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Week 32: WFL

Randy Robison and Tammy Trent

Anne Neilson

**In the studio**

**RANDY:** Welcome to *LIFE Today*. I'm Randy Robison. Tammy Trent is with me. And Tammy, I'm so excited because we have a guest back with us today who has been on several times. And she has blessed you guys. We've heard some great feedback.

And I think you're going to find today's program interesting because Anne Neilson is our guest. You know her as the one who paints these beautiful images of angels. And we've got them in our studio, got them in our home, and my mother loves them. They're just beautiful.

And we've talked a lot about Anne's art. And we've heard some stories but she's really opening up in a recent book called *The Brush Strokes of Life* with her personal story. So this is your chance to get to know the woman behind the beautiful artwork.

And we're glad you're here. Anne, so good to have you back on *Life Today*.

**ANNE:** Oh, I feel like this is home. I'm so grateful that you invited me back. So thank you.

**RANDY:** Well, it is your home. But while you're here, could you touch up this wall back here?

**ANNE:** I see -- I see it! Yes! I can definitely touch up that wall.

**RANDY:** No, I appreciate the fact that you've shared your art with us over the years but now you're sharing your life. What made you decide, this is a little vulnerable and scary, what made you decide to say okay, it's time?

**ANNE:** Gosh, it's been a long journey. And when I published the first coffee table books the journey just kind of took off. Everybody saw the highlight reel. It was really important for me to show that gosh, there is a lot of journey. A lot of brokenness in my past. A lot of choices I made in my 20s. And I wanted them to see that no matter what, the hand of God was on me. And I wanted to be transparent.

It's been a great journey. There have been a lot of incredible divine appointments. Kathie Lee is one of my dearest friends. She wrote the forward. But I want people to dig deep and it is like peeling off those layers and connecting with someone. We walk around in a world where everybody wants to be beautiful and appear beautiful. And you're like how are you doing? I'm fine. I'm fine. But really and truly, how are you doing? Let's go deep. So we go deep.

**TAMMY:** I love that you do. And I felt like as I was reading your book, I was really getting to know you, which made me love your art even more but I wanted to know you.

And as you said, your journey started when you were a little girl. For those of us that don't know you, can you take us back to when that journey started? Where you can look back and go, this is where I think this started in my life, that became an identity that I had to work through, or forgiveness, or just made me part of me that didn't like about myself. Where did that start?

**ANNE:** So in the book, I talk about my parents' divorce when I was probably about five. Very traumatic, any divorce is traumatic, but when I was around eight, I had a very powerful experience with Jesus. I can't explain it. It was almost like a dream. It was like he just came from and empowered my body. And I knew he was real. I love the "Footprints" poem. That was framed next to my bed and so that ministered to me. No matter what I was going through, I knew God was carrying me.

But as a young child that had divorced parents, I was trying to find my identity. Who was I? I knew I also wanted to be an artist. In the third grade I wrote a paper, what do you want to be when you grow up? I wanted to be an artist. Fast-forward, I was not the greatest student. I

probably have dyslexia; I think I still do. A little ADHD but I made a D minus in 10th grade art.

**TAMMY:** How did that happen? What did you draw that gave you a D minus?

**ANNE:** I think I was really coloring outside the lines. I was not following the protocol.

**TAMMY:** Which is what we love about you. It all started then.

**ANNE:** But still, as a teenager trying to find that identity, I believed in God but I did not have a relationship with the living Lord Jesus Christ, and that is so important. I went through all the motions. I wanted to be good. I wanted to do good. That relied on me having to do all the work and not relying on Jesus, His grace and his mercy. And so it was a lot of wandering.

**RANDY:** Did you struggle with kind of coloring inside the lines in the sense of trying to please others or meet others' expectations?

**ANNE:** I probably did. I probably was a people pleaser and not a God pleaser. Yeah, I probably did. I went on to college, and you'll read in the book -- I found out recently that I flunked out of college. I thought I just kind of got tired of it and left after a year and a half but I did find some paperwork that I did flunk out and my dad jerked me out of college.

