye might consider the rhymin' words 'arranged' and 'deranged' to describe ye ancestors. Ye maternal grandparents had an 'arranged marriage' which only allowed enough unity to provide a tiny amount of acceptance toward each other and a limited amount of love expressed to their 11 children. Ye paternal grandparents had a 'deranged marriage' with ye grandfather's grip controllin' ye grandmother's every move. Their seven children saw chaos, confusion and abuse."

"No wonder my mother and father had a rough marriage. Neither had ideal parenting role models."

"Just know, because of inherited family dynamics, ye and ye mother needed each other. That style relationship is a beautiful thing in difficult situations. Ye were fine because of ye reliance on her, and ye mother was hangin' on to serenity the only way she knew - by pourin' herself into caring for ye and ye brothers."

I had always wondered why I seemed to have the best mother in the entire universe. She needed me, Carl and Danny to keep her sane.

“You know, the best time in my childhood was when Dad was off on a military assignment, and Mom took care of the family by herself. She had a gentle response to daily trials. On the rare occasion she used a stern tone with me, I was in need of her guidance.”

“She truly loved ye, Josie.”

“I felt her love. She protected me from my father at times, like when he got drunk or was just being mean. She wouldn’t allow him to hurt us.”

“Your household ran under the ‘CC’ umbrella, better known as the Chaotic Clan. It ‘appens more often than you think, darlin.’”

HP winks an eye while I laugh aloud.

“That’s funny, but alcoholism is a serious thing.”

“Aye, dearie, but I want to lighten things up a bit for ye. Being too serious can keep a lassie from healing and growin.’”

“I have noticed I don’t laugh easily. With you around, maybe there’s hope for joy in my life after all.”

“Aye, things can change for the better, luv. Now, what were ye tellin’ about ye mother?”

“Well, Mom and I were tight. We remained close as I became a teenager.”

“I’ve been watchin’ over ye during ye entire life. Ye had a few laughs along the way with ye mother, eh?”

“Oh yes, we did. And Mom had a beautiful laugh. All three of us kids had our own ways to entertain her. I remember reading to her from an elementary school joke book. I enjoyed planning productions for Mom to watch. Sometimes my brothers and I danced to big band music played from a 33 vinyl on our record player. Other times the three of us did tumbling acts, like forward rolls, backward rolls and cartwheels on an old cotton mattress set

aside for such events. She would stop whatever chores had called her name to spend time with us.”

I shared some of Mom’s favorite phrases: “Life’s not fair,” “Being bored isn’t a bad thing,” “If something seems too good to be true, it probably is” and “Your dad loves you, he just has a hard time saying it.”

“Ye mother had a pure heart and we spent quite a bit of time together during her 77 years on Earth.”

“That warms my heart, HP. I miss Mom.”

“Ye can see her again someday. Hold on to that hope, dear.”

“I enjoy our talks so much. I don’t want to leave but my tummy is telling me it’s time to get to the house and fix supper.”

“Ye are human. Eatin’ is how ye stay healthy. Night-night, Josie.”

\*\*\*\*\*

I had just gotten to the gully when a cacophony of rustling leaves got my attention.

“Woohoo, what a delightful afternoon! I’ve always loved playin’ in the leaves.”

HP is picking up large handfuls of leaves and throwing them overhead, creating a “rain shower” of autumn colors.

“HP, you seem to come out of nowhere!”

“Aye, I’m merely a thought away. Always.”

HP’s feet dance around as he grins playfully, then leaps several feet in the air for a high five with me. Afterward, both of us are laughing as we settle onto the bank to chat.

“Hey HP, you’re a lot of fun. I’ve been thinking how difficult it was to have fun with my father. I guess you know Dad was trouble for me most of my life.”

“Before we discuss difficult times, can ye think of joyful times with ye father?”

The atmosphere becomes uncomfortably quiet as I cross and uncross my legs, stare at my fingernails while pushing back a few cuticles, tighten my lips, relax my lips, and finally let out a big sigh.

“I can. But only recently. After spending the better part of a year in a recovery program, I have learned to accept Dad for who he is, and not expect him to give me something he’s incapable of giving - like emotional support of any kind. But it wasn’t easy to accept at first. I had to sort through my own emotions of anger. And I had to quit blaming my father for how my own life turned out, with two divorces and failed career moves.”

