

By Christina Quick

# Drunk at the wheel

Rosena Willard (left), Josh Bryant, Rachel Finch

## Lives collide in a story of healing and forgiveness

Rachel Finch scanned the familiar winding road as she drove toward her Cape Girardeau, Mo., home on July 20, 2004. The college English professor had spent the morning a few miles away visiting her brother and sister-in-law and their new baby.

Riding with Finch in her Chevy Tracker were her sister, Becky Green, who was visiting from out of state, and her 68-year-old mother, Rosena Willard. It was a hot day, and the women were looking forward to retreating indoors for lunch.

Just as they were topping the hill near Finch's house, a pickup truck traveling in the opposite direction crossed the centerline and plowed into their SUV. The impact of the head-on collision sent Finch's vehicle skidding across the pavement, spinning violently.

Finch was knocked unconscious and pinned inside the vehicle. Flying glass shredded the skin on her arms and legs. Willard suffered a broken shoulder blade and two broken ribs, and Green's eye was injured by debris.

When Finch regained consciousness, she was lying on an ambulance gurney. Green stood nearby with a worried expression.

"What happened?" asked Finch, who had no recollection of the crash. "Was the accident my fault?"

"No," her sister assured her. "We were hit by a drunk driver."

Finch, who attends Cape Girardeau First Assembly of God, responded by saying a prayer for the other driver. The man had suffered minor injuries when his truck flipped and landed on its top.

"I knew he needed the Lord in his life," Finch says. "I immediately started praying that God would reach down and turn his life around."

At the hospital, Finch was awaiting X-rays when she realized the man for whom she had prayed was lying on

the other side of a thin partition. She talked with him and learned that his name was Josh Bryant.

Bryant, still intoxicated, began a rambling apology. Finch told him she was praying for him.

Finch spent two days in the hospital recovering from a collapsed lung. She also suffered muscle injuries that required weeks of rehabilitation. The pain was intense. She couldn't walk or straighten her right arm.

In spite of her injuries, Finch was filled with an inexplicable sense of compassion for Bryant. A few days after returning home from the hospital, she found his phone number and called him.

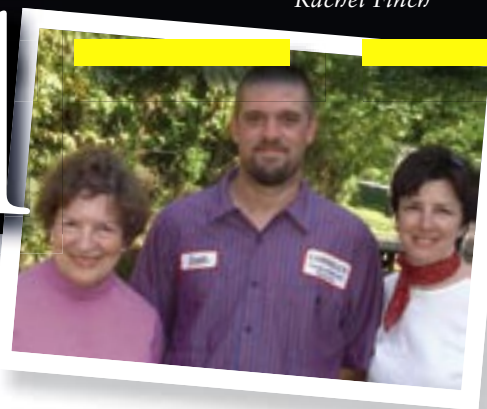
"I was really able to witness to him," Finch says. "God put a boldness in me to tell him what Jesus had done in my life."

"I asked him if there was a time when he was close to the Lord. He said there was, when he was younger, before the alcohol took over his life."

Bryant was facing criminal charges for the accident. It was the second time he had injured someone while drunk at the wheel. Finch once again told him she was praying for him.

In the fall of that year, Bryant called Finch to apologize for the accident. The call was a required step in a secular recovery program Bryant was completing. Finch told Bryant she was glad to hear from him. Before hanging up, she said she was still praying for him.

Finch was unable to reach Bryant directly while he was in the program, so she found a phone number for his mother. The two women soon developed a friendship as Finch called periodically to check on Bryant's progress. Finch learned that, because of Bryant's alcoholism, his wife had taken their young daughter and left him a few days before the accident.



Finch never stopped praying for Bryant. After he completed the recovery program in early 2005, Finch invited him to a Sunday evening church service. He accepted.

When Bryant arrived at the church, Finch embraced him. It was the first time they had met face-to-face. Finch's husband and two teenage daughters also greeted him warmly. "It was like a reunion," Finch says. "I felt like I'd invested in him. He could be my son."

At the end of the service, the speaker invited anyone needing prayer to come to the altar. Bryant stood up, and the entire Finch family walked with him to the front of the sanctuary, where he accepted Christ.

Bryant later completed a three-month prison sentence. Finch continued to pray for him and communicate with his mother during his incarceration.

Since the accident, Bryant and his wife have reunited and had a second child. Bryant, who is free from alcohol, works as an auto mechanic and attends a local church with his family. He recently shared his story with his congregation.

Finch and her family members have fully recovered from their injuries. Finch is thrilled with the way her prayers were answered. She says God gave her the grace to forgive and reach out in compassion when she could have reacted with anger and bitterness.

"Josh's life was pretty much over, but God turned it around," Finch says. "I see grace all over that situation. God's grace was with all of us." **tpe**

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