

A CALL FROM THE HOSPITAL



NAME WITHHELD

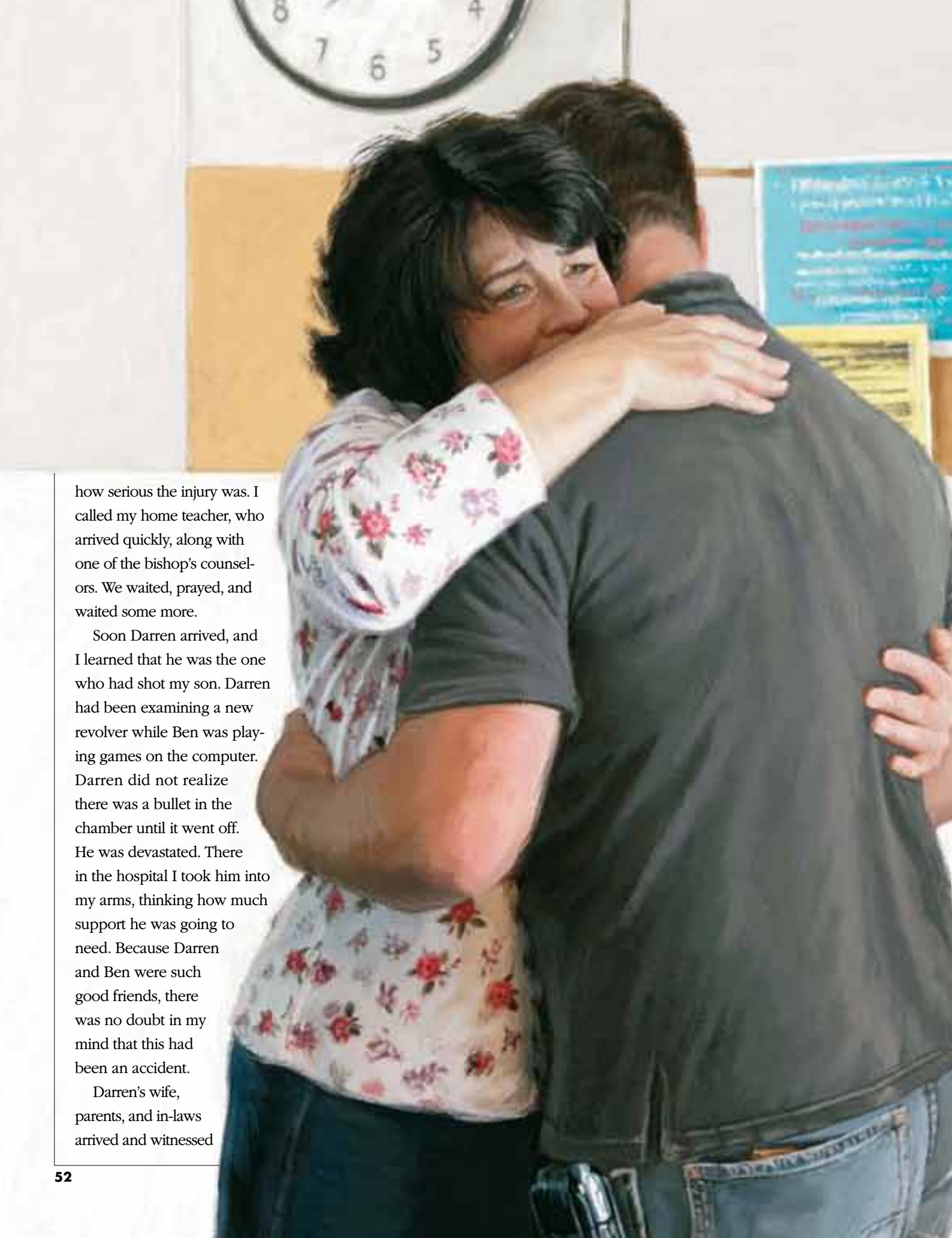
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Ben was my youngest child and in many ways my most challenging. For several years he had followed the lures of the world, becoming involved with drugs and some very unsavory characters. Finally, after much rebellion, heartache, and pain, Ben began to turn his life around. He moved back home, began working a steady job, and started attending church and even paying tithing (although he didn't want me to know that). Many parents know the sorrow and pain their children's choices can cause, and many understand the joy that comes from every new, faltering step in the direction of the Lord. Ben was in this progression, sliding backward now and again, but slowly moving forward.

Darren, who was not a member of the Church, had been Ben's best friend for years. He had stood by Ben throughout most of Ben's rebellion, stepping back only when my son reached his lowest depths and pushed everyone away. But Darren was quick to be back at Ben's side as Ben began to change. After Darren returned from a tour of duty in Iraq, the two were together so much that sometimes Darren needed to be reminded that he was married and was needed at home.