“Let it all out, luv. I’ve got your back.”

After a few seconds to sort my thoughts, I shared.

“Denial has a new definition to me. I used to believe a person had to be aware they were denying a situation. Not necessarily so. I was unconscious of the dynamics of alcoholism in my family life. Several times, after a particularly disturbing interaction with Dad, I tried to label him an alcoholic. He was always able to banter that he could put down the drink any time and for as long as he wanted. His denial of the problem was adopted by me. So, instead, I spent nearly six decades believing my father had a ‘crazy’ problem. My insane father, I used to say.”

“I watched over ye dad as he grew up, the middle child in a family of seven kids. He lived through some tough situations. If not for interventions on my part, he may have had even worse outcomes from the abusive beatings.”

“Oh my, HP, I thought it must have been bad on him as a child. I never knew how bad. He told me when his older brother came

back from the Army, he introduced him to alcohol at age 16. I used to hate alcohol, but I'm learning it's the root of a bigger problem."

I share with HP information I read about how the alcoholic is usually dealing with emotional pain, which the person expresses as anger, blame, chaos and insane choices.

"Josie, ye recall readin' that alcoholism runs in families, eh? It's a hard cycle to break. Ye granddaddy kept whiskey hidden in his shed. Ye dad, a teenager at the time, was his target. I watched the progression of abuse as an inebriated father took out his anger with increasin' vengeance on his son. Keepin' the pattern going, the teenage son began sneakin' his own alcohol to soothe his rejected soul for the moment, but his pain and shame ran deep. His anger grew as his mind waffled between revenge and escape. Not wantin' to get involved in violence, ye dad chose to join the military."

"That's heavy to think about. Dad is a human being with a severe problem.

"Aye."

"After making amends with my father recently, it feels like I've resolved my resentments. I wish he could find peace of mind. I invited Dad to recovery classes for alcoholics several times, but he's not ready for anything like that, he says. I'm learning I can do nothing to alter Dad's decisions or fix his problems. I can be kind to him, but control him? No way. I'm going to give him to you, HP."

After a reflective moment, I thought about perplexing, current issues in my own life.

"You know what, HP? It's nearly impossible for me to stay in the moment. Thinking about the past and worrying about the future are thought processes I dwell on most of the day. Can you help me?"

“Absolutely I can. See how the sun is just about to drop out of sight? Count the moments it takes for it to completely disappear.”

As I begin to count out loud, I observe sky colors on the horizon. Subtle at first, then more brilliantly, the life sustaining yellow ball changes to variations of orange as it descends behind the trees. In less than three minutes, Earth’s energy-giving force had taken a bow and whispered, “Until we meet again.”

“I think I see what just happened. I was tuned in completely to the sun’s exit and my other thoughts got pushed into a file somewhere in my head.”

“Aye, it just takes practice. Ye’re goin’ to do fine. And, don’t forget, there’s always time and place for reflection on the past and makin’ plans for the future.”

“What about meditation? I have a hard time calming my stray thoughts. I try to be still and hear your voice when I’m laying quietly on my yoga mat. I make a goal to keep an imagery of a moon shining on a lake, but I end up thinking on details of an upcoming work project or scenes from a TV show I’ve watched.”

“Ye’ve got this, too, luv. There are as many ways to meditate as there are people I’ve created. And that’s a lot. Visitin’ the forest is a great form of meditation. Don’t make things too hard on ye’self.”

Silence hovers over us again...My mind wanders to my grown children, Anna and Ben. I visit with my daughter often, but things have changed recently in my relationship with my son.

“One more question today, please? How do I let go of my son? I miss him so much, but he seems satisfied living with his daddy, (my ex), and doesn’t really want to see me in person. I’ve cried a lot about it. And I’ve prayed to accept things. It’s hard.”

“Remember what ye’ve learned about being powerless over alcohol? Ye’re also powerless over other people and their choices. I’m watchin’ over Ben. Ye can rest in that thought. Ben enjoys talkin’ to ye on the phone occasionally. Cherish those conversations. He watches the night skies, and pays attention to alignments of planets with the moon. Every time ye do the same, ye are in ‘conversation’ with ye son. As ye watch the same sky, ye are communin’ with him through nature. It’s a powerful, spiritual thing.”

