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Faith illuminates path

A woman who went blind as a teen finds belief in God lights her way.

By *Linda Leicht*
News-Leader

Jennifer Rothschild has never seen the sweet, round face of her 3-year-old son or the delicate paintings that adorn the walls of her tastefully decorated living room. But she has no trouble walking through her home or her life.

The petite 38-year-old mother of 12-year-old Carter and toddler Connor began losing her sight when she was a teen-ager. Today, she sees only light, and she brings that light to others through her music, her speaking and, now, her first book.

“Lessons I Learned in the Dark: Steps to Walking by Faith, Not by Sight” welcomes readers into Rothschild’s life and heart. It is an honest look at personal struggles anyone can relate to, from teen-age angst to the bumps of motherhood.

And it is filled with open discussion of a faith in God that has seen Rothschild through all those struggles.

Her biggest hurdle? “It has definitely not been blindness,” she said. “It has definitely been my attitude. ... It’s the choice I make to either be bitter, be angry or be faithful.

“I know when I stumble over that hurdle. ... That’s when I really struggle, not because of the trappings of blindness.”

Rothschild handles the “trappings of blindness” with unexpected grace. She delicately runs her manicured hand over the rich, wood railings that lead to the front door of her south-side home. Opening the door, she smiles her greeting, quickly turning her face to a voice.

The house is filled with light, the one thing her eyes — blinded by a rare degenerative disease — can discern. The rich, pumpkin shade of the walls and the stone textured top on the coffee table reveal a designer’s taste, while the open simplicity of the room allows for easy maneuvering.

That grace and beauty are an important part of Rothschild’s life,

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Jennifer Rothschild, author of “Lessons I Learned in the Dark,” has many other talents. She is also a recording artist and public speaker. The 38-year-old mother of two has been blind since her teens, but says personal struggles are much more difficult than physical ones.

[Steve J.P. Liang / News-Leader](#)

Jennifer Rothschild

- Book signing at Radiant Book & Music Center, 1351 N. Boonville Ave., 11 a.m.-noon today. “Lessons I Learned in the Dark” will be on sale for \$9.99.

- Online: www.womensministry.net and www.jenniferrothschild.com.

- On television: “Time for Hope” on INSP (Mediacom cable channel 22) 7:30 a.m. Dec. 8.

and she shares her secrets to accomplishing that in her book. But the secrets — from putting on makeup to changing a diaper — may surprise the reader. She not only reveals the simple truths of getting along without sight, she shows how those truths can give deeper insight.

Rothschild's life made an abrupt about-face when she was 15 and learned that she was going blind. She had to give up some dreams — driving was now out of the question — and take on new ones.

An artist, her plans to earn a living with that talent were undone. Instead, she turned to music, something with which she had had an on-again, off-again relationship.

She left her friends at the large public school she attended in Miami and moved to a small, Christian school in a class of about 25. But there, she bloomed. Her blindness didn't stop her from making new friends.

"That was part of the package," she said. "They were great."

She played piano, by ear, with an ensemble for the school, playing at clubs and organizations to promote the school. That led to paying gigs at parties and churches.

"That was evidence of the kindness of God," she said. "It was a private, personal place for me to grow, and also publicly to have an income and identity."

One activity in high school makes her laugh with embarrassment. "I was a mat maid," she giggled. Admitting it was the first time she had told the story publicly, she recalled her two years as a wrestling cheerleader.

"My co-captain would tell me what was happening and I would lead the cheer," she said. "I was a big proponent of calling us mat maidens."

That spirit sent her off to college where she met her husband, Philip. Theirs was a match made in heaven.

Both insist that there was never a hesitation about their feelings for each other or their belief that they were going to do just fine together.

"I did not have any issues with (dating a blind woman)," Phil Rothschild said. "I just felt, I love this girl. ... I really felt that God had equipped me."

His future mother-in-law warned him that he would have to take on much more than most husbands and fathers — from ironing

clothes to bathing babies.

He not only does those and other chores, he has taken on his wife's career as well. And that has led to a change in his own career.

Phil Rothschild is a business professor at Southwest Missouri State University and the director of the entertainment management degree program, which he has built from 12 students four years ago to 170 this year.

It was his experience promoting his wife's performing, recordings, speaking and now writing that expanded his own career.

"I love to build things ... building a career or building a program," he said.

Jennifer Rothschild's career is growing beyond her or her husband's expectations.

Her publisher, Multnomah, offered her a four-book series called "His Life and Mine" on four aspects of Jesus Christ — touch, power, favor and loving kindness.

The first book is due next October.

"She's just dynamic and she has a brilliant message," said Andi Buerger, Rothschild's publicist at Multnomah Publishers.

That decision may have been based on the success of "Lessons." David Jayne, general manager of Radiant Book & Music Center on Boonville Avenue, said the book has been selling well.

"Most people don't realize how good the book is until they pick it up and read it," Jayne said.

Jennifer Rothschild may be her own best salesperson. Jayne recalls a group of women coming in and buying more than 20 of the books after hearing Rothschild speak.

"They were totally inspired by her," he said.

Lifeway Christian Resources is planning to do an interactive video Bible study with Jennifer based on "Lessons," which the Rothschilds hope will be filmed in their church, Second Baptist in Springfield.

Television appearances and a Web page have also brought her message to people around the country and the world.

“It’s exciting to see how God is opening doors,” said Philip Rothschild. “We are just kind of walking through them one door at a time.”

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