



KIM WALKER-SMITH

# BRAVE

*Surrender*

LET GOD'S LOVE

| *Rewrite Your Story*

## PRAISE FOR *Brave Surrender*

I so love Kim's heart for worship and her passion to help others encounter the love and redemption of the Father. *Brave Surrender* is a book of beautiful truth and personal stories that will be an encouragement and inspiration to all who read it.

*Kari Jobe*

God had a great surprise and gift for the church when He created Kim Walker-Smith's voice. She sings with a passion and abandon unlike any other I've known. However, this kind of freedom doesn't come without struggle, without pain, or without a fight. Thank you, Kim, for being so honest and open with your story. I know this book will be a lifeline to so many in their own journey of faith.

*Chris Tomlin*

What most people know about Kim Walker-Smith is what they've experienced as they've heard her lead worship on an album or on stage. Countless numbers of people have been impacted by her voice and the anointing on her life. But what most may not know is the woman behind the voice—the daughter, mother, wife, friend, preacher, and leader I've been privileged to know since she was eighteen. What has most impressed me is not her ability to lead worship, but her willingness and hunger to embrace growth and allow God to shape her life. Up close and personal, I've watched her walk with Jesus off the

stage. Through mountains and valleys, in hard times and good times, she has consistently positioned herself in full surrender to God. In *Brave Surrender*, Kim invites us on the same journey of intimately knowing the love of a Father who will never leave us or forsake us and calls us to trust Him completely. With raw honesty and vulnerability, Kim inspires us to experience a freedom that can only come through surrender to a Father who surrendered all for us.

***Banning Liebscher***, founder of Jesus Culture

*Brave Surrender* is a majestic telling of the unparalleled power of God's love. Kim Walker-Smith vulnerably opens up the scenes of her life, allowing us to dive into the experiences that led her to understand the splendor of surrendering to a good God. Read and know that God's all-consuming love is waiting for you.

***Lisa Bevere***, *New York Times* bestselling author

Kim Walker-Smith's book grants us a glimpse into God's work in her life. For all who seek to discover their gifts, find healing for their hearts, and minister to others, this wonderful book is a terrific resource.

***Max Lucado***, pastor and bestselling author

**BRAVE**  
*Surrender*

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## *Surrender*

LET GOD'S LOVE

*Rewrite Your Story*

KIM WALKER-SMITH

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*Brave Surrender*

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*To my children—Wyatt, Bear, and Maisie.*

*You give me the strength to keep fighting  
for the best version of myself.*

*I pray that you will also find Jesus  
in every hardship you face  
and never forget how loved you are.*





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It was a Friday night in July 2006—the first night of our annual Jesus Culture conference. I stood just offstage, peering out from behind a thick curtain at the people filling the auditorium. A hum of nervous anticipation coursed through me like electricity.

Our team—worship leaders Chris Quilala, Melissa How, and I, along with our band—was about to record our second live album, *We Cry Out*. This time we were filming as well. After the success of our first album, *Everything*, we couldn't wait to see what would happen with this one.

When we released *Everything*, none of us had any intention of going on to become a band and record multiple albums. Our sole purpose had been to give kids something to take home from our conferences that would help them enter into worship again. From the reports of youth leaders and kids themselves, we knew they were having amazing times of connecting to Jesus in worship at our conferences. The kids eagerly told their pastors about the ways they were experiencing God's presence and love, and their response had been consistently evident in their loud and physically expressive worship. However, when they went back to their homes and lives, it seemed they were struggling to hold on to that connection with the presence of God.

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By the time they came to the next conference, we felt as though we had to help them go back and pick up again at the beginning of their journey into intimacy with the Lord. The first session usually seemed flat—the kids would all kind of stand there and stare at us like they weren't sure what to do with themselves. It seemed like there was a lot of distraction in the room, and their faces and body language clearly said they weren't really excited to worship.

As a team, we understood from our own relationships with Jesus that sometimes life (stress, work, school, and the like) can pull all our attention from that relationship. Our connection to Jesus is not a onetime thing; it is something to fight for and nourish. It was in these moments of worship that the teens developed intimacy with Jesus, and we thought it would be incredible if they had a recording of the worship to take home and help incite their hunger for more of Him.

