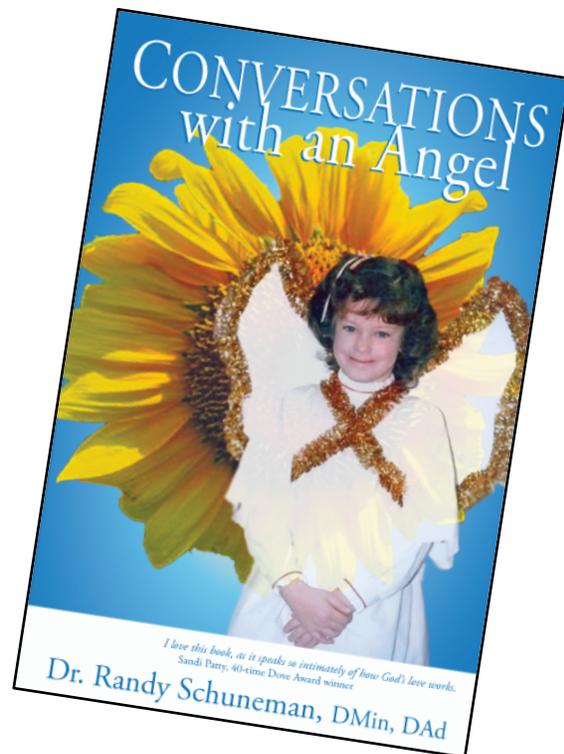


TWELVE

a *Conversations with an Angel* “web extra”

by Randy Schuneman

I have this theory about heaven. I would suggest to you all people in heaven will be twelve-years-old. I cannot prove that statement, but it only makes sense to me. At 12, boys are still “yucky” and girls have “koodies.” The question of marriage in heaven dissolves away. We will all just be friends. There will be no jealousy. Your first husband and your second husband will be great buddies. That guy you dated in high school will not cause your husband’s blood pressure to sky-rocket. Everyone will be as innocent as doves. Relationships that we had on earth will be replaced with a great sense of “oneness with God.” We will live in harmony like we did in sixth grade. None of the issues we have as teenagers and adults will come into play.



This is an extra chapter post-scripted to *Conversations with an Angel*, provided courtesy of Sonpowered Press. Please visit www.JennieShoe.com for more information.

Likewise, I would suggest that everyone who does not make it to heaven will be 13. I base this on the fact that when a child reaches 13, all “h-e-double-tooth-picks” breaks loose. A junior high girl will tear the eyes out of any girl who tries to flirt with the boy she likes. They will divide into groups that year, the “in” group (mostly cheerleaders) and the “out” group (usually based on good grades or braces). If you make one 13-year-old girl mad, sides will be chosen, because now there can only be one “best friend.” Gossip is a way of life. It is always, “Did you hear that Johnny likes Bridgette? I even heard they kissed!”

At 13, boys become “territorial.” They try to establish a “pecking order.” The junior high quarterback begins his career as the “coolest guy on campus.” Nicknames like “Buddy” or “Bobby” are replaced with names like, “Shorty” or “Fat Boy” or “Four Eyes.” (Wait just a moment while I regain my composure. I am reliving 7th grade!). Boys divide into categories like “jocks” and “nerds” and “band members.” A fight can break out between two 13-year-old boys without there being any reason at all. I was once backed against a locker by a boy who thought I had waved at him the wrong way.

Needless to say, the transition from 12 to 13 is a very hard one. Boy’s voices begin to change. It is hard to impress a girl when you sound like Alfalfa from *the Little Rascals*. Your body begins to change. Girls begin to have “curves.” Boys begin to grow taller and have a unique “stink”

about them, because they sweat while standing still. Hormones begin a rampant assault on everything from the way you look to the way you act to the acceptance or rejection you face as a person. Pimples will also be a dividing line.

At the school I attended, the change of location was from the south side of the principal's office to the north side. However, there was a world of change in those two locations. At best, entering your teen years is difficult. Imagine if your body could not change on its own. What if you had to have medicine to enable you to experience puberty at all? What if you did not understand why your friends were all giggling every time a boy walked by? What if you did not *feel* what they felt?

