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Week 28: WFL

Sheila Walsh

Shannen Fields

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh. And most times you see me on this set I'm sitting by myself and will be teaching on something. But every now and again, I hear a story that I know you're going to love. And so I have this beautiful guest with me today. So please help me welcome Shannen Fields. It is just lovely to have you here.

SHANNEN: Thank you. I'm very excited to be here.

SHEILA: Your story is one of hope found in the midst of very, very difficult places. In case our audience isn't quite familiar with who you really are, I wanted to show them a little clip of something that you've done that I think was fantastic. So we'll chat a bit but first of all would you watch this?

Video clip of *Rebuild and Restore*:

[Beep]

>> Okay, are you ready?

>> Yeah!

>> Okay, finally!

>> I got it. I'm Ken Fletcher.

>> Hold on! Hold on! [Beep]

>> It's harder than it looks.

[Laughter]

[Beep]

>> I'm Ken Fletcher.

>> And I'm Shannen Fields and we're the hosts of *Rebuild and Restore*. Ouch! Oh, my gosh! [Sawing and hammering sounds]

>> *Rebuild and Restore* is a home makeover show where we help widows and their families. Every episode, I lead a team of volunteers in helping rebuild part of a widow's house. Thank you so much for all of you coming out. Oh, yes! Look at you! Yes! Are you good on levels? What do you think? Well, what we're wanting to do is convert this storage shed into a pool house. And remember, this is a home fix-it show, not a comedy show.

>> Ain't no telling what's going to come out of here.

>> When Shannen came by, I really wanted her to replace this toilet ring.

>> I can only imagine what Ken's doing right now. He's probably sweating bullets.

>> It is so hot!

>> While Ken is helping to rebuild their house, I'm a part of helping to restore their heart. That's super cute!

>> Ice cream party!

>> Oh, my goodness!

>> I put a lot of it in my mouth!

>> The massage was amazing. It felt so relaxing.

>> Just nestle it in there for now.

>> Thank you so much for blessing my family this way!

>> James 1:27 reminds Christians that we need to take care of widows and their families.

>> According to the Bible, this is pure religion, helping the orphans and helping the widows.

>> Most of us don't know each other. We just got a phone call that said, would you help?

>> Restoring is a big part of the show. She was still wrestling through the ground zero of loss.

>> I'm sorry, I've been good all day until now -- and now it is all coming out.

>> It is good for it to come out and it hurts to heal. Have you looked in this? [Sobbing]

>> I could feel her pain.

>> This is healing -- healing forward. Every widow has said that to me.

>> Along the way there is plenty of challenges.

>> Hurry!

>> That clock is always your worst enemy. We need another 15 minutes and we'll have it done. I hate making them wait but it will be worth it.

>> And the payoff of each show --

>> Is the big reveal.

>> Oh, my gosh! [Cheering]

>> Look at all the crowd!

>> Look at that.

>> That's cute!

>> Oh, my God! [Cheering]

>> Did you have a good day?

>> Yes!

>> Well, it's getting better.

>> Wow! You guys did a lot of work.

>> On *Rebuild and Restore*, you'll laugh, you'll cry.

>> But ultimately, we hope you're inspired to help widows in your own community.

>> We love it.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Shannen, what a great concept for a program. But you had no idea when you began preparing for this how close to home this was going to come. You told me that one of the people in that is your sister.

SHANNEN: Yes. She's one of those widows, my sister, and there is a whole story there. My husband passed away one year and four months after my sister's husband. So when you began with this concept of let's follow the instructions in James to care for widows and that means the world to me. My mom was widowed at 33 and the way that our church gathered around and ministered to our family was phenomenal.

How far into this whole idea did your sister lose her husband? And was it an expected thing, had he been ill?

SHANNEN: No, it was unexpected. So how it all got started with *Rebuild and Restore* is my -- gosh, it was probably two years before that, my sister lost her husband. And so none of us had any idea what we were about to walk into. I was approached at a film festival by my co-host Ken Fletcher. He said, "I have this idea that I'm talking with Widow Strong, and we were just toying around with doing a home fix-it show because he loves that. I would love for you to maybe think about co-hosting with me."

At the time my house was great, my family was great, and my husband was great. We were all healthy and I'm like, this would be great. I would love to speak into the lives of widows. I just had no idea that my life was about to change.

SHEILA: When did your -- your sister lost her husband and was in one of the episodes. When did you realize something was going on with your own husband?