Wonderfully, that is exactly what happened! *Everything* became a huge success—in terms of sales numbers, but also, and more importantly, in fueling kids' devotion to the Lord. We heard countless testimonies from kids who described how the moments we recorded on the album had led them into fresh encounters with Jesus and stirred their passion to keep running after Him.

Parents were emailing us to tell us how their teens were spending time praying and worshipping Jesus in their bedrooms at home. They told us that their kids insisted on listening to the CD in the car every time they had to drive somewhere, were eager to talk about Jesus, and were excited to go to church.

When we had arrived at the venue earlier in the day for the Jesus Culture conference, we were happily surprised to hear kids worshipping together outside as they waited in line to enter the

building. As the first session was about to start, they rushed to the front, crowded around the stage, and were shouting praise before the first song could take off.

Even as I waited backstage, I could feel that the level of hunger for worship in the room was much greater than what I had experienced in past conferences. It was obvious that these kids didn't need to start over in worship; they were ready to go deeper than ever before! I couldn't wait to see where God would lead us and which moments of encounter with Him would be captured forever. I was convinced that *We Cry Out* would only be more powerful and bear more fruit than we had already seen.

### *Sloppy and Wet*

There was, however, one song in the set list I was a little nervous about. It was not a typical worship song—it was very wordy and contained a phrase that our team wasn't sure the kids would really understand: *so heaven meets earth like a sloppy, wet kiss*.

The first time I heard “How He Loves” was at a church event in Fort Mill, South Carolina. I had just moved from Redding, California, to Charlotte, North Carolina, which was very close to Fort Mill. A few months before, I was feeling stuck in my relationship with God. A few friends told me that God was doing good things out there, so I made the move in hopes that something new would be awakened inside me. “How He Loves” led me into an encounter with the Lord that ignited fresh passion in my heart.

My friend John Mark McMillan had written the song after the tragic death of a friend. As he sang it, I began to feel the

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overwhelming love of Jesus for me. It wasn't the first time I had felt this love so strongly, but as I stood in this room full of strangers, the words of that song came alive inside me with incredible intensity. Admittedly, it was a little strange at first to sing "heaven meets earth like a sloppy, wet kiss," but as the words came out of my mouth, I realized the truth of that lyric.

When heaven shows up, when Jesus intervenes in my life, when I encounter God, it can be messy, passionate, and all-consuming. Not in a negative way, but in a way that causes me to say, "I am surrendering to Your love completely, God. I am not fighting for control, and I am trusting You in every outcome." And when Jesus shows up, He covers *everything*, just like a sloppy, wet kiss.

I felt totally convicted that Jesus loves me regardless of any mistakes I've made, my past, or what anybody says about me. *He loves me.* I sobbed through the entire song. It felt as though a wildfire was sweeping through my heart. Then suddenly, I was consumed with one burning thought: *Everybody needs to encounter this love! Everybody needs to know this love!*

I wanted to shout it from the mountaintops. *Isn't this the question everybody asks?* I thought to myself. *Am I loved? Does God really love me?* I felt like the girl in the classroom, raising her hand and shouting, "Ooooh, pick me, pick me! I know the answer!" I wanted to find a way to tell everyone.

When I moved back to Redding, California, and the band asked me which songs I would like to lead for our second album, I knew immediately that I wanted to sing "How He Loves." It took a little convincing, but in the end, I won them over. As for winning over our audience—all I knew was that if they experienced what *I* had experienced through this song, they would

love it as much as I did. For this reason, I desperately wanted my version of “How He Loves” to be *awesome*. I wanted everyone in the room to experience love like a sloppy, wet kiss that covers everything and melts our hearts into total surrender.

On that Friday night at the conference, Banning Liebscher, director of Jesus Culture, finally gave us the go-ahead nod—it was time to start. I took a deep breath, stepped out from behind the curtain, and walked onstage.

As the band launched into the first song, I felt my nerves give way to the comfort, familiarity, and pure enjoyment of doing what I was made to do. I *love* to worship Jesus. I cannot contain the joy I feel when I sense His presence moving in the room.

