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Week 28

Randy Robison & Blynda Lane

Victoria Arlen

"Defy The Odds"

MALE ANNOUNCER: The following program is sponsored by friends of Life Outreach International.

VICTORIA ARLEN: When I was 11, I developed two incredibly rare neurological conditions, and they went misdiagnosed. So by the time doctors figured it out, I was pretty much gone. I mean, I couldn't move, I couldn't speak, I couldn't walk.

For four years I'm in this vegetative state, and what they don't realize is I'm aware the whole time. So I can hear and I can see, but nobody knows that I can.

ANNOUNCER: Victoria Arlen's miraculous healing journey and the lasting effects, next on "Life Today."

[music]

RANDY ROBISON: Welcome to "Life Today." I'm Randy Robison. Blynda Lane joins me. How are you?

BLYNDA LANE: Hi Randy, I'm good!

RANDY: You've been in a mood today.

BLYNDA: I mean, it's on a new level today. I'm very chipper, and it's probably because I love our guest today.

RANDY: We do have a wonderful guest today, and Victoria Arlen is on the program today. And you know the interesting thing about her story, and we'll really get into it here, but a lot of times in the church, I think, we look at physical healing as like the ultimate goal.

BLYNDA: Right, yeah, that's true.

RANDY: Spiritually not so the case, because it's all temporary anyway, right, in this life. What else? So, anyway.

BLYNDA: And sometimes when we think, "Okay, as long as I get my physical healing I'll be okay," and we don't realize the effects some of the physical ailment has had on our mind and our spirit.

RANDY: Yeah, so if this is where you're at, this will be a very special program. There's a book out called "The View Is View Is Worth It," written by Victoria Arlen. Welcome, Victoria.

VICTORIA: Thank you, thank you for having me. I'm grateful to be here, thank you.

BLYNDA: "The View Is Worth It" is actually a second book for you, which talks a lot about your post-healing journey. But I do think the audience might benefit from hearing a little bit about your story.

VICTORIA: Absolutely.

BLYNDA: So help us, kind of bring us up to speed to "The View Is Worth It."

VICTORIA: Okay, I'll do my best Cliff Notes version of it, but when I was 11, I developed two incredibly rare neurological conditions and they went misdiagnosed. So by the time doctors figured it out, I was pretty much gone. I mean, I couldn't move, I couldn't speak, I couldn't walk, and I was in a vegetative state.

So they basically told my parents, you know, "Plan a funeral, people don't survive this. And then if you don't plan a funeral, well, you should probably--if she does survive, the Victoria you once knew is never coming back. She won't be a functioning member of society." And they were just encouraging my family to give up, essentially, and move on with their lives.

And I'm a triplet, so as you can probably assume, my parents aren't one to back down from a challenge. And so my mom, being the warrior that she is and was at that time, was just like, "No, I'm going to take care of my child, and I'm not giving up on her. So for however long we have, we're going to give her life, give her a quality of life." And so they set up a hospital room in our living room, and for four years I'm in this vegetative state.

And what they don't realize is I'm aware the whole time. So I can hear and I can see, but nobody knows that I can. And so I'm in this state where that's where I found my faith, and at the same time, my mom was fine--because we were brought--I was brought up Protestant, but I didn't know God. And then I got to know God pretty quickly, because no one else could hear me.

And so in the midst of tremendous valleys, God just kept showing up and giving me that peace that surpasses understanding. And there was struggling moments. I mean, there was a moment where I firsthand witnessed God just intervening, where there was a nurse--you wouldn't believe how medical professionals treat you when they think you're not there.

And there was a nurse that was choking me, that was essentially trying to end it, and then at the last minute, she just let go. And it was one of those moments that at that point is

where I prayed a pretty significant prayer, where I was like, "God, if you need to take me home, take me home, but if you don't, I can't really do much in this state. So please give me back my voice, give me back my life. I won't waste a single moment, but also I'll use my voice to change the world. I'll use it to help others and speak up for others too."

And two weeks later I started blinking, and that's how my family knew I was in there, and then I started this very tumultuous, you know, healing journey of learning how to sit up, learning how to talk, navigating the world in a wheelchair, and then being able to get out of that wheelchair after ten years and and go on to do some pretty cool things. So God just kept showing up, which was really amazing. That's my Cliff Notes version.

RANDY: How old were you when you started coming out of it?

VICTORIA: Fifteen.

RANDY: Fifteen.

VICTORIA: So I went from 11 to 15.

BLYNDA: But you said ten years after that you were still in a wheelchair.

