

# Book Review • Grasping Heaven

by Jeffrey Lewis, MA, PharmD

*Today I am healed  
Perhaps not the way you had hoped for,  
Prayed for, waited for.  
But I'm in a glorious new body,  
Free of pain, full of new strength.  
Free to run and dance in a place  
Where God himself wipes my tears away.*

*Immersed in love, joy and peace  
That we have a mere taste of  
During our time on earth.  
In the presence of my God and  
Savior, Jesus Christ,  
Who loves me more than His own life.  
Know that today I am healed.*

-Tami Fisk, MD

Using letters, essays and diaries from Tami's own hand, the authors of *Grasping Heaven* have marvelously chronicled the life and ministry of a young physician possessing a passion for the Yi people of Sichuan, China.

From early childhood, through medical school and beyond, it is clear that Tami was anything but ordinary. Her radar was always "on"...sensing needs when others were oblivious and evaluating the present in light of the future – her future in God's plan. And, her future was determined to involve serving the physical/medical needs of others in China...a country that she first visited while a medical student at Emory University School of Medicine.

The road to China was challenging, to say the least. Her family was very supportive of her plans to serve there, but the opportunities to properly train for the mission (medical school, pediatric residency, and a fellowship in infectious disease, among others) never seemed to materialize until the doors were nearly closed. But Tami was never deterred...always believing that God wanted her in China, and that He would make a way for her to get there. And, get there she did.

As a relatively tall fair-skinned woman, Tami was quite different-looking than the Yi people. They were convinced that Tami was not only from another country...but, quite possibly, from another planet. She willingly assumed the role of "martian", and was quickly adopted by Yi people who would engage her in various kinds of struggles (medical and otherwise). Working closely with two nurses from Taiwan and Japan, and with the support of Medical Services International, Tami was finally "home".

Home was a brutal place at times...harsh winters, dry hot summers, limited modern amenities (e.g., running water, heat, refrigeration), but her love for the Chinese people over-shadowed any of these. She was in Asia during the SARS epidemic, and served as a great resource for the CDC. She even had a bacterium named after her, *Bartonella tamiae*, because of her instrumental role in its discovery. She was in the place that God had prepared for her, and in the place that she had prepared for many years to be. And, then...with her lifetime ministry hardly begun...it started to end. Malignant melanoma ravaged this young physician's body...and, eventually, took her life.

She spent her life preparing to meet the needs of a secluded population of people in the Great Cold Mountains of China – her heart pulled along by the hand of God. She then spent what could be better measured in months than years actually meeting those needs. Even at the very end of her life, grace flowed from her lips...disappointed that she would no longer be able to serve the people that she loved, yet grateful for the brief opportunity that God afforded to her to serve at all.

This biography of Tami's journey is inspiring and deeply challenging. It prompts much self-reflection of motives, attitudes, purpose, and relationships. I would encourage you to take a couple of hours to read it, reflect...and reset your course.

Oh...I almost forgot...the poem was found in Tami's "last things" folder on her computer: a gift to her family.

## *Grasping Heaven*

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