

“As a journalist, I believe in the transformative power of storytelling. *Taylor’s Gift* is an exquisite example of the power to move people . . . the power to heal . . . the power to inspire through a breathtaking story.”

Juju Chang, correspondent, ABC News *Nightline*

“Tara and Todd Storch share their story so openly that you will be inspired no matter what the circumstances are in your life. *Taylor’s Gift* reminds us of the importance of organ donation and how special of a gift it is.”

Alex O’Loughlin, actor, Donate Life ambassador

“The Storches are a truly amazing and inspiring family! They show beautifully how faith and hope can bring you through the toughest of times. *Taylor’s Gift* clearly shows that there can be a purpose in the pain. I love what *Taylor’s Gift* is all about, and I would highly recommend this book.”

Carly Patterson, Olympic gold medalist

“Todd and Tara Storch are a true inspiration. Their story is amazing and touching. This book promotes faith, family, and the gift of life. Taylor was a special person and her spirit will live on forever. This book has been a gift that has changed my life. It will change yours too.”

Jarrett Payton, ESPN analyst, radio personality

“Tara and Todd Storch share their story so openly that you will be inspired no matter what circumstances are in your life. I love how *Taylor’s Gift* shows how organ donation can be a beautiful gift and also shows the blessings that can come if you have hope and follow your purpose. I would highly recommend this book!”

Roger Staubach, former quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys;
executive chairman, Jones Lang LaSalle Americas

“In *Taylor’s Gift*, the Storchs are an example of an ordinary family that experienced an extraordinary and tragic event. The Storch family transitioned from grieving to becoming a shining example of giving the ultimate gift of life all over the world.”

Everson Walls, NFL all-pro, kidney donor

“This is a book about love on so many levels. How grieving parents turned their anguish into joy by seeing their daughter live through others.”

Cynthia Izaguirre, WFAA-TV news anchor

“Tara and Todd’s courage and strength in the face of tragedy are an inspiration to us all. The entire Storch family’s dedication to Taylor’s memory and Taylor’s gift makes them my heroes.”

Ann Lopez, kidney donor

“In *Taylor’s Gift*, Todd and Tara Storch take us inside the agony of losing a child. But more than that, they take us inside the unexpected joy that comes in seeing God use the worst thing we can imagine for good, helping us to believe He will do that in our lives too.”

Nancy Guthrie, author, *Holding on to Hope
and Hearing Jesus Speak Into Your Sorrow*

Taylor's Gift

A Courageous Story of
Giving Life *and* Renewing Hope

Todd and Tara Storch
with Jennifer Schuchmann



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We dedicate this book to our children Ryan and Peyton:

This is not just our story; it is your story too.

We love you deeply.



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Foreword

My initial contact with Todd and Tara Storch came in the form of an email blast. A longtime friend was asking everyone to pray for a player on his volleyball team. She'd suffered a severe injury in a skiing accident. There was concern she might not survive.

And so it was that I became acquainted with the story of Taylor Storch and her family. It is a difficult one. It is a story that causes every parent to grimace, every person to wince.

It is a story that challenges the faith of the most stalwart saint. Why? Why would God give a family a child only to take her? Why so soon? Why her?

These are difficult questions. The Storch family has asked them and a thousand others. They invite you to consider their journey. They don't gloss over their pain. You won't find any pious pretensions or shallow dismissals. Instead, you will find an honest itinerary through the valley of sorrow. Sadness comingled with hope. An alchemy of doubt, determination, regret, and resolve.

Their story makes us think of a well-known Bible verse. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose" (Rom. 8:28 NKJV).

Note the phrase “work together.” Individually, the challenges of life are daunting and difficult. What good is found in the cemetery or ICU? But mixed together—by God’s hands—good will happen.

The story of Taylor Storch is the story of Romans 8:28. On one hand, there is the tragic death of a delightful girl. On the other, there are the needs of ill patients, literally dying for want of a healthy organ. When the loss of Taylor met the needs of these people . . . good happened.

The prayer of this book is this: may good continue to happen. May this story bring hope to anyone who has suffered tragedy. There is life after loss. It comes after a monsoon of tears. But it comes.

May this story alert us to the potential of organ donation. Taylor’s gift of life made the difference of a lifetime for the people you are about to meet. In more ways than we can imagine, she lives on.

Thank you, Storch family, for sharing your story. May God continue to bring healing until we are all finally home.

Max Lucado

Part 1

Endings



The Accident

MARCH 14, 2010

VAIL, COLORADO

The sun wouldn't set for another three hours, but the shadows of the snow-covered pine and spruce trees that bordered the ski run had grown longer with the afternoon. From the top of Beaver Creek Mountain, the view was exquisite. Todd Storch knew he was experiencing the trip of a lifetime, and he wanted to capture every minute of it in pictures and videos.

It was shortly after 4:00 p.m. when the three skiers pushed off from the top of Latigo, an intermediate "blue level" run. Eleven-year-old Ryan took off first. An experienced skier, he'd been on numerous father and son skiing trips with Todd, but this was the first ski trip that also included his mother and sisters. Swelling with pride, Ryan couldn't wait to show them all the things he'd learned and talked about from his past trips.