SHANNEN: So we did the first show, and it was our pilot show. During that time, he was having some problems with his right shoulder. He was a football coach and he thought he was 20 years old because he would lift with the guys. And I'm like okay, we're going to have to have another surgery because he's had all the knees done, replaced, all the stuff. I'm like okay, I guess we're going to do this again.

So during that first episode, we were in the process of going to doctors. But we didn't expect what we found out. So March the sixth of 2020, now this is right before everything shut down, COVID, we found out. He was diagnosed with A.L.S. which is Lou Gehrig's Disease, which is a fatal disease

SHEILA: And one of the most, I think it's one of the cruelest diseases.

SHANNEN: It is one of the cruelest diseases. Yes.

SHEILA: Because even as your body wastes away your mind is still as sharp as it's ever been.

SHANNEN: Oh, he was just as sharp as a tack. It's just -- it affects the muscles, slowly. The first thing that went was his arms. He wouldn't use his arms. He was extraordinary -- extraordinary man. He was a football coach that was not just a football coach, but he just spoke life into so many young men. At his life celebration, it was -- gosh, there were over 1,000 people there all like young men from -- some of those had babies and married up until the younger ones. It was a life celebration.

SHEILA: I wondered when you walk through something like that and kind of know where this journey is taking you, how did that impact both of -- your faith in Jesus?

SHANNEN: I want to tell you, our family was like never once -- we heard the word *fatal*, but we're like no! Jesus can do this. He's healer, and he can, and he does, and he did. He healed him. He just healed him on the other side of heaven. We wanted him healed here and we believed it until the last days. We kept it strong. We kept believing it. We kept the word going. We would do communion together as a family. We would tell stories. And all the while, his body was still just deteriorating. We were in a fight.

SHEILA: I wondered when a husband knows that this is about to happen, is he able to speak into the life of his wife and his boys -- or no, you have one daughter and one son, before he leaves?

SHANNEN: Mine did.

SHEILA: Tell us about that.

SHANNEN: He never once turned it on him. It was all about us -- all about speaking life into us and taking care of us and telling us, "If Jesus takes me home you've got something to do. You've got people to love, you've got the gospel to share. I know there is grieving but you've got to go. You've got to live your life and you've got to praise the Lord all the time, and you've got to inspire others."

He had this thing that he says "war-win? So as a football coach all of these years, you know how they huddle, and they break? They say, "War-win!" So what it means is war: we are ready. So if you're not ready for Jesus to come back and you're not ready to go or if you're not ready to do what God's called you to do to get ready because war, we're ready. Win -- to worship God, inspire others, and never, never, never quit.

SHEILA: I love that.

SHANNEN: It's war-win. So our whole family, that's how we kind of live our life. We were, we were fighting. I look back on it now and I'm like, Lord, how did you -- how did

we do it? It is by the grace of God. And his hand was over us every minute.

SHEILA: How as a mom do you help your children through a huge loss like that?

SHANNEN: Oh, gosh. You know, I know that the Lord gave me the strength that I needed when I needed it. Because I look back and I go how? How did we do it? But we did it together. We did it as a team. We cried, we laughed, and I would encourage, encourage them to -- they're always there, they were always helping me. But I think we helped each other, really. I mean they helped me just as much as I helped them.

SHEILA: It's interesting, I've read so many things from people like C.S. Lewis, to even more contemporary writers that talk about that somehow there is this strange thing that happens in the economy of God where it is not the mountaintop that brings you closer to Jesus, but it is the valley. Was that your experience?

SHANNEN: That was. I felt so much closer to the Lord than I've ever felt in the darkest times of my life. And now, I can't explain, I don't know why he's gone, I don't know why an amazing man is not here. He is more alive than we are, I do know that. I don't understand; maybe when we get to heaven we'll have that, oh, I got it! That moment. But while we're here on this earth, I know I have to live by what he's told me to do.

What he told me, he said, "Now Shannen, if Jesus takes me home, I'm going to take our love story and I'm going to take it to heaven with me. And then I'm going to turn and you're going to be there. But in that in-between, you can't stop, and you can't quit."

And so our whole family just kind of, we came together and got so close. So the tragedy did bring us closer together. And it showed us God's love is so much more than we can comprehend. So much more! I still can't comprehend it, but I thought I knew, but I'm like I don't know how I feel so much closer to you now, Lord and he's not here. I can't -- I can't explain that. But I can share it through the hurt, through the pain, through the loss that God loves you more than you can ever imagine.

