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## Astor's Pen

There is a familiar song that rises from the very heart of the Bible that speaks to all of us as a New Year begins. Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me; and your right hand shall hold me fast (Psalm 139).

The opening words of the Psalm are "O Lord thou hast searched me and known me". Those words have brought assurance of God's intimate knowledge of each one of us to generations of believers, and the section ends, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it". Then the psalmist soars off through the universe to proclaim the ubiquity of God and the impossibility of hiding from God: "Whither shall I go — whither shall I flee? No matter where I go — heaven or hell or the uttermost parts of the sea, thou art there". God is everywhere and cannot be escaped. That is the message.

There is no crisis ahead of us in the New Year out of the range of God. That is what the Psalmist is telling us. "You know my journey, my resting places, and are familiar with my paths. You have been behind me and are before me".

"Where can I escape from thy spirit — where can I flee from thy presence?" These are not the questions of a philosopher arguing the omnipresence of God, but rather the flaming words of faith, a faith that springs to life in defiance of despair, a faith that leaped in response to a living God who was showing the author that there is no corner of the universe that is off-limits to God's love and nowhere to go where God is not already present.

The Bible reveals a God who is present in every corner of the universe and present not just as a permeating influence, a diffused spiritual atmosphere, but totally and vividly, and personally. Wherever we go, God is there. It is God's creation, and God is to be found wherever design or chance may take us. God was there yesterday and today and God will be there tomorrow. Again, that is the message.

There is no crisis ahead of us in the New Year out of the range of God. That is what the Psalmist is telling us. "You know my journey, my resting places, and are familiar with my paths. You have been behind me and are before me".

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## One law firm's work keeps others safe on roads

by Frederick M. Baron and Penny Gold

On Nov. 8, 1994, the Willis family — mother Janet, father Rev. Duane "Scott" Willis, and their six children, aged 12 years to six weeks — were traveling down Route 94 to Wisconsin for a birthday celebration. Reverend Willis was driving the family's Chrysler minivan when a mudflat/taillight assembly, which had fallen off a semi-trailer truck. The debris, which weighed 90 pounds, punctured the minivan's floorboards, ruptured the fuel tank and started a fire. The adults just managed to disentangle themselves and escape, but the children were, tragically, trapped in the back of the minivan.

Five of the six children — Joseph, 11; Samuel, 9; Hank, 6; Elizabeth, 3; and Peter, age 6 weeks — died instantly in the fire. Ben, 12 years old, died the next day from the wounds he suffered in the accident.

It was clear that some part of the system that keeps our roads and highways safe had been breached. The Reverend and Mrs. Willis, who were devastated, wanted answers. So they hired the Chicago law firm Power, Rogers and Smith to help them hold accountable those who were responsible for the crash.

And all were shocked at what they found.

As attorney Joseph A. Power Jr. dragged investigated the crash — in particular, the truck driver's qualifications — he uncovered a scandal of horrendous proportions. Power learned that hundreds of truck drivers who were unable to pass

Power then discovered that some of the money obtained from the corrupt sale of these commercial drivers' licenses was funneled into then-Secretary of State George Ryan's campaign for Governor.

The investigation and legal battle took four years of hard work to accomplish. But the work that Power and his firm invested led to 31 federal indictments (formal criminal accusations) relating to the illegal issuance of licenses, 25 of which resulted in convictions. In addition, thousands of truck drivers in Illinois have had to undergo re-testing or risk losing their licenses.

"We'll never know how many lives have been saved by this investigation. But still, we should all be grateful that our civil justice system encouraged these discoveries that helped keep us all safe."

This is just one story of how America's civil justice system serves our communities and people like you. "Fighting for Public Justice: Cases and Trial Lawyers That Made a Difference" tells the facts behind the dramatic story of Willis vs. Transamerica Leasing, Inc. This hardback book, published by Trial Lawyers for Public Justice and the TLPJ Foundation, included a foreword by Erin Brockovich. To order copies, call (202) 797-8600 or visit www.tlpj.org.

their driving and safety tests had bribed state officials to receive their licenses.

It eventually emerged that nine people had been