Inspired Woman

NEW BEGINNINGS

LOOKBACK:

INSPIRED WOMAN MAGAZINE FROM THE BEGINNING

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE
A STORY OF DEATH, LOVE, LIFE, & HOPE

JULY 2016
COMPLIMENTARY COPY

Shayna Monson

A FUTURE WITH HOPE

The mission of Inspired Woman is to celebrate, encourage, empower, educate and entertain women.

Ou Philosophy

Our philosophy re ects our core beliefs and values. It reveals what we believe and value most about people and organizations, as well as the kind of organization we are and desire to be.

We believe every woman is created in God's image, with value and with purpose. We believe women should be celebrated and valued for their uniqueness, talent, and beauty. We believe women should be honored for the contributions they make to their families, careers, and communities.

We value the vast di erences, backgrounds, and beliefs that make each woman special, and the possibility that these can unite us rather than divide us.

We aspire to breathe life into those who read and hear the stories we share.

Ou Purpos

Our purpose is to enrich the lives we touch, to share inspiring stories, and to educate our readers, as well as ourselves. Inspired Woman is a journey – we are inspired every day, and we grow and learn with each issue we produce. We feel called to use our talents and time to inspire others.

Ou Objectiv

Our objective is to provide a print magazine and an interactive website where women can go to read about other women doing great things, to nd hope, inspiration, laughter, and maybe even a new recipe. We strive to enrich every life we touch through Inspired Woman.

She is clothed with strength and dignity,
and she laughs without fear of the future.
– Proverbs 31:25 NLT

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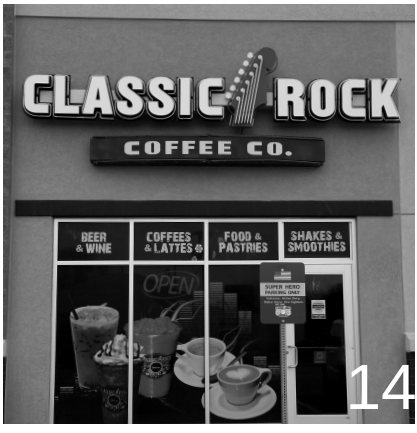

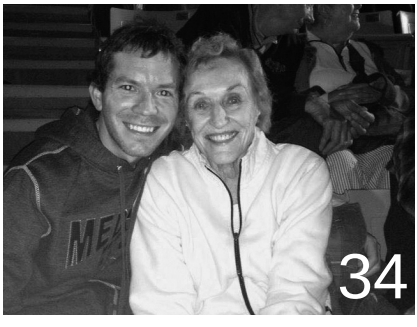

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Editors' No

Memo to self: next time a friend tells you she has an idea, take a moment to think about how much work that idea will be.

Just kidding.

I would do all this again in a heartbeat, even knowing what I know now.

When Marci and I got the news that Inspired Woman magazine was going away, we immediately started planning a way to save it. It has taken a lot of late night texts, phone calls, and emails to make that happen. It truly is a new begin ning for Inspired Woman magazine.

It's taken countless cups of co ee, cans of Diet Coke, and a few beers, to keep us motivated. We've spent so much time together we now joke that we share a brain.

This nished product is exactly what we envisioned in our shared brain.

Our team is amazing and we feel truly blessed to be surrounded by such talented people. Thank you to Jacy and Tiah for your creativity. To our contributors – thank you for your beautiful stories. To our advisory board – there's no way we can thank you for all you've done. You ladies are amazing.

And then there are the people featured in this magazine. They are the real reason we wanted to keep Inspired Woman magazine alive. This community, and this state, are full of amazing, inspiring women (and men) and we feel honored to share their stories with you.

Finally, Marci – I can't imagine sharing my brain with anyone else. Thank you for talking me into this, for your unconditional friendship, and your lame jokes. I am blessed to have you as a friend and business partner and I am so grateful for this new beginning to an old friendship.

Jody

"We should do something on our own."

Those were Jody's words to me the day we found out there would no longer be an Inspired Woman magazine to edit. Two issues together and we were done. And feeling de ated.

Little did I know we would really do something on our own, and here we are. With one exception—it hasn't happened on our own.

You hold in your hands the work of many people who share the same pas sion of telling stories that have meaning and positive impact, and the potential to truly inspire; to breathe life into yours. I feel immensely grateful to be working with my friend and business partner, Jody, our team and our advisory board, to give this magazine a breath of fresh air.

A new beginning takes on many di erent meanings. We chose this theme for the obvious reason: It's a new beginning for Inspired Woman, as Jody and I humbly take ownership of this wonderful magazine and make changes to it that we hope you enjoy. But life gives us new beginnings in other ways. Surviving an earthquake and nding new life after the loss of a spouse. Or nding out after a tragic accident that a loved one has lived, and believing God has a purpose for this.

Inspired Woman magazine has a purpose, and it gives me a purpose in a way I can only describ as an unexpected blessing.

It has been a wonderful whirlwind of hard work and decisions to get to this point, and I expect there is more to come.

Marci

A WITNESS TO NEW BEGINNINGS

By Marci Narum

New beginnings are part of life, every day, in many ways. Writer and poet, T.S. Elliot said, "Every moment is a fresh beginning." Pastor Renee Splichal Larson of Bismarck would agree. And she points to her own life and her rm foundation of faith in the ability to see new beginnings o ered to all of us.

