

GARDENS

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An excerpt from

“Encouraging Words for All Seasons”

By Iris Lee Underwood

I carried the bucket of bulbs, shovel and bulb food to the island in my front yard that is my English perennial garden. Fall's agreeable days slipped by, leaving me racing to beat the sleet on a cold November day.

The soil was workable, with the shovel's blade crunching through the frosty surface. The still, crisp air was invigorating.

I imagined the new colorful addition of early blooming tulips, irises and daffodils in the spring. With every bulb I planted, my anticipation and appreciation for the spring season grew.

As I was kneeling, digging in the earth, my thoughts wandered to my eldest daughter. She wasn't home last spring, summer, or fall to see the blooms of my garden. How I regretted it! What beauty she missed! I wept at the loss.

Again, I rehearsed the same questions a mother asks when a child she has nurtured decides to trade the shelter of a loving home for the brutality of substance abuse. Again, I answered with the possibilities. The path of this journey is well worn from six years of her coming and going.

The next day, I would be bringing her home from a drug treatment center after a three-year departure from us. Relief refreshed my hope, but reality and experience whispered to me.

Will she be here when my tulips bloom? Will she stay and face each day of winter until spring's visit? Does she know the earth holds the seed of the flower? Will she stay close to the heart of home where love can feed her and restore her soul?

Our prodigal's Christmas card has not been opened. Neither have her Christmas gifts. She left again, leaving behind more heartache, grief and unanswered questions. The lies she has believed have hardened her heart and devoured her flower.

Friends of a prodigal son encouraged me: “You've done all you can do. There is nothing you can do about her choices. You are not responsible for them. She's in God's hands.”

Yes, how painfully I know. With intense desperation I cry out, “I can't pull weeds that choke the life from her! This child whom I've planted and watered and protected in my life's garden is no longer mine to care for!”

I can't pull the weeds of alcohol and drugs from her earth. How I wish I had the power to stop the violent reaping of addiction! But she must work her own garden. This is the bittersweet place of rest and resignation. It is time to cease from designing, tilling, mulching, planting, transplanting, weeding, fertilizing and watering my garden. I must submit to the frozen ground and wait for the warm sun to thaw the soil and draw forth the flower.

Yes, the seed and bulbs are hidden in the earth. I rest in the reality they will bloom and bear bountiful bouquets again.

Surrendering to the Master Gardener and His seasons is the only hope of peace. With great passion I trust Him with her life. He can cause her garden to bloom again.