

Walking In The Light

JENNIFER ROTHSCILD'S LIFE BEARS WITNESS TO GOD'S DESIRE FOR EVERY WOMAN TO BE AN OVERCOMER.

From the outside, the Rothschild residence seems to be the quintessential middle-class home nestled beneath the shade trees of a typical Midwestern suburb. The freshly cut lawn gently slopes down to the curb on which a bicycle casually rests.

Parked in the driveway is the all-American family-sized utility vehicle awaiting the next trek to the nearby high school soccer field or the local farmers market. Little would anyone imagine that within the traditional brick walls of this home (in the basement study, to be exact) lies the control center for the ministries of Christian author, singer, songwriter and inspirational speaker Jennifer Rothschild.

"As a wife and mother of two, having a home-based ministry is a real blessing," Jennifer recently told SpiritLed Woman. "I can do a radio interview in my sweats while finishing a third load of laundry. It's become rather ordinary; it really has."

Actually, it's extraordinary, considering the fact that Jennifer is blind. As a teenager, she was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, an eye disease that caused her to slowly lose her vision.

However, Jennifer does not consider her blindness to be a handicap or a reason for self-pity. She sees it, rather, as a life situation presenting a series of challenges for her to overcome by relying on God's help. As she states in her book *Lessons I Learned in the Dark: Steps to Walking by Faith, Not by Sight* (Multnomah Publishers), "At times, life is dark for all of us, but you can walk forward by faith into His marvelous light."

Whether it be traveling on weekends to speaking engagements and concerts, learning to ride a tandem bicycle, or even bungee jumping, Jennifer practices the advice she gives to her audiences and readers: Set your sight on the potential not the problem. For example, Jennifer is learning how to use a computer to complete her writing assignments.

“I decided that since I just turned 40, it was high time for me to become computer savvy, and there was no way blindness was going to keep me from being proficient.”

She usually writes everything by hand and has an assistant meet with her once or twice a week to transcribe the handwriting and enter it into a computer. “Even though we have a great working relationship, I’m looking forward to having more freedom. It’s a big mountain to climb, but I’m about to be so liberated, I can’t wait!”

SPIRITUAL ROOTS The spiritual stability that anchors Jennifer’s confidence was nurtured at an early age. Her father, Lawson Jolly, was a Southern Baptist pastor.

“After coming to Christ at the age of 9, I would get up early every Saturday morning, go out with my dad on the church bus, and knock on doors throughout the city,” she said. “We’d tell people about Jesus and invite them to church.

“And we did this every week well into my teenage years. God really used these weekly outings to help mold me and shape my image of what ministry was all about.

“Even though most people have never heard of my dad, he is one of the godliest men I have ever known. And it’s through his and my mom’s ministry and their walk with the Lord that I developed my love for Christ and the Word.”

Along with her parents, Jennifer’s circle of Christian friends became the support group she needed during those first years of her illness. “Thankfully, none of the relationships with

these friends changed or suffered during the tender years when I initially lost my sight. Life went on, from playing with Barbie dolls in the sixth and seventh grades to experimenting with makeup and nail polish in high school.

“There seems to be a resilience of youth and a grace that good friends, especially Christian friends, share at that age. One of my best high school friends, Stacy, was probably most steadfast in her faith, which was seemingly very logical to her. I probably couldn’t have articulated that at the time, but now I look back and realize her kind of faith had an impact on me.”

While in college, Jennifer developed a friendship with a fellow student that evolved into a four-year courtship and then marriage. Her husband, Philip, who is a professor of entertainment management at Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri, was drawn not only to Jennifer’s physical beauty but to her spiritual maturity as well.

Willing to take on the added responsibilities that fall upon the spouse of one who is visually impaired, Philip has been the ultimate helpmate for more than 18 years. Whether helping Jennifer select a new dress or applying her nail polish and checking her makeup, Philip sees these acts as “wonderful opportunities for intimacy.”

Philip’s dedication to placing Jennifer’s needs above his own is observed daily by the couple’s two young sons, 15-year-old Clayton and 6-year-old Connor. “Both are following in their dad’s footsteps,” Jennifer noted, “and developing the very relationship skills and habits that I find in Philip.”