“Wow, a great load of guilt just slipped off my shoulders.”

With a twinkle in his eye, HP stands up, his face just a few feet from my own, as I remain sitting. Placing a hand on my shoulder he chuckles, then laughs out loud, a melodious laughter that makes me join in, even though I haven’t the faintest idea what is funny.

“Josie, ye are my beautiful creation, and I’m right satisfied ye wanted to chill out today. That tickles me...down deep in my soul! Remember, I’m with ye always, all day and all night. But if ye want to see me again, just head to this dry creek, be still, and listen for my footsteps.”

HP wanders off, whistling an upbeat tune.

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Journal entry: Today I’m trying harder to keep myself in the moment, trying “to live with my eyes wide open” because as Christian musician Jeremy Camp’s song says, “I don’t want a miss what You have for me.”

Spending today at the house on the farm was calming. I boiled and peeled eggs, taking time to really concentrate on the task at hand. HP created the chickens who laid these protein snacks. I’m



feeling more grateful today for the little things. After all, tomorrow is Thanksgiving.

\*\*\*\*\*

Journal entry: Glen and I had an early morning Thanksgiving date....in the woods at our dry creek. Clearing forest undergrowth makes me feel like an adventurer.

After attaching a small trailer to the back of the 4-wheeler, Glen placed chainsaw, clippers, gloves and other supplies in the trailer. I packed water and a boiled egg for me. Bundled up in layers, we headed out around 7:30 a.m. to our dream bank.

It was 39 degrees when we started our trek along existing trails to our project area. Glen cut saplings and underbrush to form a new path along the north side of the bank, and I stashed limbs in a pile (for the forest to take back as decomposition). Glen helped me move the larger limbs. Gloves came in extra handy when we ran into wild rose bushes.

Our goal was to clear a path along the creek toward the west, turn northward toward a downed oak, then stop for the day.

During the first hour, it warmed to 47 degrees. Working up a sweat, both Glen and I removed our jackets and kept at it.

We accomplished our goal in two hours. Unbelievable to me. Glen is a work horse. Give him a couple cups of coffee and a bowl of oatmeal and he can move mountains.

There are quite a few months of prep work before a bridge is constructed from two electric poles (which we already have) and lumber-milled planks, which have not yet been purchased.

After today's project, Glen and I headed to the house for hot showers. He was worried about chigger bites. I was concerned with aching muscles.

As part of my new attention to staying in the present, I listen (as a fly on the wall) to our silly bantering.

“It’s going to take me a little longer in here. I’ve got to wash my hair too,” said Glen, talking louder than usual over the sound of running water.

“Ok, no problem, I’m busy stretching my shoulder muscles.”

“I have twigs and leaves in my hair. I probably have spiders and webs, too,” Glen jokes.

“Maybe you have a bird nest and a sparrow in there,” I said, at which point, we both laugh and laugh.

Conversations are what make life go from mundane to memorable.

We later had a Thanksgiving feast with Glen’s parents, Frances and Charles, who live nearby. Frances made chicken and dressing, creamed potatoes, vegetables and pecan pie. I had made deviled eggs and Glen brought tea.

During the meal, conversation went to our land renovation on the parcel of land where Charles was raised. Charles recalls a time when he and his sister had their photograph made by the huge oak on the north hill. They were kids and the tree was gigantic then. He’s 86 now, and estimates the tree to be well over 100 years old. A trail to encircle the memorial “Papa Oak” of the forest is part of our plan. The path will also go by the old well where Glen’s granddaddy drew water, and the block cellar where Glen’s grandmother stored her canned goods.

Later that evening while snuggling in bed, I reflected on the day, feeling loved by family and HP. I look forward to our next forest clean-up, knowing the more time I spend in HP’s world, the closer I’ll feel to the divine nymph.

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Journal entry: Life is filled with ironies. As fate would have it, just on the other side of the land we are clearing, over our large forested hill, is a hangout for bikers and others. It's literally a football field away, however we can't see them. And they can't see us. On weekend afternoons and evenings, Glen and I hear live music from bands set up in front of the place, along with noisy crowds and motorcycle engines.

I'm thinking HP is busy keeping people safe as they leave the bar, pulling out onto the highway between the two properties. People are looking for answers in this world. Some are searching with a drink in their hand across the road while I wait for peace in nature, merely a stone's throw away.