Thirteen-year-old Taylor was next. She'd graduated from ski school only minutes earlier. The instructors couldn't believe this was her first time skiing. They'd promoted her from her assigned class with her little sister, Peyton, to a much harder class with older teen

boys. She handled it just fine. “She’s a natural. She’s been on blues and greens all day,” the ski instructor had said, referring to the color codes that signified the difficulty of each run. “She’s good to go.”

Seconds later, Todd was the last of the three Storches to push off from the mountaintop. With poles in one hand and his Flip camera in the other, Todd took videos of the kids as he skied behind them. He couldn’t have been prouder. Ryan was in the lead, showing off a bit for his older sister. Taylor skied behind her brother, her neon pink and black ski jacket and forest green helmet creating a colorful contrast to the glistening snow. A natural athlete, she looked good on skis. Todd marveled at the sight—his two kids skiing together for the first time. He reminded himself to breathe in the moment.

Back in the alpine village, his wife, Tara, and their nine-year-old daughter, Peyton, ordered hot chocolate and found a seat by the fireplace. Todd told Tara he’d meet them there with Taylor and Ryan by 4:30. The family needed to return their equipment rentals by 5:00.

Earlier in the day, Todd and Ryan had mapped out an easy route to the bottom. They had planned several pit stops along the way, which gave the three skiers a chance to reconnect so they didn’t get separated on the mountain. Those stops also gave Todd the opportunity to take pictures with his phone. At the final stop, Todd dropped his backpack onto the snow, took out his good camera, and said, “Okay, guys, we’re going to get a bunch of pictures here.”

He snapped a few pictures, then posed his children to get the perfect mountain landscape in the background. “C’mon, Dad,” Ryan said, “we’re supposed to be skiing, not taking pictures.”

Taylor was more tolerant of her dad’s wishes. She loved having her photo taken; she’d recently opened a Facebook account and wanted to share pictures of her in the snow for all of her friends back in Texas to see.

Todd wrapped up the photo session and gave his kids their final instructions. “This is the last run, so when you finish, wait by the ski lift and then we’ll go find Mom together.”

Once again, Ryan pushed off first, followed by Taylor. Todd was delayed a few seconds as he put on his backpack, grabbed his poles, and once again held the Flip camera in his hand. Todd had never been so happy. It had been the perfect first day, and they still had four more vacation days to go.

The run got a little busier when their slope combined with another. Ryan, already ahead of his sister, pulled over to wait for Taylor, but when she caught up with him, instead of stopping she seemed to rapidly pick up her pace. Ryan pulled out a few feet after her, while Todd was less than a hundred feet behind them.

As the runs merged, the slopes became steeper. Though the path was extremely wide, trees now flanked both sides of the run, and the number of skiers continued to increase as they neared the bottom. Taylor was now moving too fast for the conditions. At first, she tried to snowplow—a technique used to slow a skier down—but instead, she fell backward into a squatting position, which had the effect of reducing her wind drag, and she began to increase speed at an alarming rate. Ryan and Todd watched, hopelessly unable to help, as Taylor got into trouble.

Witnesses suggested that instead of falling over to stop herself, she tried to stand and put more weight on her right side, which caused her skis to turn. As the slope steepened, she continued to pick up more speed. Like a rocket, Taylor shot toward the woods that bordered the run. Heading into the tree line, she hit a pine tree head-on, but her perilous speed made her bounce off it, and she propelled into a second tree.

Stunned at what he'd witnessed, Ryan snowplowed to a sudden stop on the trail adjacent to where Taylor lay face up, her leg unnaturally bent backward at an angle.

Seconds later, Todd skidded to a stop, overshooting the area by about five feet. He quickly kicked off his skis and ran into the woods toward his daughter. But off the main trail, the snow wasn't packed. With every step he sank into the powder, and he found it impossible to climb up the hill. After backtracking to the trail, he

sidestepped up the hill until he was directly next to Taylor, then once again left the trail, tugging his boots through the deep powder until he reached his daughter.

“Is she dead?” Ryan cried out. The sickening alarm in his voice could only be heard by his dad. The other skiers on the hill didn’t seem to notice what was being said—or even realize what had happened.

Todd got down on his knees, straddled Taylor, and looked into her eyes. They were dilated and watery. He leaned closer, placing his left ear against her mouth, listening for breath sounds. Then he shouted.

“Listen to me, Ryan. I need you to listen to me. She’s breathing! She’s just knocked out.”

“Okay, okay.”

“Do exactly what I tell you. Kick off your skis and put them in the snow so they form an X, and then wave your arms at the skiers as they go by. You can yell, ‘Help!’”

“Okay, okay, okay,” Ryan said, as he looked at his sister’s limp body and the gravity of it all sank in.

“Do it now!” Todd yelled. “We have to get help. Taylor can’t ski down.”

Ryan immediately went to work and flagged down a skier, who used his cell phone to call the ski patrol. The time was 4:20 p.m. Within minutes, Taylor was taken off the mountain on a sled. Riding in the sled next to her were EMS officials who made sure she didn’t code out on her first—and last—run down the mountain.



At 12:15 p.m. the next day, doctors at Grand Valley Junction hospital pronounced Taylor Storch dead. Her grieving parents wept by her bedside, and the doctor asked a single question that would forever change countless lives.

“Would you be willing to donate Taylor’s organs?”