VICTORIA: So I started walking when I was 21. So I became paralyzed at 11. My mom opened up this incredible neurorecovery center. She mortgaged their house to open it up, and as a place of hope for not just our family and me, but for other families that were given up on.

And she's become like a world-renowned neurorecovery center where she's like, "I just didn't turn anyone away," and people got better. And she's like, it's amazing when you're a mom on a mission, but she always says, she's like, "It's God that's flying the plane. I'm the one that's just simply listening."

RANDY: Wow, that's amazing. Okay, and then--so you didn't just learn how to walk. And when you learned how to talk, you learned how to talk very well because you've been hired for television hosting, sportscasting. Some people will be like, "I recognize her." It's probably from the sidelines you've been on and some of the TV programs you've done. But I mean, once you got up, you didn't stop.

VICTORIA: No, I didn't. I didn't really have a choice. I feel like there was almost this relentless pressure of trying to prove the doctors wrong, that I would become a functioning member of society, and then making up for lost time that I feel like I--this fire was ignited, but at the same time, there was no rest in between.

And I think that, in the long run, you know, caused me to crash a little bit, but also realize, okay, there's a physical level of healing, but there's also the mental side that I think a lot of us, myself included, tend to just brush aside and think that that's not necessary.

BLYNDA: Well, there was clearly a trauma that had taken place on your body, but there's no way that your mental state can't be affected after four years of a vegetative state and then being in a wheelchair. And did you always have, internally, a drive that, "Okay, when I get better, you know, I'm going to exceed, I'm going to really be driven," or were you just like, "I just hope that I take my next breath tomorrow"? Like, where was that tension that got you to that next day?

VICTORIA: It was kind of twofold, because there were days where I was writing my obituary in my head, and also sad that I wouldn't be able to say goodbye to my mom or my family. But then there was also other times where, "Okay, if I go down this path it's gonna get dark really quickly," and I just started making a list of what am I going to do when I get out of it?

Today I'm one step closer. Because every day I woke up I realized, "Okay, well, I've proven another person wrong that I'm still here and my family's fighting for me, so I should at least fight for them too." So I feel like there was that back and forth, but there were days that were very hard. There were days that were very just--I'm sitting there, and I'm like, "Oh, I can't--I don't know if I can."

But that's where--that's where I witnessed God giving me that peace that surpassed understanding, because even I still don't understand how I was able to be so calm and optimistic when quite literally all around me was just every reason why it wouldn't work out.

BLYNDA: Because Randy's mentioning your communication ability, but I mean, she was a Paralympian in swimming, correct? I mean, it's just--it's so impressive how you've overcome so much.

RANDY: Did you ever get a medical explanation? Was it just a misdiagnosis? Surely there was a lot going on.

VICTORIA: Yeah, well, the doctors--so, transverse myelitis and acute disseminated encephalomyelitis were the two conditions. The doctors told my parents I was doing it for attention initially, so they missed a two-week window that if I had just gotten a round of steroids, I would have been fine. I maybe would have needed a little rehab on my one foot that was dragging.

So by the time--and my, you know, my neurologist years later that I have, he was like, "On behalf of all medical professionals, I'm so sorry, because this could have all been avoided." And I didn't find that out until later on.

BLYNDA: Okay, so help me walk through a little bit on that part. Was there a forgiveness journey associated with this?

VICTORIA: Oh, yes.

That was--I had to do that earlier, early on, because there was so much mistreatment and misdiagnoses and people that just were not operating on a godly realm, if you will. And I think for me, I mean, my first book, the first page is, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." Because I can sit here, we could have gone and done, you know, tried to make us think about it, but I was like, if anything, if I can just be an example.

You don't give up on people, you don't mistreat people. This is not the way and maybe there's an example that, you know, I can set, my family can set, that goes against what you would expect someone to react in that way. But I think forgiveness, you don't forgive for them, you forgive for yourself. And I think if you can set yourself free, then they can't have a hold on you anymore. And so that was a big thing.

For me, that was an ongoing thing, because I think, my mom would say, and my grandma used to say this, too, is, "Hurt people hurt others." So if someone is hurting that much that they can hurt a child, or they cannot fight for a child that clearly something's wrong, that's more on them, and that's more they have to put their head on the pillow at night and they have to eventually, you know, come face to face with God and, you know, deal with whatever they've been dealing with. So I think the forgiveness was a huge part, but that was also just, I didn't wanna let them keep hurting me. I didn't wanna let them keep having some type of hold on me. I survived, and so at that point, what do I do now, picking up the pieces and trying to figure out where to go?