Whispering Comfort

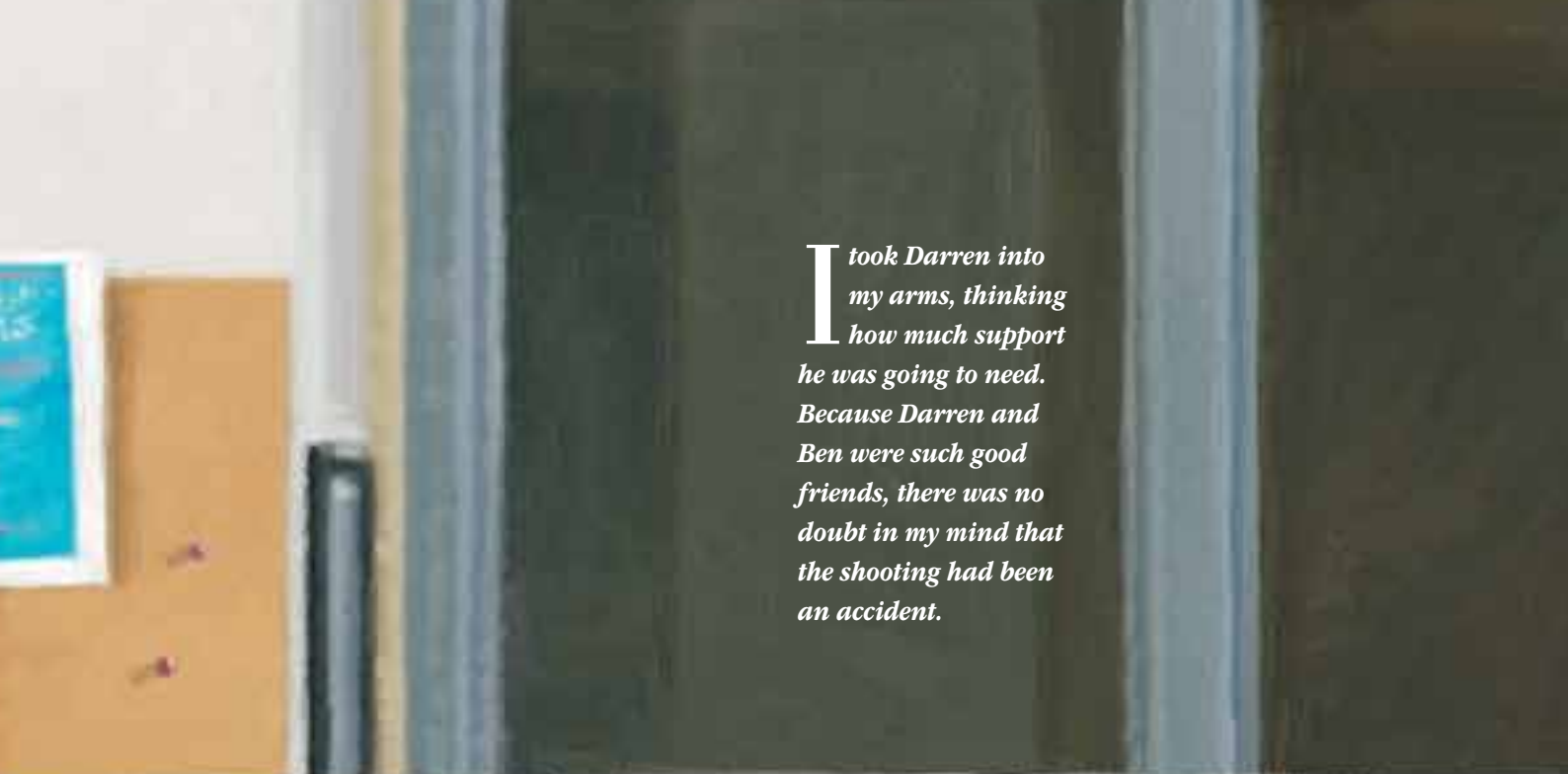
One Sunday after church, I received the call that parents pray they will never receive. It was from the hospital, saying that Ben had been admitted. They would not tell me what had happened over the phone; they said I just needed to get there as quickly as possible. At the hospital I was told that Ben had been shot and was in surgery. Only time would tell



how serious the injury was. I called my home teacher, who arrived quickly, along with one of the bishop's counselors. We waited, prayed, and waited some more.

Soon Darren arrived, and I learned that he was the one who had shot my son. Darren had been examining a new revolver while Ben was playing games on the computer. Darren did not realize there was a bullet in the chamber until it went off. He was devastated. There in the hospital I took him into my arms, thinking how much support he was going to need. Because Darren and Ben were such good friends, there was no doubt in my mind that this had been an accident.

Darren's wife, parents, and in-laws arrived and witnessed



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several priesthood blessings and heartfelt prayers for Ben and for Darren. When we joined Ben in the recovery room, I knew that his spirit was already gone. The staff gave me Ben's watch and CTR ring. I remember handing the ring to Darren across Ben's body, with a brief explanation of its meaning. Looking back, I now know that the Lord was whispering comfort, solace, and love into my heart. I was so aware of Darren's pain. I never felt a need to lay blame anywhere, despite the tremendous sadness and loss I was experiencing.

Finding Peace

After Ben's death I often wondered what I should do, how I should move forward. Again and again, I found myself counting my blessings. My personal support system, made up of my ward family and my work family, was awe-inspiring. I am so grateful for each friend who helped me through the darkest hours, who comforted and served me in so many ways. I found myself grateful that Ben had not been killed by any of his former drug associates. That was a good indication of the change of direction his life had taken. He was on the right path. And I found strength in knowing that I was in good standing with the Lord, an assurance I had sought for diligently in prayer over the past few years.

Darren's mother has told me that shortly after the accident Darren had said he felt he needed to go to my church, that he felt "there was something there." I told Darren that a few months before Ben's death my son had told me he wanted to talk to Darren about the gospel. Darren took the

missionary discussions. At the first meeting with the missionaries, Darren told the elders how afraid he had been to come to the hospital, how he had worried that I was going to hate him. In tears he said: "But she didn't. She just put her arms around me." I was surprised by Darren's comments. No other reaction had even occurred to me.

Less than a year after the accident, Darren was baptized and confirmed a member of the Church. I am grateful for Darren's friendship and the unique bond we share.

Bearing Testimony

How grateful I am for the Atonement and the great plan of happiness. My life would be unbearable without this knowledge. I know that the Savior's love is real. Alma taught:

"And he shall go forth, suffering pain and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

"And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:11–12).

I have felt the Lord's tender mercies again and again. I can testify to His loving-kindness and the power of forgiveness. I know that He lives and that I will be with my son again someday. ■