"I believe in a God of new beginnings. It's noticing the spring green, the way music touches us, and the way creativity comes to us. Or what we learn and who we become because of what we've been through, not in spite of it. It forms us, and shapes us," says Pastor Renee Splichal Larson. "For that I am grateful."

God o ered Renee a new beginning six-and-a-half years ago, after Renee experienced the deepest pain she has ever known: the death of her husband, Ben. He died after being buried in the rubble of the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010. He was one of an estimated 300,000 killed.

Renee and Ben were in Haiti, along with Ben's cousin Jon Larson, as seminary students. All three felt called to be there, believing their relationships with the Haitian people would help them become better pastors.

"A day or two following the earthquake Jon and I were still in Haiti waiting at the U.S. Embassy to see if we could help or what we should do. Jon and I were grieving, and Jon said to me, 'Renee you're going to write about all this someday.'"

And she did.

STARTING TO WRITE

It started immediately. Jon and Renee began journaling, writing down words, phrases, people's names, short thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Renee says they wanted to remember.

Renee returned home, arranged a funeral and burial for her husband, and nished seminary. She took her rst call as a pastor, at Heart River Lutheran Church in Mandan. Still grieving, Renee would write down her thoughts in a journal, as an outlet for her grief. Telling her story in a book was always in the back of her mind, but actually doing it was not easy. In fact, Renee calls it painful.

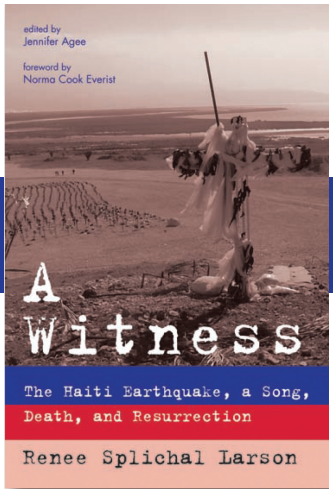
"I would start writing. I would sit at my computer and write a sentence or two and just end up crying. It was so di cult to form language to what we had experienced. There wasn't language for the depth of grief that I was feeling, and the loss. What I had seen in the earthquake, and being in it," remembers Pastor Renee. "I would end up grieving for a number of hours and have to set it aside. I continued to do that for three years after the earthquake."

During a three week writing sabbatical in the summer of 2013, Renee wrote the majority of her book. She says, "The whole story poured out of me." And Renee chose to share very openly about her life, this experience of death and grief, and her new beginnings.

"It's been very hard to know what I've written in there and to release it. But in the end, my hope for it is that people can connect. No matter what kind of loss people have su ered they would nd similarities or connect in some way to what I've written. And ultimately I wrote it and released it in order that it might give people hope," explains Pastor Renee. "I called it *A Witness* because that's what it is in the Christian sense of the word. It's a testimony, or a life story.

"One, it's to get Ben's witness out there, because he sang when he died. I mean, who does that? But also my witness. That

Jon Gabriel and Pastor Renee



new beginnings, resurrections happened in my life. And if it happened in my life, it can happen in all people's lives. I hope they can connect on some level with that."

Renee has already heard from many people who are connecting with her book. One, a father of four, uses the book as a way to introduce faith conversations with his children. Others are pastors who want their church committees to read the book. And it's being read in groups for discussion purposes.

Renee graduated from Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, and in May, she was there for a book-signing and panel discussion about her book. One panelist was Mytch, her Haitian friend and pastor, who, through tears, shared the deep signi cance *A Witness* has for her. Listen to Pastor Renee talk about this powerful moment by visiting this link: inspiredwomanonline.com/Witness

HER NEW BEGINNINGS

The cover of *A Witness* is a photo taken by Jon, of a mass grave in Haiti, called St. Christoph. Renee says she and Jon went back to Haiti twice after the earthquake and they visited that mass grave each time.

"It's hundreds of black crosses. One of many, many, mass graves. I think, I could have been in here."

But she wasn't, thanks to the Hatian people, who cared for Renee and Jon during and after the earthquake. They also gave them the greatest gift of digging out Ben's body by hand, making it possible to have his body returned three weeks later and buried in Iowa.

Six-and-a-half years after the earthquake, Renee says she is full of gratitude. Her new beginnings have been unexpected and beautiful. It's fair to say the tragedy that took away her first husband did make her a better pastor. It made Ben's cousin Jon a better pastor. And it made Jon something else, too.

"I would see that my call is a beginning of my ministry and my marriage to Jon a few years later, my goodness what a beginning and a surprise! Never could I have imagined," says Pastor Renee with a smile. "And then our son, Gabriel. It makes me excited for life.

"To have a point where I thought my world was ending, because a lot of people's worlds ended that day, in the midst of the shaking of the earth. It really did seem and feel that the world was ending. And my life and my world the way I knew it did end. But here I am and I'm grateful.

"I still grieve, and long that this didn't happen and that Ben was still alive. But I can look for these new beginnings God offers us. And it happens all the time."

Here is were to find *The Witness:*

- wipfandstock.com/a-witness.html
- www.melbergs.biz/home.asp
- Amazon
- Splichal.larson@gmail.com

Renee is also working on making it available at Barnes and Noble.