

FAITH

ONE SUNNY MONDAY MORNING ABOUT fifteen years ago, my mother was attacked in her home while she was doing her hair. She was getting ready to go to her teaching job at a nearby church preschool when she heard the doorbell ring. She went to the living room and peeked through the curtains. A man she didn't recognize was standing there. Deciding he must be a salesman, my mother quietly replaced the curtain and went back to the bathroom.

The man, whose name we later learned was Kenneth, went around to the back of the house, where our overfriendly black Lab watched him break in. He came across my mother's purse in the living room, then continued to the master-bedroom suite.

My mother never saw Kenneth. He grabbed her from behind and started punching her repeatedly in the face. When he was done hitting her, he simply left, tak-

ing her purse with him.

At the hospital my mother's face was so swollen and purple that I wasn't sure it was her until she said, "Cindy, it's OK. I'm all right."

A few days later Kenneth's mother turned him in after seeing his picture on the nightly news. He was sentenced to fifteen years. My father installed a high-tech security system and bought a ferocious guard dog, but my illusion of our home as a place of safety was shattered.

My mother returned to work at the preschool after two weeks. (She would have returned sooner, she said, but she didn't want to scare the children.) Kenneth had chipped one of her facial bones, and her left cheek still sagged a little, but otherwise she was OK.

More remarkable than her physical recovery was her emotional resilience.

She never experienced flashbacks or post-traumatic stress, or even felt afraid when alone in the house. (I, on the other hand, wouldn't be comfortable at home alone for years.) By the time Christmas rolled around, she had sent a New Testament to Kenneth in jail, with a card telling him that she'd forgiven him, just as Jesus Christ had forgiven her.

My mother and I rarely see eye to eye on religion, but her grace and strength remind me daily of all that is good about faith.