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I wander back to the magical place in the woods this morning. I sit quietly, waiting to see if HP will return. I know he is with me always, but what a delight it will be to commune with him face to face again. I close my eyes and allow my other senses to be more finely tuned. Believing there is something to my left, I open my eyes and look that direction. Nothing. I close my eyes again and breathe deeply. Minutes pass. I sense movement behind me. I turn around and see HP's face peering from behind a small cedar tree.

"G'mornin,' luv. Ye were expecting me today, huh?"

I giggle softly.

"Watcha doin' behind that tree? Playing hide and seek?"

HP raises one eyebrow and ambles my way. Today, he's wearing a white t-shirt featuring a dragon in flight.

"What's on ye mind, luv?"

“Funny thing, you wearing a t-shirt with a dragon, that’s my grandson’s favorite thing right now. I was just thinking about little Timmy. He’s such a precious child, and yet he’s having problems with speech. Of course, all of us have something difficult to deal with on this planet, right?”

“Ye’ve hit the nail on the head, luv. There’s no easy road. These uncomfortable situations allow opportunity for each and every person to turn to me for support and compassion. I’m there, any time, day or night. Don’t forget, I’m there for a 3-year-old too.”

“Timmy was so sweet last week. I hadn’t seen him for nearly a month. When I arrived at the house, I made a run for the bathroom. I closed the door behind me, and barely got seated on the toilet in time. Seconds later, here comes Timmy, opening the door and climbing up to stand on his little stool. He waved his arms and hands in an awkwardly expressive way, leaned forward, and said loudly and clearly with an emphasis on the “h” sound, ‘Hi, (pause), Hi, (pause) Hi.’ It was the first time he had used language with me in such a meaningful way. I said, ‘Well, Hi, yourself, you precious little thing.’ Then he jumped onto my lap and bear hugged me.”

“Josie, my young human friends communicate with me easily and often. They become so filled with divine love it spills out onto others. That’s why a child can touch another person’s heartstring, with or without spoken language.”

A tear of joy runs down my cheek.

“HP, you always know what to say.”

## DECEMBER

Journal entry: When I was asked to speak at a meeting for recovering addicts, I was ecstatic. I prayed for guidance as I quickly pulled together notes on how my life has been changing with HP's guidance, along with my recovery experiences. Knowing this would be my first public speaking in many years, I was a little nervous. Glen attended the event, sitting on the back row at the left. Two ladies from my recovery group sat on the front row at the right. It was comforting to see those friendly faces as I spoke. Butterflies in my stomach went away as soon as I got to the front of the room. As I looked across the audience, about 60 earnest faces looked back at me. I said a quick prayer as words from my mouth spoke to searching souls while I shared my life story as a co-dependent before and after recovery.

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“Top o’ the morning to ye, darlin’!”

“HP, I’m so excited. I wanted to tell you how warm my heart feels after giving my talk last night. I lay awake for a couple hours, thinking about how it helps me heal when I share with others.”

“Aye, as ye’ve been learnin’, alcoholism is a family disease that affects communication and relationships. Ye’re in a healin’ place now.”

“I spent so much of my lifetime, up until now, searching, and I didn’t even know what I was searching for. It seems, looking back, that I was dense. I couldn’t think of any way to do life, except to stay busy. Copying patterns of my childhood, I moved locations often. Extreme moves. Causing extreme stress. Like from Georgia to New York, then west to Wyoming and then back to Georgia.”

“My dear, ye were learnin’ about life and about ye’self. Ye weren’t dense but in denial. Denial actually helps a person stay sane until they are ready to deal with their fears.”

“I feel silly talking to you about this, HP, but I really did look for lovepl,0- in all the wrong places.”

“Think about this. Each relationship had struggles and joys. Ye experienced the miracle of childbirth not once, but two times in ye first marriage.”

“True, I became extremely attached to my children. They were with me through some of my toughest moments. Now I realize I treated my kids similarly to the way Mom treated me. I became co-dependent with Anna and Ben, treating them like miniature adults at times, expecting them to help me with adult decisions. Other times, after working long hours, I ignored their innocent need for comfort by being emotionally unavailable.”

“Aye, the cycle is rarely broken. Ye raised your children as a fractured mother ye’self. Dysfunctional families have the same issues as families with alcoholism.”