As I always do when I’m singing, I focused intently on every single word coming out of my mouth, feeling total conviction in the truth of each lyric. I could sense the way these declarations were bringing us deeper and deeper into God’s presence. Spread before me, I saw a sea of faces looking heavenward, tears streaming down cheeks, arms reaching up. I heard an army of voices singing at the top of their lungs. As I looked out over the crowd that night, I knew with absolute certainty that these people would not leave the room the same. At the same time, my heart began to pound with the hope and expectation that the Lord was about to do something new.

“How He Loves” was the last song in our set, and when we finally reached it, I could feel the atmosphere change in the room. The presence of the Holy Spirit became as tangible as the nose on my face. I could feel His love filling the room like a heavy, warm blanket.

At the same time, something powerful was happening, and I began scrambling in my head to find the words to describe it.

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It was as if God had decided in this precious moment to tear down every lie that says He can't love us. Lies that say, "You are a mistake. How could anyone love a mistake?" Lies that convince you that you've made too much of a mess of your life for Jesus ever to love you, that you aren't worthy of forgiveness.

These lies and many more were being demolished by the love of God. Every line of the song was like a sledgehammer smashing a wall. As we sang, "He loves us, oh how He loves us," shame was relinquishing its hold on hearts; fear was being swallowed up in an ocean of grace; and we were finally believing the truth that had always been there: *He loves us!*

The whole atmosphere in the room changed. Where earlier it felt like I was pressing up against a wall, I felt like now I was running freely down a hill. Leading everyone in singing the chorus was effortless, as every voice was shouting out the words. The little hairs on my arm were standing up, as I felt the tingly sensation of something happening—something beyond my natural abilities to manufacture.

This is the kind of moment in a worship set that I live for. I am no longer a leader, but instead I am simply a sister and daughter enjoying the presence of her Father with those around her. I feel my whole body settle into a calm and surrender as Jesus walks into the room and does what only He can do. It's the moment when it is no longer about a song, or a schedule, or a routine. It is plainly just about Jesus touching His people.

After a few minutes, we reached a lull in the song. I desperately wanted to put words to what was happening in the room. It was urgent that not a single person miss the freedom God was offering. I reached for words, notes, a melody, a phrase—anything that might define this encounter. And what came out



of me was a blur of . . . something. The phrases coming out of my mouth sounded disjointed and awkward to my ears:

*And right now, if you haven't encountered the love of God—and you would KNOW, because you would never be the same . . . you would never be the same AGAIN!—And if you, if you want to encounter the love of God right now, you better just BRACE yourself! Because He's about to just BLOW in this place! And WE'RE GOING TO ENCOUNTER THE LOVE OF GOD!*

I could feel heat radiating from my cheeks as I finished speaking, but there was nothing I could do except plunge ahead and finish the song and the rest of the set. As Banning came out to pray and wrap up our time of worship, disappointment and frustration began to churn inside me. I slipped offstage after Banning's "Amen" and felt tears welling up in my eyes. My head was a jumble of embarrassed thoughts: *Oh, Kim, you missed that one. Way to ruin the moment and sound like a bumbling idiot. Talk about sloppy and wet—that was beyond sloppy. You were probably singing off-key too. Everyone's going to be disappointed.*

Then I remembered the worst thing of all: *it's all on tape.*

Wiping my eyes, I looked around frantically for Banning. I spotted him and hurried over, desperate to prevent the disaster I was imagining.

"Hey—" I began.

"That was awesome!" Banning interrupted.

"Um, thanks," I said. "Hey, can we please cut out that part where I talked in 'How He Loves'? It just felt really awkward. I was stumbling over the words, and I'm sure it didn't come out very well."

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Banning laughed. It was the laugh of a dad laughing at his child because he thinks she is cute. “No, it was *so* good!” he insisted. “It was my favorite part—it was so powerful!”

This was not what I wanted to hear. “Banning, *please!*” I said, trying not to freak out completely. “If you care about me at all, do *not* put that on the recording! I’m serious! It was so . . . so bad! I don’t even think people were singing or connecting to the song at all!”

Nothing I said made the grin on Banning’s face budge an inch. He stubbornly maintained that my embarrassing moment had been the best part of the whole night and that all of the awkwardness was in my head. But nothing he said changed my mind either. All his assurances did was convince me that he really was acting like a dad, because only a dad would think a performance like that was good. Only a dad could look at a scribble on a paper, tell you it was a beautiful self-portrait, and pin it to the fridge.