BLYNDA: Now it becomes that Romans 8:28, that he uses everything for our good.

VICTORIA: Everything. And he takes care. He sets the table, and he takes care, and I think if I didn't have my faith, it would have been a very different story. But I think just knowing how he has shown up time and time again, and not that I'm a fan of revenge, but my mom and I used to joke about, like, success is the best revenge. So, they have a television set. They can see, they can see.

RANDY: And I do wanna ask you--well, that's another one of my questions, because, you know, you hear a story like this and I would be like, "Oh, she's in full-time ministry now," not that you're not, you know. But why do you think you were led into mainstream sports television and--well, you were on "Dancing with the Stars," I mean, right? These are not like the--

BLYNDA: Which, by the way, is again, no small feat because you couldn't even walk until you--

VICTORIA: Yeah, it was about a year later I did "Dancing." My family was like, "Sorry, do they know you just started walking?" I was like, "We'll figure it out." Jesus take the wheel, you know?

RANDY: Amazing from that standpoint. But why do you--I'm just curious about why do you think God led you there? Because that's not an easy place, necessarily, to proclaim your faith.

VICTORIA: No, and it wasn't a place I planned on being either. I wanted to go be a doctor. I had every intention to be a doctor and be, you know, a good neurologist, and someone that actually helps kids, and so--but it was a God thing of he just, I think, you don't get your voice back to then go hide away in classes or whatnot. And so I think he kind of just kept--because my story got shared when I was, you know, 17, not on my account, by everyone else kind of putting two and two together.

And so my mom was like, "You either lean into it or you run away from it," and she goes, "But you weren't saved to sit." And so I think I was like, "Mm, you make a good point." So I think for me it was just, you know, when I started doing that, I didn't know where it was going, but also, what I laugh about, I'm like, I don't even have to mention God.

When you hear my story, there's no medical explanation as to why I am here. So I have had the most unbelievers get curious over this God thing, because it's one of those things that it's like you can't--and I say that. I'm like, I can't not have a cross because there's a reason--on my, you know, on my neck, because I'm like, there's no other medical reason or explanation. So until you can find one, we're gonna say thank you to this Jesus fellow who didn't let me down. So I feel like that's my testimony itself.

And that's the funny thing. I've given talks where God's not mentioned, but they know I'm a Christian. And so it's, where can--for me at least, you know, where can I just be a vessel or be a lighthouse?

RANDY: I love it. I mean, they would look at me and go, "Oh yeah, you're a preacher's kid. That's a preacher's kid, don't listen to him." They look at you and they're like, "Wait, what?" you know? So, God knows how to get people's attention.

VICTORIA: Oh, he does, and he can use it in all types of ways, and you'd be shocked at how many people are believers, and you just--you give them a bridge and you meet them in the middle and you walk across it.

BLYNDA: And by choosing to be in that more secular field, you get to reach people that maybe we won't ever have the opportunity to reach in a way that they need to hear it.

VICTORIA: And just give people hope. I mean, I think at the end of the day, even if you're curious, I've had so many friends that with faith are just afraid of they're not enough for God. And then I have to remind them, "No, Jesus revealed himself to the not so, uh, not so perfect people, and he loved them all the same."

And so I think if anything, just meeting people where they are and saying, "No, he just wants to get to know you. He wants to be your Father, your friend," versus this having to be this

whole process. So if I can, if anything, just share that or share, look, you can get through tough times, but I wouldn't have gotten through them without my faith.

BLYNDA: That's right. Okay, so talking about "The View Is Worth It," though, there's just been this miracle story of your healing, but then there was a walking out. And even your book says "unlocking the beauty in life's peaks and valleys." So you had some great peaks on "Dancing with the Stars," and having a great career in broadcasting and those sort of things, being a Paralympian.

But there were some valleys associated with walking out your healing, and I don't know that we always talk about that. It's like, "Oh, she's healed, woo-hoo!" But there were some real hard things you had to deal with. How did that start showing itself in your healing? How did you start realizing, "Okay, there's more to this than I realized. It's not just my physical that needs healing"?

VICTORIA: So I didn't know a ton about anxiety or depression or even post-traumatic stress. So when I got better, it was all of a sudden play catch-up. "Oh, she's doing so well, she's doing this, she's winning medals." So there was never--I was essentially, I always say I was given the superhero cape but I didn't have flying lessons. And I wasn't equipped to be a superhero because I was 17, and I'd been two years out of a very traumatic ordeal and then just expected to get on with it, you know? "You have this miracle."