One of my favorite pictures of Jennie was taken on the deck of the parsonage on Cambrian Drive in Flint, Michigan. She is 12. Jennie is thin with the "metal" smile of newly applied braces. She is wearing a darling dress and has a bow in her hair. She is wearing those enormous glasses that little girls wear before they get contacts. Her fluffy bangs cover the scars on her forehead. You can barely see the scar on her right cheek. She is holding Pudgy the Cat. She is so happy!

Unfortunately, in many ways Jennie stayed 12 for the remainder of her life. Please understand that when my daughter when off to college and then into the medical field, she did amazing things I could never think of doing. She worked with a cadaver for one of her classes. She could look at

that dead body and wonder what kind of life the woman had experienced. She dissected frogs, inserted chemo needles into the arms of small children without causing pain and stood by the bedside of a dying child on numerous occasions. She “wrestled” with old men who needed a PICC line inserted into their arms. No matter how much trouble they gave her, Jennie would eventually come out the “winner.”

When she came home, however, she turned into a 12-year-old again. I fondly remember seeing her sitting in a recliner in her twenties with a coloring book in one hand and a brand new set of Crayons in the other. She would sit there by the hour. She loved it more when a child would join her either at the hospital, at home or at the church. Every year, we would buy Jennie that year’s Crayola Crayon’ tin. Even though she knew it was coming, she giggled with glee when she opened it at Christmas.

From a father’s perspective, having your daughter stay at age 12 was not bad at all. My “little girl” is safe and protected from those “predators” of boys who might take her away from me. I never had to worry (with both of my kids) about breaking curfews or a young man’s unholy intentions. Jennie was always safe under my care. I did not have to do any background checks on boys who knocked at our door with flowers and an overdose of some cheap cologne. No young man ever called me “Mr.

Schuneman.” There was a positive side to having Jennie “frozen in time” at 12.

However, there was a true “dark side” to being 12 all your life. I remember Jennie coming home from a district camp meeting she had attended with her girlfriends. She said, “Daddy, why do my friends all giggle when boys go by? They talked about going out in the dark and kissing boys. I don’t understand.”

Because Jennie’s right ovary was removed when she was four and the other ovary was severely radiated, Jennie had to take hormone shots to go chemically through puberty. Although her body did change, she did not have the automatic “roller coaster ride” of emotions that comes with “turning of age.”

There was a sense in which Jennie “fell behind” from a large group of friends she had at school and church. Fortunately, Jennie was never without a friend, but things were different for her in junior high. As naturally happens, old friends found new “best friends.” Boyfriends started to appear for some. A few may have even fallen into the “in crowd.” Jennie was never without a BFF, but the dynamic changed greatly.

Junior High was a pretty lonely time in Jennie’s life. She made the softball team her seventh grade year. She was a fairly decent hitter and did not “throw like a girl.” But the damage done to her heart by the

Adriamycin made it difficult to run without getting out of breath. She “hung up her cleats” after one season.

Jennie loved to sing, but there were other students that the teacher looked to for leadership. She began to doubt her abilities. Jennie was always an excellent student, but good grades alone are not a good social asset. She found some confidence in high school when she was chosen as a Chorale member. Probably her greatest thrill from Chorale was the day she found out that Robbie had been accepted her senior year. She was overjoyed that Robbie had made the choir, especially since she got to give him her robe (it was a little short on him to say the least).

Jennie was blessed to be a part of a very large teen group. Steve Close, her youth pastor, had done an amazing job of helping the teen group to grow to over 70 teens. Jennie enjoyed going with the teens to retreats and outings. When Jennie got into high school, in addition to her friends, she got adopted by a couple of Senior girls. It also helped that Jennie became good friends with the new children’s pastor, Beth Bidle.

Throughout her college days and her professional life, Jennie never lost that “I’m 12!” innocence. When Phillips, Craig and Dean came to our church for a concert in 1999, Dan Dean asked if Jennie was 12. She was 21 at the time. Dan even signed her CD, “To the 12-year-old.” And Dan was right: Jennie is always 12, because everyone in heaven is 12, right?”