“I guess I have a lot to learn about the past, HP, and how it relates to today. There was no alcohol in my first marriage, however there was physical fighting. And that spouse tried his best to control me for five years. I finally left. My second marriage had no alcohol for 20 years, until he and I started having marital problems. When the whiskey monster entered our home, well, everything changed. Things escalated over the next four years. Deja-vu feelings hit as I packed to leave. My head screamed inside that I must be part of the problem. I just couldn’t identify it yet. As a single middle age woman, I found myself attracted to alcoholic relationships. I ‘fell in love’ with two back-to-back

boyfriends, each brazenly active in alcoholism. Living with each of them actually brought me closer to identifying my own problems.”

“Ye had a break-through about five years ago, Josie, when ye recognized ye own responsibilities for ye behaviors. Ye were able to stop lookin’ for love and acceptance as only comin’ from another human being.”

“That’s so true. I can see now how unhealthy it is to expect something from a person who can never deliver. For at least 10 years, I remember looking into people’s eyes everywhere I went, sure there was someone out there in the big wide world to help me. Maybe a friend I hadn’t met yet. On my lunch breaks, I popped into church offices asking to speak with clergy. Pastors were kind and listened to me cry about my confused feelings. I felt hurt and lost, and put the blame on a variety of things - my dead-end job, empty nest, lack of furthering education. I never thought to look back at my childhood for clues at that point.”

“Dearie Dee, Josie Lee, ye were not aware that ye were doin’ life with fears and distorted thinkin.’ I am never early and never late. Ye were right where ye needed to be.”

I choke up, thinking fondly on the times my dad used to make up little rhymes with my name when I was little.

“Just then, the way you talked, HP? It felt like home.”

“Growin’ up wasn’t all bad, was it, luv?”

“No, there are good memories, too. Even though it sounds corny now, Dad used to say ‘Josie Lynn, the big fat hen’ and then he’d laugh and laugh. I’m not sure if he said it to make me laugh, but he sure made himself laugh. Mom said Dad was the only one who laughed at his jokes. Still, that’s who my dad was and is. A jokester a lot of the time.”

“Bein’ an adult got difficult though, didn’t it, Josie?”



“Yes, I slowly started losing control of who I was. It sneaked up on me. It got scariest during the decade of my 40s while I was in my second marriage. I nearly went off the edge during those years. I seemingly couldn’t get involved in enough shocking experiences. I was addicted to excitement, and yet, I got more and more afraid of my own decisions. Who was I? What had I become? What was my stopping point? I didn’t know.”

“Alcoholism is a progressive disease, dear. Ye were at a point where ye were abandonin’ yourself. Even though you were runnin’ away, it didn’t turn out too badly. I was always nearby. A self-abandonment pattern keeps showin’ up until you find a way to heal from your childhood pain. Remember six months ago when you quit your job after 16 years of writin’ for the newspaper?”

“Oh my, HP! That was such an extreme decision for me. I was still looking for peace of mind in outward experiences. Only you had a big surprise lined up for me. I landed an office position at a recovery center for men, and wow, did my head start tripping! Recovering addicts at the center, through no effort on their part, became the catalysts for my own recovery. Clients, young and old, reminded me of my father - the wonderful attributes of his character of being loud and funny (which made me laugh), the more troublesome attributes of manipulation and anger (which made me tremble) and the chaotic self-destructive decisions (which made me cry).”

“Josie, ye whole life’s experiences up to that point had to happen in order for ye to be ready to hear ye personal recovery invitation. I’m so glad ye said ‘Yes.’ The recovery journey doesn’t end as long as ye live on earth. The grand thing is, ye and I will have many intimate hours of discovery together... welcome to recovery discoveries.”

“I love that, HP. I had a wild revelation at the recovery center. Stunning really. While at my new office, I read a book on recovery for alcoholics. I thought I was simply reading to find out more about people with addictions, but I found myself reading about ‘my family life and myself.’ The veil was lifting. Addictive issues and dynamics in my home had set me up to deal with life in a specific way. Whether alcohol (the drink) was present often or seldom in my childhood home, the emotional separation from my addictive parent had caused a lifetime of pain and consequences.”

“Ye had expected emotional support from someone who was unable to provide it. Pain of this sort is difficult to talk about. It’s much easier to distract ye’self with any number of activities or hobbies. ‘Tis ye time to heal, girl.”