I walked away, plotting how I was going to convince him not to ruin my life by putting it on the final cut.

## *The YouTube Effect*

In the end, despite multiple and increasingly desperate attempts, I failed to convince Banning to withhold that moment from the album. The day *We Cry Out* was released, I felt incredibly raw, exposed, and vulnerable. I felt like I had recorded myself reading my diary and then blasted it out for the whole world to hear. I braced myself for the teasing, criticism, and mocking that I felt certain would come.

Sure enough, as the days rolled on, reactions to the song began to pile up. But they weren't the responses I had expected.

I remember sitting in a café a couple of weeks after the album released and suddenly hearing “Kiiimmm!” from across the room. Stunned, I turned to see my friend Sarah running up to me, apparently about to burst with excitement. “I have not stopped listening to your new album!” she exclaimed, her eyes shining. “I have never felt the love of God like I do when I’m listening to ‘How He Loves.’ I’ve had it on repeat for days!”

Other friends found me after church to describe, with similar intensity, the impact the album was having on them. Person after person said they could feel God’s tangible love filling the room and shaking them to the core. Some had cried for days as God delivered them from shame. They were experiencing freedom as old mind-sets suddenly shifted and negative thoughts and lies were replaced with truth, love, joy, and peace. Where a weight or a burden had been holding them down, now they felt lightheartedness and a deeper trust in Jesus.

Soon, random strangers at church began stopping to tell me the same thing, their voices full of passion as they described the love they had encountered. The majority of them mentioned that the part where I was speaking was especially powerful.

I couldn't help but continue to be baffled that these were the testimonies coming out of that crazy moment. Yes, I was glad that people were encountering God’s love—that was exactly what I had hoped and prayed for. Yet no matter how many times I thought about (or worse, heard) that moment on the album, I felt nothing but embarrassment and a hope that people would soon delete the song from their playlists.

Nothing could have prepared me for what was about to happen next.

A month or two after the release of *We Cry Out*, my younger brother, Matt, who was about fifteen years old at the time, called me. “Kim,” he said excitedly, “you’re on YouTube!”

“What is YouTube?” I asked, bewildered.

He told me to get online and guided me to a web page where I saw the video of me singing “How He Loves.” My stomach dropped to the floor, and embarrassment flooded through me once again. *NO WAY*. This vulnerable moment of mine was floating around in cyberspace for the whole world to see? I was suddenly possessed by the urge to mysteriously disappear from planet Earth.

Then I saw the number posted below the video: 20,347.

“Matt,” I shouted through the phone, “what is this number underneath the video?”

“That’s the number of views this video has had.”

*Kill me*, I thought. *I’m dead. I have to change my name.*

That number was ringing through my head. I got off the phone and immediately called Banning.

“Banning,” I shrieked. “I’m dying!”

“What’s going on?”

“Did you know that someone put ‘How He Loves’ on this thing called YouTube, and it’s been seen more than twenty thousand times?” My voice rose to a scream.

“Yes!” Banning exclaimed excitedly. “Isn’t it amazing?”

I was speechless. I could only think that I was living in some alternate universe where your worst nightmares not only become reality but are then broadcast across the internet. As I was pondering the cost of a new identity, I heard Banning say, “We’re

working to get it taken down, but then we'll put it right back up again so it's there legally."

*Oh great*, I thought. As he had for the umpteenth time by now, Banning tried to calm me down and assure me that the video was a powerful moment and that God was up to something spectacular here. Despite the positive feedback we had gotten so far, however, I was sure Banning was being way too optimistic.

I drove home from work that day, went straight to my room, and lay down on my bed. My heart was pounding, and tears stung my eyes. I just could not believe what was happening. Thousands of people had seen me in a moment I wished I could have erased from history. Many had watched that moment *over and over*. Instead of fading from the scene, "How He Loves" was on its way to massive exposure—and so was I. That meant I was either facing embarrassment of epic proportions—or . . .

*Or God had a plan.*

I began to feel the gentle presence of Jesus surrounding me as I lay on my bed. I could feel the love of my Father—a love I have come to know very well—filling up my insides and causing the wind and the waves of my stormy emotions to calm.