Needless to say, the Rothschilds are a very close-knit family. Jennifer cooks at least three nights a week. “Tuesday night, of course, the kids look forward to eating at a local Italian restaurant for a dollar. Every Thursday night the boys have

‘wrestle night.’

“Clayton is growing out of the wrestling phase and becoming more of a referee. On those Friday nights when I’m in town, we have a family night: order pizza, rent a movie, pop popcorn. And on the weekend we love to stroll through the nearby nature center, catch a dollar movie, or just stay at home and enjoy our neighbors.”

Jennifer strives to make sure that the time she spends at home with her family is not affected by the fact that her ministry is based at home. “I usually have an administrative assistant who works 30 hours a week in our basement office. So we have a rule that when the assistant is working in the office and needs to see me, she should call me on the phone, rather than come up from the office and, for example, bring e-mails to my bedroom.”

Lately these e-mails have included countless invitations for Jennifer to speak at events such as upcoming 2005 Women of Faith national conferences. She recently teamed up with Beth Moore and Mary Kassian to lead LifeWay’s national women’s conferences.

Jennifer’s distinctive communication style has also resulted in invitations from national and state professional organizations, and international ministries such as Focus on the Family, MOPS (Mothers of Pre-Schoolers) International, and some of the largest churches in America. She has made numerous singing appearances with Grammy Award-winner Larnelle Harris and shared the platform with fellow authors Kay Arthur, Zig Ziglar, Beth Moore and Nancy Leigh DeMoss.

Jennifer’s life story and message has been the cover story of numerous national magazines such as Virtue, Becoming Family and HomeLife. She’s been interviewed on many national TV and radio programs, including Hour of Power, Life Today, Family Life Today and CBN’s Living the Life.

CONNECTING WOMEN IN MINISTRY During her travels, Jennifer sensed the need to network the thousands of fellow women in ministry she had met, and subsequently co-founded the online interactive resource ().

“I want women’s ministry leaders to have a way to exchange ministry ideas, resources and other information worldwide. She may be a paid church staff member, a volunteer minister or a home-based Bible study leader.

“But gives her the opportunity to explore things that have been tried and tested in similar ministry situations. She may have a true-life illustration but hasn’t found an outlet. Or she may have a unique ability to organize and plan but hasn’t had a chance to share her tips.

“The Web site is a great way for a woman in ministry to publish her ideas, get exposure and let others know about her own women’s ministry events. And I think that the greatest strength of is that women truly do exchange their ideas and resources, making them far more practical than theoretical.”

Online features include such submissions from subscribers as Top 10 lists, retreat theme ideas, photos of decoration ideas, new choruses with tips for leading worship, and “wake-em-up tricks, icebreakers and other fun stuff for livening up presentations and gatherings.”

An interactive events calendar allows subscribers to publicize upcoming women’s ministry activities. And a search feature allows the user to find a speaker or program guest based on such criteria as specialized ministry, location, availability and honorarium fees/love offering.

There are more than 17,000 subscribers to the online magazine and free e-newsletter. “And they’re very active, very responsive whenever we ask for feedback. Judging from the resources they submit, we know that they’re really involved in their ministries and communities.”

Jennifer is excited about the March 2005 release of her newest Bible study, Fingerprints of God. She just returned from Hawaii, where much of the footage for the video portion of the study was filmed.

With such an intense schedule Jennifer is looking forward to some down time. "I'm going to take a few months off just to ponder, pray and see what's next. I think I have a book brewing in the back of my mind.

"The book will deal with the struggle of why things don't turn out as we hope. So many of us feel like we counted on God for something and from our perspective, come to the wrong conclusion that He's failed us."

She is aware of the many struggles of women and the need for encouragement and support. "Lately I've been in a season that has required a lot of perseverance," she says. "And one of my favorite verses, Hebrews 10:39, stays on my mind: 'But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.'"

Jennifer has learned how to draw on the Lord's strength in order to overcome life's challenges. Helping other women connect with God and one another is at the heart of everything she does.

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