So I was never in a position where people would go, "But how are you actually doing?" because I could just hide behind a smile, and I could hide. I was like, "I don't wanna burden anyone. I don't wanna--and also, everything's fine." And so many strangers would be like, "You must never have a bad day." There was just this assumption that everything was good. And I think my mom was aware, but she was very much, you know, trying to meet me where I was, but she was like, "Nobody knew the cost that it took to get to where you were and to stay."

And I think for me, I wasn't giving myself that grace. I knew something was wrong. I knew I wasn't happy. I knew I was constantly having panic attacks, but I didn't know how to ask for help, because I didn't want to let anyone down. And I think that's a common thing for a lot of us, is we have so much to be grateful for. That is true, but mental health doesn't look at your resume or how strong of a believer you are and say, "Actually, we're going to skip this one."

If anything, there's more pressure to--you're trying to meet in the middle and figure that out, and it really took me having a complete breakdown where I tried to take my life that God intervened, and my mom intervened, and it was one of those things where she told me, "It's okay to not be okay." And that was shocking to me, because I didn't know it was okay to not be okay. And I was like, "What do you mean it's okay?" And she goes, "It's okay to not be okay."

And then I finally said, "I'm not okay, and everyone has expected me to be okay, but what happens when the miracle needs a miracle?" Because I wanted to give it to everyone else because I didn't feel worthy of it because I was struggling so badly, but having to be what everyone expected me to be, I was like, "I need a break. I need to figure out what's wrong. Something's wrong."

And I even, when I was really struggling, had texted my mom and I said, "It was easier being in a vegetative state than it is with what I'm navigating, because every day I'm feeling like I'm in this valley, but all anyone can see is the mountaintop, and they can see the peak."

And so that's when this whole journey I went on with healing, how God, you know, my mom, she answered the phone at 3:02 a.m. and stayed with me till the sunrise, and then said, "We're gonna fight for that sunrise," and then drove down and we started this healing journey. I realized, oh, our mental health is just as important, you know? And in turn that actually helped my spiritual health, because God showed up in such an amazing way that two years later we were on a family trip and my therapist, God bless her, was like, "I want you to enjoy a sun--I want you to wake up and see the sunrise."

I was like, "What do you mean wake up and see the sunrise?" So I get up, we were on the beach, and everyone's asleep, which doesn't normally happen when we're all together, we're all up pretty early. And I'm sitting on a rock and I'm watching the sunrise on the beach, and for so many years I just couldn't see--I couldn't see what God was trying to tell me to see, of just take in the view, look at the rainbow. And I just wasn't. I was so fixated on anesthetizing my pain with accomplishments that I'm sitting there, my phone's not even with me, there's nothing that--there's nothing that could distract me and trying to pretend that I was okay.

And then all of a sudden, like, you know when the Grinch has--his heart starts to grow, and he's just like having this moment? That was me. I started ugly crying but laughing at the fact that if anyone looked out right now and watched me, my reaction of, I finally saw the sun, and I finally just felt that peace that God just had put over me and realized, "Oh, I can be happy." Like, I can--it's okay to be okay too.

Then after that I was like, how many--it gave me such a different perspective of how many people that we're sitting next to, that we're working with, that we're passing by, are struggling in plain sight, too, and have not been given permission to not be okay.

BLYNDA: You never know what someone's going through.

RANDY: Yeah, I'd like to talk about that more. We're out of time today, but I love hearing your story, but I love the acknowledgement of, that may not be the end of the story or the completion, right? So let's come back and talk on another program, if we could do that.

VICTORIA: Okay, I'd love that.

RANDY: I would encourage you to get Victoria Arlen's book "The View Is Worth It." We would love to send it to you today. There are some people right now that I want you to see that are in pain, and you know, like a parent, like Victoria's mother, would do anything to take that pain from her daughter, you know, I do believe God feels our pain and sees it, and hears us when we pray.

But you know, if you look in Scripture, you see that God works with people, he partners with people always. As my father always says, God uses imperfect people to accomplish his perfect will. So you're gonna see a need right now, and I want you to consider, just for a second, because I think this is the case, you could be that partner with God to fill a practical need for someone who is in great distress right now. Watch this, and you'll start to see how.

[music]

CHUM SOPHAL: When my husband and I moved here, it was a very isolated and poor community. There's no clean water wells here, so we had to dig our own well. He dug the dirt and filled up a bucket, and I would lift it up to take away. I was pregnant during this time.

