

Extraordinary Heroines of the Faith—They're Not Always Who You Think

There are heroines of the faith listed in the Bible. You know their names and their stories ... women like Sarah, Esther, Hannah, Elizabeth and Mary.

There are heroines of the faith who have changed the course of history for the cause of Christ. You might know the names of Betty Stam, Mother Theresa, Ruth Bell Graham, Darlene Rose and Kathryn Kuhlman.

But there are grand heroines of the faith who live in obscurity and yet whose lives have been significant and impactful. These are the ordinary women who have chosen to live in an extraordinary way.

I'd like to tell you one of these quiet stories today. It is the true story of one of my dear college friends, Paula Thomas Lee.

Paula Thomas lived across the hall from me during my freshman year in college. We both hailed from the Northeast, and attending a Midwestern Christian university was culture shock for both of us.

Paula had lived under an older sister's imposing shadow. Paula's sister was a gorgeous and talented beauty queen, but I never detected any resentment in Paula's heart toward her sister, only genuine love and respect.

Paula's roommate, Trudy, was the most fabulous girl on our floor. When Trudy made the cheerleading squad, although Paula and I did not, Trudy was gracious beyond measure. Trudy met her future husband the first day her foot stepped on campus in

the registration lines. Neither Paula nor I had a date our entire freshman year.

Paula loved Trudy dearly and delighted in every one of her victories. Paula was a one-in-a-million kind of girl.

Paula was an avid runner, and I hated every single minute I spent on the university's track trying to earn the dreaded aerobic points. At the end of our freshman year, we were required to run 1.3 miles in under 12 minutes. Paula finished well ahead of me and actually lapped me a couple of times on the indoor track. However, when she crossed the finish line for her final lap, she didn't even pause for water but looped around to find me. Paula joined me at my much slower pace, quoting Bible verses and encouraging me to run harder.

The next year, our sophomore year, Paula developed a precious ministry on our floor. She poured herself into praying for the girls on our floor and encouraging each one through simple acts of kindness and affirmation. We often found little notes or Scripture verses tucked under our pillows at night. When someone had a bad day, it was to Paula they ran for prayer. When any of our girls suffered broken hearts, it was Paula who met them for breakfast and spent time with them. When the stress of college life became too great, it was Paula who would gather the troops, pop the popcorn and mother us all back into stability and joy.

As the years passed, I lost track of Paula, as college friends often do, but I knew she had a son and a daughter and had stayed in the Midwest while I moved around the country with my pastor husband and growing clan of five children.

I reconnected with Paula a few years ago, and we so enjoyed our minutes talking and laughing together while at our university for Homecoming. However, I could tell that there was something different about my friend, Paula, during this conversation.

As we stood outside our beloved chapel that September morning, I asked her how her husband, Gary, was doing. She responded by saying he was having a very difficult time dealing with grief. I looked at her blankly, apologized, and then asked, "Did someone die?"

"You didn't know, Carol? Our son drowned this summer."

Paula then recounted to me the horror of receiving the phone call that her 23-year-old son had drowned while boating with friends.

Although she had tears in her eyes, they didn't run down her cheeks because the sparkle of joy held the tears within the boundaries of her eyes. These were the words of a mother processing the grief of losing her only son,

"Carol, I know that my son is with Jesus. Although I would never have chosen this reality, I have peace because I have God. I struggle with happiness but I am filled with joy. God has been faithful to comfort my broken heart and to give me the peace that passes understanding."

Paula, while working full time in the world of finance, recently earned a master's degree in family counseling. She has felt the tug on her heart to help other families who are experiencing the pain she and her family walked through due to her beloved son's death. Paula knows, that because she has experienced the comfort of God, it is now her call and destiny to comfort others with that same comfort. Paula is determined not to waste her pain but to honor God and her son with the abundance of living a life brimming over with comfort, strength and peace.

You have never met my friend, Paula, but I know that you, too, have resilient and powerful heroines of the faith in your life. I hope that today, you will pray for them and salute them as they serve Jesus through the ordinary days of their extraordinary lives. {eo}

Carol McLeod is an author and popular speaker at women's conferences and retreats, where she teaches the Word of God with great joy and enthusiasm. Carol encourages and empowers women with passionate and practical biblical messages mixed with her own special brand of hope and humor. She has written five books, including *No More Ordinary*, *Holy Estrogen!*, *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart* and *Defiant Joy!* Her most recent book, *Refined: Finding Joy in the Midst of the Fire*, was released last August. Her teaching DVD, *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart*, won the Telly Award, a prestigious industry award for excellence in religious programming. You can also listen to Carol's "Jolt of Joy" program daily on the Charisma Podcast Network. Connect with Carol or inquire about her speaking to your group at .