My heart is to help women and men to get off of the couch because that is a whole new thing. When you go through this grief process, you don't want to move, you don't want to put makeup on, you don't want to go anywhere, you don't want to do the things. But I want to help people do that and I had to do that. I had to do that too.

SHEILA: I think that's important because you talk about something happening in 2020 just before the world kind of closed down. And I'm thinking of those viewers who are still struggling with that. Even though we're in 2022, so many people have stopped going to church, and maybe don't pray as much. They just kind of retreated into themselves and struggle with anxiety and depression.

What would you say to somebody who thinks, I'm so proud of you that you did that? I love the fact that your husband left that legacy, but I just don't know how to take that first step.

SHANNEN: You know, I had a friend that said, "What is success for you?" And I said, "You know what? I'm sitting here in front of you. I got up off of the couch, I took a shower, that was the first step." Sometimes that's what they need to do. I can't -- sometimes you know during grief you just need to be. Sometimes I wanted to close everything up and put on a movie. I just wanted to be. And that's okay too -- that is so okay. And then there are times you're like, I've got to get up. I've got to get going. You may not feel like God's got you, but he does. But if you can just say I'm going to take a shower. Let me just take a shower. Let me fold these clothes. Let me go visit a friend. Let me do something, and then a little bit more, and then a little bit more. Just start living -- just start living. But you have to do it. You have to be intentional to do it. You don't have to do all of the things, just do something.

SHEILA: What did you see during those episodes of -- and the show is available on Pure Flix. During the filming of those, what did you see God do in the lives of other widows that was maybe surprising or that touched you the deepest?

SHANNEN: Obviously, when I first started the show, the first two, the one I wasn't, I wasn't a widow at the time. I just knew I loved and had compassion for her and those things. The second was my sister because she lost her husband a year and four months before. So that was a little bit more like family in there. But my husband was sick then at the same time. And those women what I'm finding, into the next episode that we did, and my husband passed away during that episode, is that we kind of get each other. I thought that I did, but when I started walking it out and he was really, really sick, they were reaching out to me. Instead of me bringing them all the hope, they were bringing it to me. They knew he was sick. They were praying for me. They were believing with me.

But during that third episode, which was "Carla's basement," the first little bit of the show my husband was really sick, but he was still with us. During the reveal when I look really, really happy, he had passed away a month earlier. But Carla needed us. Carla needed us to finish that basement and to bring her hope. So I had to go, Shannen, this is not for you. But when I stepped into that house, it was Carla who was the widow and had been a widow for a year that touched my life. So then I could do the show. I could say, you know what? I can do this because this is not about me.

And so really, it was that strength from each other. And we're still friends today, all of us, and we like to tell people in the community, go help a widow. Don't ask them, don't wait, go cut their grass, go take them some food, help them with their kids, because they're not going to ask. I'm not going to ask but somebody just go do it.

So my husband was diagnosed on March 6th of 2020, and passed away on February 15th, so an 11-months battle. And I know a lot of people battle longer with A.L.S. His went rapidly fast. He passed away on my son's birthday. But my son is like, "I asked the Lord to do it because I was tired of him suffering." You get to that point too. So all of these widows, we draw strength from each other.

SHEILA: I love that. One of my dearest friends lost her husband two years ago. And I

remember, I was having dinner with her one night and she said, "I feel like I'm a zebra in a field of horses. It is like one of these is not like the other." So they formed this thing called The Zebra Club, and it is seven widows. Because you're right, it is like when you have walked through something like that, you're able to -- it's the way God redeems our suffering. Because you've probably seen changes in your life and it is like, I think suffering washes your eyes and you see people in a way you've never seen before.

Now, I'm not about to make an announcement but I think there is some pretty good news coming up in your life fairly soon. If people want to follow you, how can they find out?

SHANNEN: So what I like to say is, God's redeeming love and His grace has been shown -- I mean, the joy has just engulfed me. I know God loves me so much, and I don't know why. So there is a story that continues. And if anybody wants to follow, they can go to my website at ShannenFields.com and I have all the social media because it is all going to be on there to find out what?

SHEILA: Okay. You heard it here, folks. So you're going to want to check it out because it is pretty special.

Here at *LIFE*, we're very committed to providing water in areas of the world, 20 countries we work in, where they have access to no clean water. I want to share a story with you of another widow and her very real struggle. And maybe we will get to be the zebras that surround her and bring her fresh hope. Would you watch this?

On the mission field

Announcer: Desolation. Desperation. Death. These are the constant companions of countless mothers throughout the nation of Zambia. Mothers like Hilda.