“That warms my heart, HP. I’m thankful I had previously typed calendar information for the newspaper, and knew where and when recovery groups met. A strong pull in my heart said, ‘Go.’”

“That would’ve been my tug, Josie Lee.”

“It was powerful. From my first recovery meeting I felt like I had found home. I had an immediate connection with the others. They understood me. We had a common thread - dealing with alcoholism. They had books available on the subject of recovery; I got every book they had. Words in the books felt like real conversations with people, my tribe of people who understood me and my struggles. I attended on Wednesdays for six weeks, then found a sponsor to learn more.”

“Everyone is unique, luv. For some, workin’ the steps of recovery clears up the muddy waters of their thinkin.’ Remember, recovery groups have been around for decades, but I’ve been here forever. Leanin’ on a Higher Power is always available.”

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It's a little colder than it has been lately out here in the woods, but I want to see HP this morning. Wearing coat, gloves and hat, I stand on the edge of the bank thinking how precious HP is to me now.

"Deep in thought, are ye, luv?"

"Oh, HP, there you are! I could just pick you up and hug you. I'm so glad to see you."

"Oh dear, heh, heh, I'm a little heavier than ye realize. I tell ye what, since the ground is cold and damp, let's climb this silver maple tree and hang out for a bit."

About two feet up, the silver maple splits into three parts, with thick, horizontal branches going out on two sides. HP and I sit near one another on one of the huge branches.

"Darlin,' are ye worrying about ye health today?"

"Yes, my blood pressure has been running very low. It makes me feel weak and old. And my resting heart rate is too fast, over 100 beats per minute."

HP places his small hand on top of mine.

"Trust me. The doctor visit with the cardiologist next week will bring solutions. Rest easy in ye soul, luv."

Energy runs through his hand and rapidly encircles my body. I smile.

"Okay. I'll put my worries in a 'box' and forget about them. HP, it's definitely easier to trust you since we are building this bond together."

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Journal entry: Dr. Kiawa wants to do a series of tests in order to get more information before he makes a diagnosis on my heart. I'm good with that. Glen and I are reminded that Kiawa sounds like

chihuahua. Dr. Chihuahua. I like the similar sounds. And I like Dr. Kiawa. A heart monitor is placed on my chest for the next two weeks. It will record all my blood pressures and pulse rates during that time. All this medical attention is new and a little uncomfortable. But I want to feel better.

Within the next month I will be getting a stress test and an ultrasound of my heart at the hospital. Best news so far, medication has been prescribed to increase my blood pressure.

I am learning through recovery books that feelings of repressed anger and fear of abandonment from my childhood can plant themselves in my tissues and create illness. Since I have recently been letting go and letting God take care of my life, I'm feeling slightly optimistic about my health. Still, I'm nervous about having heart problems, like perhaps my years are numbered.

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Journal entry: What a heart-warming Christmas Eve with young Timmy and family. I have been on the new blood pressure medicine long enough that I feel more energized than I have in months. All my playtime with Timmy felt magical, accompanied with his smiles and giggles. It was the best Christmas gift ever.

Timmy doesn't talk much, but he can organize his own Grandma experiences. He grabs my hand and his mother's hand, then sticks one of his feet up in the air. He wants each of us to grab a foot and swing him back and forth, up and down. Which we did, over and over, much to his delight.

Anna is the "chef-quality" cook at her home and on this Christmas Eve, she was baking lemon sugar cookies. She has a mixer that makes the process look easy, but it's her knowledge of baking that makes her a master baker.

Over the years, of all the people in my life I have obsessed and worried over, Anna has torn at my heart the deepest. Throughout her life, I have seen her in pain and felt her tears as she dealt with life's hardships. Before I understood what it meant to be a controlling individual, I would pray late into the night, demanding the deities to fix my daughter's problems. I'm thankful now for my new understanding of the serenity prayer and recovery slogans.

By asking for "serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference," I am also allowing a Higher Power to take care of my daughter. That allows time to concentrate on my own life, which includes making decisions to take "better care of me."

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Journal entry: All my life, I've heard the phrase, "Easy as falling off a log." Today, I lived it.

Once you pass the pivotal point of balance, you're going over the edge, with the ground as your only stopping point.

