



Choosing happiness

By Shelli Sivert

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Clothing by Whimsy

Stephanie Nielson

WASATCH WOMAN OF THE YEAR

Stephanie Nielson's blog, NieNieDialogues.blogspot.com, began as most do: a way to keep in touch with family. Nearly five years ago, Stephanie posted her first entry, one of hundreds that would narrate her day-to-day experiences as a wife and mother. But as any of her readers will tell you, NieNie's blog is anything but ordinary; there is something sweet, simple and faith-building about her musings.

Slowly, these sweetly poetic thoughts began to resonate with others. Eventually, thousands of readers across the world tuned in. "I think it was the mothers who connected," Stephanie says. "I was posting about everyday things like potty training and romantic evenings with my husband ... things that we all can relate to in one way or another. I was posting the good and the bad, but mostly the good. Motherhood and being a wife is very challenging, yet very noble. It can be the most rewarding role ever, and I was showcasing it as that on my blog."

Stephanie seems to strike a chord with people — especially women — of all circumstances. One of NieNie's readers, Julie Nielson (no relation to Stephanie), says, "I was really touched by what I read. I'm not married and I don't have children, but I love how Stephanie embraces being a woman as the most important job. She doesn't look down on it and to me that's inspiring." Another reader, Melissa Hardman, describes Stephanie as "genuine, creative and a little bit sassy."

But in August 2008, NieNie's readers found a very different kind of post there. It said, "Prayers Requested." Stephanie and her husband, Christian, had been in a serious private airplane accident. Their pilot and friend, Doug Kinneard, sustained fatal injuries and died 24 hours later. Stephanie and Christian managed to make it out alive, but they would be forever changed. As well as suffering other injuries, Stephanie was burned over 80 percent of her body and Christian, 30 percent. "Mr. Nielson" as she affectionately calls her husband, heroically saved her life that day.

Doctors kept Stephanie in a medically induced coma for 10 weeks to treat her burned skin. When she awoke, everything had dramatically changed: her physical appearance, having to endure constant pain and her sense of who she was. Stephanie was forced to reinvent herself. "The fire burned my body and my face and I was unfamiliar with who I was," she says. "My role as mother and wife seemed to be stripped from me. I felt so lost and frustrated. I was certain I could never be

happy again or back to doing what I loved to do. Slowly I am feeling more confident in my life. I am feeling better about who I am. I have more faith than I ever thought possible."

More than a year after the crash, the healing process continues. The most difficult aspects of Stephanie's recovery are the physical and the emotional. "I hate pain," she says honestly. "I hate being down and out. I hate having to spend hours trying to get better. I just want to be made whole right now, with no complications or problems. I am so impatient!"

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Yet her optimistic, grateful self always emerges. She still manages to find beauty in everything around her, especially womanhood. One of her post-accident blog entries says, "I love beautiful things. I love to surround myself with things that radiate happiness and beauty. Jane [her daughter] came home from school one day with a large branch of cherry blossoms. The colors were vibrant and gorgeous. Simple things like that allow me to feel special, happy, loved and most of all ... my favorite ... feminine."

As for future dreams, Stephanie makes no secret. "I want a baby! I want to be well enough to have more children. I am so baby hungry right now, it is killing me!"

Being needed is one of the greatest blessings of marriage and motherhood, according to Stephanie. "I love when my children and husband need me. I love to cook for them, cuddle them, tickle them and love them. There is nothing greater — ever!"

Stephanie understands that happiness is a choice, and she makes that choice every day of her life. "Sure I am mad sometimes that this happened and I miss my outward beauty so much. But the lessons I have learned and my relationship with God have been so much more strengthened in ways that I can never comprehend." ❧