After a few moments of simply receiving His love and peace, I sensed the Holy Spirit gently beginning to help me understand how I had come to be in this place. He first reminded me of a prayer I had prayed many times. I had prayed it long before I ever heard John Mark's beautiful song. I had prayed it in desperation: *God, help me to love like You love.*

This prayer had been born out of a journey of healing I had walked through several years earlier. As you'll learn in the coming chapters, things I had experienced in my childhood had led me to become a woman full of wounds, scars, pain, anger,

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fear, hatred, and deep sorrow. Finally, through God's insistent wooing in my life, I reached the place where I was desperate to be free. I became convinced that if I could come to know His love in a radical way and see my life through His eyes, then I would view my past and those who brought me pain through the lens of that love. Surely, that was the way I could forgive them, love them, and love myself, for "we love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Sure enough, all of that turned out to be true. God had met me with His love in a series of profound healing encounters that utterly transformed me. On the other side of those encounters, all I wanted was to live in that love and share it with others. My daily prayer became, "God, help me to love like You love." His presence became the air I breathed. I could feel His heart for people in a way I never had before. I could feel the heart of a Father calling out to His prodigal child to come home. I could feel the heart of a Mother, a love that never, ever gives up on her child and always believes the best. I could feel the heart of a Brother, who swears, "Come hell or high water, I will not forsake you."

It was *this* love I had felt when I first heard "How He Loves." That experience hadn't just been about me receiving love from Jesus; it had been about me being consumed by the desire to help *others* receive it. This was why I had said, "Pick me!" And even though my version of the song hadn't gone the way I had envisioned, I had to admit that the results I was seeing were exactly what I had wanted. People were receiving God's love.

More peace flooded through me as I lay on my bed and finally understood that God had had a plan all along. That plan had started before the recording, before I heard the song, before

my healing, and even before the song was written. It was not about me. It didn't matter that I was embarrassed or felt foolish. It didn't matter that I was terrified of what people thought. The only thing that mattered was a Father wanting more than anything for His children to know His love for them.

But it *was* about me in one sense, I realized. This was another opportunity for me to surrender.

Before my healing encounters with the love of God, I knew that I needed His love and that His love would transform me. What I didn't know was that letting God love me would require me to make one of the riskiest and most vulnerable and courageous decisions I had ever made—the decision to surrender. I had to let Him love me on His terms, and that meant letting go of the questions, demands, and needs I had been insisting He address. It would be a long journey of learning ahead.

Now I was in another moment where I needed to surrender. I had to let go of the way I wished that vulnerable moment on stage had gone. I didn't get to bury it or go back and turn it into something polished and articulate. I had to let it be what it was and let God use it the way He wanted to.

### *Brave Enough to Surrender*

Over the last ten years, I've had to continue to surrender that moment to the Lord. I know it's probably surprising to everyone but me, but to this day, I still have times when I wish I could have convinced Banning to switch out the live track of "How He Loves" with a perfectly produced studio version featuring *no* talking, and to leave the video off *We Cry Out* entirely.

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That would have saved me from experiences I could have lived without—like event chauffeurs loudly quoting my entire speech from the song while taking me to a concert venue or reluctantly listening as random people at the grocery store want to quote it to me, complete with hand motions.

Yet I am also fully aware of the reality that this recording is the catalyst God has used to bring me to where I am today and to bring countless people into transforming encounters with Him. It has arguably been the recording that brought significant exposure to Jesus Culture and helped launch it into the movement it has become.

Today, that YouTube video has more than 20 million views. For ten years, I have received a regular stream of emails and social media comments from people who are watching it for the first time, letting me know about how Jesus is showing them His love. It would take another book to record all the stories and testimonies of what a single moment caught on a recording has meant to so many, but I'll mention just a few.

One email came from a woman who told me she was in a lesbian relationship. Someone had emailed her the link to the video. After she watched it, she kept playing it over and over. She couldn't stop thinking about Jesus. In her email, she asked me if I thought Jesus could possibly love her in the way I was singing about. It wrecked me. I was happy to share the love of God with her.