The log in this story was a 90 ft. pine near Firebreak Trail that Glen cut with a chainsaw about a month ago. Near one end, the fallen tree, which has lost all its bark, spans a low place in the land, creating a natural bridge. Glen and I have walked the log several times. Even Champ, our dog, has followed us down the length of the fallen log.

Today, we had visitors from out of state - Glen's niece and her family, including her three children. The baby daughter was in the arms of her daddy. The two sons agreed to walk the log with me. As I excitedly jumped onto the log ahead of them, Boyd, 5, changed his mind. But Andy, 3, was enthusiastic and climbed up with me.

Due to some confusion about whether we should go ahead and walk the log or wait for his mother who was a few yards back, I grabbed the toddler's hand. As the adult in the situation, I made a quick decision that we should wait until his mother got beside the log. Andy didn't want to. Suddenly Andy and I began a tug of war as he pulled to get free of my grasp.

During the tussle, we both slipped off the log...hand in hand. Because of the depression in the earth, the ground was about 3 feet down. Branches from a bush growing nearby scratched at my face during the fall. I landed awkwardly, which left me with pain in one ankle. Andy was fine, but his feelings were hurt, and he cried and cried. (No one actually walked the log after all.)

How did I think walking a log with a 3-year-old I barely knew was a good idea? I'm thankful he wasn't injured. At my age, I could have broken almost any body part. I am choosing to not beat myself up about my lapse in judgment. That won't help anything. I said a prayer of thanksgiving to HP this afternoon. I'm human, I err. All I can do is embrace my humanness and praise HP for softening the blow a bit for me and Andy.

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I breathe in deeply. I wonder if this will be a peaceful hike to reset my emotional, spiritual and physical being, or will an adventure ensue, created by wildlife interaction or wild weather interruption.

In the past I've startled animals in the wild: fearful deer who thunder and crash away, skunk harmless as a kitten, armadillo doing its best to ignore me as it digs for grubs, and a number of non-poisonous snakes slithering off to rediscover their invisibility cloaks. Vultures, the quiet, Type A employees, are sometimes

clocked in, doing their clean up jobs. Woodpeckers, cardinals, sparrows, wrens, crows and jays keep the most interesting conversations in the treetops, each speaking their own language.

HP seems to show up out of nowhere.

“How’s ye hike, luv? Have ye seen anythin’ wild and woolly or feathery and free today?”

“Well, good morning, HP! I did catch a glimpse of two furry rabbits kicking up their heels a couple minutes ago. I love trying to imagine what they think of us humans.”

“Animals are curious, they wanna see what ye are doin’. All creatures of earth would be quite friendly if not for distrust, a current side-effect of bein’ an inhabitant on Earth.”

“Yeah, there are negative things about living here. I was thinking about some of those heavier topics today.”

“What’s ye worry, lassie?”

“It’s the hospital bill and my lack of health insurance. It really triggers my fear of running out of money. I have been blessed with savings, but because my part-time income is so small right now, I don’t want to spend anything extra. I don’t trust what will happen in the future. It’s scary.”

“Can I jog ye memory to a few years ago when ye came into a large sum of money unexpectedly?”

“Oh, my, that’s right! That life insurance money blew my mind, HP. I never expected it. I want to thank you for my 15-year connection with my young friend Larry, through whom I am able to pay this bill in full today. And thank you for reminding me that it’s through you that I’m taken care of every day of my life.”

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Journal entry: Larry was like a son to me. I met him when he was attending high school with my own two kids, he was one year younger than Ben. Larry was adrift in the sea of life, with no father and an absent mother. Raised in foster care, Larry was eager to attach to a parental figure. I became that person.

As he grew up and attended university, we talked on the phone regularly. Larry became a new family member. I was there for his college graduation. He came to our home for holidays. He got employment with the state, and pushed on to earn a master's degree.

From his early 20s, Larry wanted to have his house in order, as the saying goes. He bought a small home in a nice neighborhood in a big city, and set up his will and life insurance policies. He prearranged that, at his death, his remains would go for medical research. I was his contact person for everything, and his beneficiary.

I remember telling him I was honored to be his beneficiary, but I truly believed that by the time he died, I'd be long gone myself. By the normal order of events, Larry should have outlived me.

