

Note: This is the first chapter of *From Love to Love: God Knew Exactly What He Was Doing* by Romey F. Swanson Jr., edited by Ken Walker. Published in September of 2017 by New Start Ministries.

Chapter 1

Made for Each Other

“The Keeper of the Stars.” That has to be one of the most creative—and appropriate—names for God I’ve ever heard. It’s also the title of a tune sung by country musician Tracy Byrd. Ironically, although Byrd released this hit in 1993, the year after he signed with MCA Nashville Records, it didn’t become my favorite song until twenty-three years later. That’s when I first heard it on the radio while returning from my hometown of Huntington, West Virginia to my new home in Gallipolis, Ohio.

The lyrics struck a chord deep in my heart. Byrd sings about how Someone had a hand in him meeting his love, long before either of them even knew about each other. How heaven is smiling down on him as he looks at her. And how he tips his hat to the Keeper of the Stars, who knew exactly what He was doing in bringing them together. In that instant, as I cruised down the highway, that song became “our” song. The song for my wife, Vickie, and me. Tears ran down my cheeks as I reflected on God having His hand in our being together, long before we met—again.

God was there during the times I watched my precious wife, Ileta, succumb to the ravages of early onset dementia. He was there when she finally died at the hands of a painful cancer that left her immobilized at Hospice House. God was there when Vickie’s husband, Roscoe, endured an ongoing series of health problems throughout their sixteen-year marriage. (During their last five years together, Vickie’s son-in-law took him to Pittsburgh twice because of complications from earlier heart and lung transplants, and to Lexington, Kentucky for a kidney transplant.) And God was also present during my painful and tentative forays back into the world of dating after Ileta’s death.

Indeed, as I reflect on the ways God worked to bring Vickie and me together, it staggers my imagination. All the things that had to happen in order for us to first meet, and then to be reunited nine years later through the couple that had been Vickie’s pastor—and friends who I had helped adopt a baby boy—has a surreal quality. It all began in 1985 when I met Bill and Alice Staten, the couple who arranged our reunion. To draw a brief timeline:

- The Statens had moved into the Tri-State Area with the expectation of starting a church in Ashland, Kentucky. Instead, while watching Christian television, they learned of a new church in Huntington pastored by a graduate of Rhema Bible Training Center. Since Bill attended Bible school at Rhema, they decided to visit New Life Church.
- Once they did, they sensed God leading them to align themselves with Pastor Darrell Huffman’s vision. They got involved in church leadership in 1987; Bill became an assistant pastor in 1989.
- Because Ileta and I were also in leadership positions, we became friends with the Statens.

- In 1990, I started a pro-life ministry to unwed mothers. Bill and Alice had one daughter, but hadn't been able to have another. They talked to me about the possibility of adopting a child from one of the mothers at our home, which took place in 1994.
- Soon after the adoption, the Statens accepted a call to pastor New Life's church in Gallipolis. Vickie and Roscoe had married in 1993 and had been searching for a permanent church home. They wound up at New Life and later became involved in church leadership.
- One Sunday, Bill and Alice invited me to speak at New Life about my ministry, which is where I met Vickie and Roscoe. I would visit the church two or three times a year; if the Statens were out of town, Vickie and Roscoe acted as my hosts.
- In 1999, the Statens moved to Lexington, Kentucky, where Bill became associate pastor of Bethel Harvest Church. The following year, Vickie and Roscoe also relocated to Lexington. One of his doctors suggested the move so he could be close to a hospital that did transplants. They wound up at Bethel Harvest, where they renewed their friendship with the Statens.
- In 2006, Vickie and Roscoe moved back to Gallipolis because of Roscoe's mother's sudden illness.
- Roscoe passed away in February of 2009, several months before Bill and Alice moved back to Ashland because of Bill's mother's health problems.
- When the Statens came back to New Life Church after returning to the area, we renewed our friendship—and they reconnected Vickie and me.

Since I'm not a math scholar, I can't begin to determine the odds of this string of events (and others) falling into place at just the right time, in just the right place, at just the right moment, for Vickie and I to meet again when we did. You can call all this coincidence if you want. I call it the Keeper of the Stars in action.