

# A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE AND FORTUNATE EVENTS

## A PERSONAL YEAR IN REVIEW

By **Linda Atchison**

**L**emony Snicket's *Series of Unfortunate Events* by Daniel Handler was my oldest son's first favorite book series in elementary school. As I pondered over 2019, I remembered this story about three orphans and their "unfortunate events." They were fearful of almost everything that came their way in light of their parent's sizeable inheritance. The more I thought about it, 2019 was a series of both fortunate and unfortunate events for me as well. In similar fashion to the orphans, events would happen that I would find totally overwhelming at the time, and yet, clearly providentially scheduled. Through it all, I would come to understand the Holy Spirit on an entirely new level.

The year began with fortunate event number one and with the happy announcement of the engagement of my youngest son, Chris! The wedding date was only six months away. Chris' fiancée, Debbie, is from Germany, so what I'd imagined as my role as Mother of the Groom quickly doubled as I filled in for Debbie's mother. Early in the planning we found out that six of Debbie's family members would be staying in our home the week before the wedding as was their custom in Germany. I knew I would need to be an integral part of the planning, but

I lacked the finesse of an experienced diplomat. A week with strangers who were about to become family would definitely be a memorable experience.

My husband Paul and I are empty nesters, and we had finally mastered a successful "team concept" to life, which was painfully molded by 32 years of compromise and mediation. This area would prove to be the backbone of how the Holy Spirit would manifest His work in the both of us!

As we began to plan and prepare our home for the wedding visitors and also for the event, I felt completely overwhelmed both by the wedding planning and also for the required hospitality needed of our home. Paul and I would work together in ways we never had before, because we knew we were completely dependent on God. He is good for what He promises. Throughout the wedding process, God never failed to give the peace that helped produce patience, kindness, and organization, in a totally new way.

Fortunate event number two was when we rescued our dog, Bruno, in March. We knew this was the right thing to do in the circumstances, but it added to the already full balancing act that we were attempting. And summer was coming!



I have always been extremely committed to serving during KidLife Week and also for Hispanic VBS, so I felt strongly that I should not delete these very important events to make room in my schedule, even though the “destination” wedding (Columbiana, Alabama 4-H Center) was on August 24 and not far away. God, again, as usual, gave me the time to prepare my Bible lessons and also joy in teaching them whenever I asked Him for it. This brought on a new revelation for me. I learned to be open to using time in the way God prompted instead of my self-willed, iron-clad daily to-do list. How much easier God made it when I was pliable to His direction!

As the calendar pulled us closer to the wedding day, there were many unknown things yet to come. Unfortunately, my 89 year-old mother, Pat Brown, had been in declining health since January. She was living independently in Guntersville (where my only sister lives as well). Decisions concerning her care and daily living arrangements required me to be there much more frequently than I had been before. Paul and I also sensed that we needed to spend as much time with her as we possibly could.

As we experienced the tsunami of life responsibilities, I intentionally sought God daily. I wish I had been so faithful in the first 46 years of my Christian life. Keeping my eyes focused on Him made all the difference. The peace and freedom was pervasive and allowed me to enjoy the abundant blessings around me. Only God could help me know the most important things to deal with and where best I could serve.

Our wedding event details (including our house guests) went off without a hitch. Well, maybe with a few hitches, but those were fixed by a great wedding planner. And now I was expecting to be relieved from all of the pressures from the past few months, but that wasn't meant to be.

On Sunday, September 15, we awoke to the sound of burst pipes in an upstairs bathroom. Fortunately, we were able to cut the water off in time to limit the damage to the den ceiling. However, just over a week later, my Mom died on September 21, and we buried her on September 27.

The emotional landscape of planning a funeral and burying your last remaining parent is uncharted territory and requires a special type of coping. As always, my Life Group was a great support to me. I had committed my home as the location for a large wedding tea for a dear friend and her precious daughter on September 29. Again, God showed Himself faithful through the many hostesses doing their parts, in their giftedness, which made the celebration a success.

One last thing I'll share is so ironic. A sweet friend of mine had family obligations that conflicted with a Bible study she was scheduled to lead. She asked if I would be willing to substitute for her for those six weeks. Guess what the study was about? The Holy Spirit! Since I had just lived a “life class” on being solely dependent on Him, I felt that God had equipped me to lead the study with a fresh understanding of His role in our lives.

Please understand that my life is not “perfect” now, and that I'm not always totally obedient to the Holy Spirit's instruction. The truth is I'm still far from that. The one thing that I do know is that this last year has taught me that God's way is always the best way. I learned that it pleases God for me to lean on Him in all areas of my life. God will sort out what is important from the *ever-so-loudly-shouting* unimportant. Not every decision I made last year was the right one, but I had the confidence that my God was bigger than my circumstances. God did not abandon me when I did make a detour! God's grace abounded. He also gave me great enjoyment in the process, be it happy or sad.

Looking ahead to this new year, I challenge all of us to make leaning into God through the Holy Spirit a daily event. And by doing so, let's see what He teaches us. May we all be able to say that any unfortunate events we encounter were more than what they seemed. †



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