Three years ago, when Larry died suddenly, at 31, of cardiac arrest, I was shocked to my core. The following year was one of the hardest I've ever gone through. I went through a private investigator to locate Larry's biological mother and then made the call to let her know about her son's death. I went through the court system to close out Larry's estate, which included sorting his personal effects and selling his house. According to Larry's will, the \$20,000 proceeds from the sale of the house went to his alma mater for student scholarships. Larry had a big heart.

I miss our phone calls. I am so grateful for the times we had together.

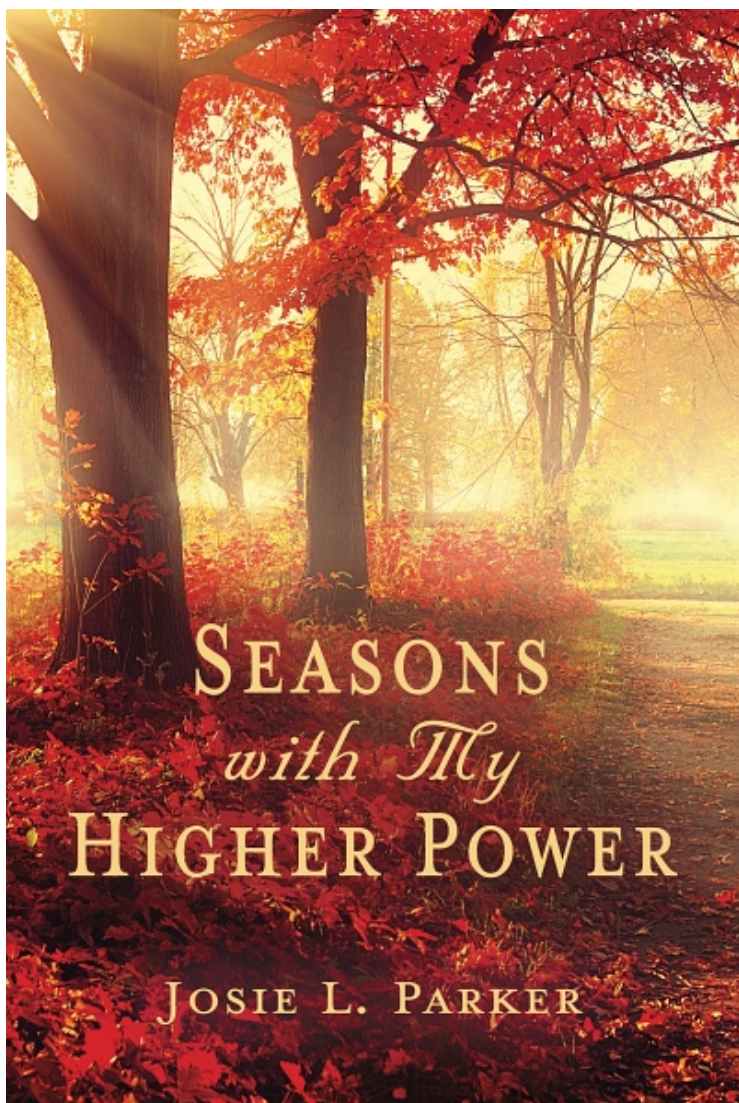
*Seasons with My Higher Power*

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Journal entry: Rain all night. Several inches of winter rain. Awoke to 68 degrees, a clearing sky, and our lake spilling over into the woods, creating rivulets of water going down the sloped acreage. As the sun's rays barely peeked over the eastern sky, I rushed through breakfast, got dressed and found myself on a 4-wheeler with Glen, traveling to the seasonal creek area to see the anticipated rushing water.

It was all I had hoped it would be. The collective rain traveled in a ravine about six feet below the main forest, creating a creek that tucked its whitewater head under a moss-covered tree root and continuing on its journey under the highway, to a bigger creek, east of our property.

Sounds of gurgling water bring peace to my soul. As Glen and I bask in the beauty of the area, the sun rises high enough to allow sunbeams into the gully. Such a peaceful place. Set apart as a gathering area, and, on special occasions, as a zone for conversations of a Higher Calling.



*"Seasons with My Higher Power" shares answers for Josie L. Parker's questions, in areas of relationship failures and discontent with life when her Higher Power reveals himself as a small man, HP, who teaches her about self-love.*

## **Seasons with My Higher Power**

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