I have received multiple emails from mothers who sent the video to their teenage children who had wandered from the Lord. They each reported that their kids had ended up in a sobbing heap on the floor, experiencing the love of a Father for the first time.



The parents of a very young boy who was battling cancer in a Ronald McDonald House in San Francisco wrote to tell me that their son's favorite song was "How He Loves." He asked his mom to play it over and over. My husband and I went to visit him. I sang the song to him and watched as pure joy and peace came over his face and his parents' faces. He went to live with Jesus a few weeks after that.

The more I have seen the way God has used and continues to use this song to bring people into an encounter with His love, the more I have gained His perspective on it. I now know that God hasn't used it in spite of my raw, awkward vulnerability but *because* of it. When I push my embarrassed feelings aside and look at what actually happened in that moment, I see my true self—a woman who has been radically transformed by encountering God's love and who lives to invite others into the same experience.

There was no way I could hide, control, or perfect the way I expressed my hunger for people to know God's love in that moment. It was raw, but most important, it was *real*. And only because this was the true, deep cry of my heart could it resonate with the heart cries of those who heard it and immediately knew, "Yes, that is what I want to say!" As those genuine cries rose to heaven, Jesus responded from His heart for us.

In that awkward moment in the middle of the song, I said, "We're never the same after we've encountered the love of God." It is very common for a Christian to say that Jesus loves them. We learn this in Sunday school. We sing about it in our songs. We memorize it in Scripture. But until we experience this truth in a tangible way, it won't become a deep conviction we live by. My husband can tell me he loves me all day long, but unless he

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actually puts those words into action and shows me his love for me, it's hard to believe and even harder to respond to.

I know that Jesus loves me because I have felt it, heard it, and seen it with my own eyes. It is that experience of His love that provokes radical change in me. And ever since I've encountered His love, this is the conviction that drives my worship: *I don't want to just say that Jesus loves me; I want to know it deep down inside and be changed by it.*

If you've ever encountered the love of God, then you already know what I've discovered: a love encounter, by its very nature, only happens through a courageous and vulnerable act of surrender. To receive God's love, we must *let* Him love us. We must abandon every effort to keep Him at a distance or every effort to control the way He touches and transforms us. We have to let Him come close—into the deepest parts of who we are—and change everything with His love.

I'm convinced there can be no relationship with Him without this brave surrender. Sometimes I feel like a broken record—constantly encouraging people to surrender their lives, lay down their questions and accusations, and let down their walls. I look for many ways to tell people what I desperately do not want them to miss: *God loves you so much, and when you experience that, you will never be the same.*

I tell them that I know what it's like to struggle to trust Jesus when bad things happen—to let go of all the pain and fear, the unanswered questions, and the powerful urge to be in control, and to let God be God in their lives. And I tell them who I've discovered this God to be—a Father who loves with a love that can't be earned, never gives up, and meets us right where we are, no matter the mess or the storm in which we find ourselves.

*He Loves Us*

With everything in me, I try to give them the courage to fall into His arms.

But of course, I can only tell people so much in one worship set, conference session talk, or interview. This is why I've decided to tell the whole story of how I have come to know these things about God's love. I've decided to step into another moment of raw vulnerability and invite you, and anyone who reads this book, to share it with me—all because I want you to believe me and to believe Him. *He loves you with a love that cannot be measured, stopped, or contained!*



# SAFETY SHATTERED

If there's one thing I know without question, it's that one moment can change your whole life. Just as there are moments that heal, restore, and revive, there are also moments that shatter, wound, and destroy.

The first of these shattering moments in my life occurred when I was two years old. My dad was riding his motorcycle home one day when a woman in a car ran a stop sign at an intersection and struck him. He flew through the air and hit his head on the pavement very hard (he wasn't wearing a helmet). At the hospital, the doctors told my mom he had sustained a very serious brain injury and was in a coma. They couldn't be sure he would wake up, and if he did, he was unlikely to regain full functionality.

My mom took me to visit my dad at the hospital. Having no concept that he was unconscious, I began talking to him. I'm sure it was mostly baby gibberish, but I don't doubt for a second that I talked a lot (a trait I still possess). As I began talking, his body began to move, as though he was responding to the sound of my voice. The doctors were intrigued by this and told my