Open Captions

>> *My name is Hilda Ngoma. I am a widow. My husband died this past year. I had seven*

children, but now I have six. One child died. His name was Emanuel.

Announcer: Like so many mothers in her region, Hilda returns each day to her child's killer, contaminated water drawn from a hand-dug well.

Open Captions

>> I know other families that have suffered the loss of children. This always reminds me of my child.

Announcer: Despite the horrific knowledge that had claimed the life of her son, Hilda has no choice but to continue giving this deadly water to her remaining children.

Open Captions

>> I'm afraid that my other children will die. I have one boy who is sick now.

Announcer: Though her situation is dire, Hilda's fears do not have to be realized. There is a solution. We can mend the broken hearts of these mothers and provide the cure for their suffering.

Open Captions

>> I would be so grateful for our village to have clean water. Everyone who drinks this dirty water gets sick. Clean water would change the lives of everyone here.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: I remember that trip to Zambia so well, and I remember Hilda. I remember sitting with her children and praying over her children. The fact that she is a widow, that she lost her husband, and had seven children to care for, and then she loses one. But the greatest fear of her life is that she'll lose another, and then another.

I don't know if you remember seeing that lovely face of another woman in that with tears rolling down her face, her name was Merci. I remember walking with her to the place where they had buried her child. And Janice, our photographer, we walked with her and almost had to hold her up. Literally, as she got closer to the place she could hardly stand, just this overwhelming grief.

And somebody said to me in a note recently, "Do you think in places like that where it's so common that they get used to losing their children?" When would a mother ever ever get used to losing a child? And the thing that's an added burden in so many of these countries is they have no other choice. So many of these women work so hard. They get up really early in the morning, sometimes 4:00, and they will walk for however long it takes to get to a place where there is a hand-dug well. You saw the water that came up. I mean I remember looking into the first one and thinking I wouldn't let my dogs drink this water -- and that's all they have.

But that's why when James and Betty started Water for LIFE it has become one of our passions. We want to shout it from the rooftops because this is not hopeless. There are situations in the world that are hopeless apart from Christ -- this is not. We've discovered that we have the solution. We're able through our teams of people who work on the ground and the people we work with to drill wells and it is our commitment this year to do it again. We are praying to be able to drill 350 wells in over 20 nations. We can drill a well way down deep, and it will last for about 70 years, for the life of the village. That's amazing! And that will provide clean drinking water for about 1,000 people.

Some of you could do that. If you can, if you've done it before, thank you! Thank you! Let's do it again. But some of you think, well, there is no way I can do that. Let me ask you this, could you do \$48? Is there something this month that you could cut out that maybe you don't need to give these people what they cannot live without? \$48 will give clean water to ten people, not for this year but for the rest of their lives. \$144 will give clean water to 30.

So, if we all join together, if you do your part and I do my part, we can bring hope and life and comfort to widows all over the world. So please, go online, call that number on your screen, give the best gift that you can, and together, we will see hope coming -- Water for LIFE in Jesus' name.

Begin video clip

ANNOUNCER: Across the globe, hundreds of thousands of lives are lost each year to waterborne disease, and nearly half of those are children under the age of five. Through Mission: Water for LIFE, you can give mothers hope and children a future as we provide clean, life-giving water for thousands of children and their families before it is too late.

With your gift today, you can help drill and establish 350 water wells this year. Your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for five children. A gift of \$48 will help provide for ten. \$72 will provide for 15. And \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime!

With your gift of any amount, we'll send you the *God's Daily Promise* devotional set. These four seasonal devotionals each contain a daily scripture, inspirational message, and room to journal your prayers and insights from God's Word.

With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the "Faith, Hope, and Love" coaster set. All four beautiful sandstone coasters come in an elegant natural wood holder and artistically display the words of First Corinthians 13:13.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1200 to help provide water for 250 people or a gift of \$4800 to help sponsor a complete well. And you may request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Let the Children Come."

Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video

In the studio

SHEILA: Thank you! Thank you! If the lines are busy, please keep calling. We can do this. This is something that we can do and do it in Jesus' name.

We'll be very excited to hear your big announcement. I've had a little clue and I think it is proof that God brings joy even out of the darkest moments. Don't you think?

SHANNEN: He does -- absolutely does! I didn't think so. When you go through some hard times, you don't think so. God's like, watch me.

SHEILA: You heard it here, watch me! We'll see you next time on *Life Today*. God bless you.