Then one night, my belly began to hurt, and I started to bleed. At the clinic, they said I had miscarried. My baby had died. We keep chickens and animals here to help us earn money and support our family. But when it rains, their waste flows down towards our well. I try to boil our water or filter it with a white cloth. Most of the time, my daughter has a stomachache and diarrhea. The clinic told me the cause of her sickness is the dirty water.

I would be so excited if you came back and drilled a new well. If we had clean water, we wouldn't worry about disease. I have hope that our whole village can be without sickness. I would like to request that if you drill a new well, can you do it at the school, so the children can have clean water, and all the people in our community can come and get clean water there too?

RANDY: That's so hard to watch. You know, Blynda, I suppose I can't really fully relate to the pain of a mother. It's gotta be awful.

BLYNDA: Oh, it's awful. I mean, I think about--I mean, a miscarriage, no matter what, is terrible, but when I think about a miscarriage because of something that is preventable, something that here we would never see in the United States, it's really painful. It's remarkable when you see the well that the husband dug on his own, and how much hope, even, a little bit of hope that would have given them, that that's the answer. And then to find out that even that didn't work, because it so easily gets contaminated.

RANDY: It's so hard. People ask, you know, don't they do this? Don't they boil it? Don't they try to-- Yes, they collect the rain--

BLYNDA: They try everything.

RANDY: They try everything. And you know, here in Texas you think, okay, it rains in the spring, but what if that's all the water you had until October?

BLYNDA: Imagine trying to capture all that and keep it clean.

RANDY: You couldn't. You just couldn't do it. And so, the solution is so simple. That's why we're coming to you right now and saying will you join us in Water for Life? There are stories like this that we hear everywhere we go.

If you look at the 20 nations where we're drilling water wells this year, our goal is 350, by the way. I'd love to surpass that. These are lives that are impacted directly by your response. This is your love, your gift, your sacrifice, perhaps, that has an impact that goes far beyond really what you'll ever see.

And the breakdown is that an average well costs about \$4800, so a gift of \$48 would effectively serve 10 people with clean drinking water for life, because as Blynda alluded to, some of the wells that they dig on their own, whether by hand or by, you know, rudimentary machine, it doesn't get to that pure, clean drinking water. And when you help provide a water well, you provide one that goes as deep as it needs to go to get to clean water. And it's built in such a way that it will last for an average of 70 years. It's covered, there's a pump put on it. You're not going to get the wind and the animal waste and the things that contaminate water so easily.

So we're asking you, will you reach out with God's love today? Will you give someone clean drinking water? Will you give them hope for a future? Will you give them, not death, but life?

ANNOUNCER: Every day, far too many lives are lost to waterborne disease, and tragically, children under the age of five are the most vulnerable. Through Mission Water for Life, you can give desperate mothers hope and precious children a future by helping provide clean, life-giving water before it's too late. Our goal this year is to drill 350 water wells in areas where the need is greatest, but it won't be possible without you.

Today, your gift of \$24 will help provide clean water for 5 children. A gift of \$48 will help provide for 10, and \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime. In thanks for your gift of any amount, we'll send you "Prayers for My Spiritual Health." This beautifully-crafted prayer book will meet you in the places where anxiety, grief, and spiritual weariness run deep, guiding you through prayers for inner peace, emotional healing, and intimacy with God.

With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request the "Your Life of Prayer" bundle. This collection includes "Prayers for My Spiritual Health," along with "Prayers for My Physical Health" and the "Life Prayer" Journal, three companions to help strengthen your walk with Christ. 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 request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "The Good Shepherd." Please call, write, or make your gift online today.

RANDY: I hope you see it, you can be the solution to someone's need. You can reach out with God's love right now. So please, go online, go to the phone, make the best gift you can. And if you would like Victoria Arlen's book, "The View Is Worth It," do request it. I know it's gonna bless people.

BLYNDA: It is going to bless people because I think, no matter--you might not have the same health issue that Victoria had, but you've had a valley in your life. Everybody has. Everyone's had a valley.

RANDY: All right, well, we're gonna come back and talk to you more about that. So if you've missed any of the programs, you can always go to lifetoday.org. We'll see you again next time.

[music]

VICTORIA: I just had a complete breakdown in the middle of the night and really had every intention to end my life.

ANNOUNCER: Physically healed, emotionally traumatized.

ANNOUNCER: "Life Today" is made possible by the supporters of Life Outreach International. Your gift will be used exclusively for the exempt purposes of Life. The ministry features specific outreaches as examples of the programs it supports and conducts. Gifts are considered to be without restriction as to use unless explicitly stipulated by the donor. The ministry is a member of the ECFA.