[Laughter]

**TAMMY:** Surprise!

**ANNE:** Surprise! I didn't want to go to class and I figured out that you had to go to class to get a passable grade. So there's just a lot of like, I knew, I knew God created me to create. And throughout my elementary years and my teenage years in high school I was always doodling. I was either, whether I'm sewing pocketbooks and selling them, or making necklaces and selling them, I was always doing something creative. History class, I was doodling in my notes, not paying attention to the current affairs events, hence a D in history.

**TAMMY:** What happened after college? How did you transition?

**ANNE:** So I came back to Florida where I'm from, Jacksonville, Florida, and I started working in a clothing store. And then I got a real job, which I thought was kind of cool. I was a real estate-owned broker. I started as a clerk, and then I worked my way because I had great work ethic. Again, I wanted to do good.

And then my dad saw kind of the wandering as a -- I think I was 20-something, and so he sent me on an outward-bound adventure. And that's when I came back and I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to be an elementary education teacher. I finished college. I got my elementary education degree, went and taught school for one year, third grade, and then I started painting pottery. And I had a little pottery business on the side. And that's when I started growing closer to the Lord with -- I was seeking him as a personal relationship.

**TAMMY:** As you were starting to grow right there, in the Lord, listening to the voice of God, understanding what that voice was, the difference between religion and relationship with Jesus, did you find that you had to go back through things or trauma in your life that you had to work through to come on the other side of wholeness and freedom in Christ? What did that look like? I've read some things in your book and a specific story that just made me think, oh my gosh, I can't believe she had through that. You've come to the other side of that but could you share that with us?

**ANNE:** So there was a lot of healing. And I've said my mom was a prayer warrior, and because of that I went through a lot of healing ministry and prayer counseling to forgive you know some things that happened with my parents, forgive myself of the choices I made in my 20s.

**TAMMY:** So you found healing in your life? Did your art change?

**ANNE:** I think it was a gradual progression. But yes, and as I continue as a daily surrender back to him, I watch and see what he does. He does immeasurably more than I could ever ask or

imagine. But I think my middle name was Control. I want to pick that name up from time to time but I like to surrender that back to him.

**RANDY:** Do you talk about the abortion in here?

**ANNE:** I do talk about it.

**RANDY:** That's deep.

**ANNE:** It's deep. Yes. When I -- back to that do good, be good, I wanted to be a virgin when I got married, and it didn't happen that way. I lost my virginity at 21 to someone who was my best friend and I thought that was it. And that didn't work out. And then I would go back to, okay, God, I want to do it your way.

But then the control kind of stepped in and I did it my way. And then I found out at 22 I was pregnant. And I had to go down that slippery slope that I was going to have an abortion. I knew that I didn't want to be married to this person and it crushed me because that was my dream to have a -- be married and have a child. But the control, you know, I took control. And going through those healing processes, prayers, and that counseling. And this is what I want to read because this was so important to me because for a long time, I had a lot of guilt. Can I read this? Because it's so powerful.

So my mom had a -- she wrote a book called *The Sword of the Spirit, The Word of God*. The Lord said to her that "Guilt destroys the soul for it completely negates my covenant with the people. I died on the cross for your sin and your guilt. Remember the scripture I will acknowledge my sin to you and my iniquity I will not hide. I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and the Lord will forgive the guilt of my sin," that's Psalm 32:5. "This is exactly what I do when you confess me as the son of God. If you truly accept me and my word and repent, you will know that and be free of all sin and guilt. You will listen to me. You will follow my words though its words spoken to you in quiet moments, and my word spoken to you through the scriptures. You will hold fast to those words and nothing will cause you to doubt."

This is important. "Doubt brings distrust. Distrust brings anguish. Anguish brings fear. Fear brings separation. Separation brings sin. Sin brings guilt and that guilt brings sickness to the mind, body, and soul. Satan is the author of sin, guilt, and death. I am Lord, and the author of life. Choose life, my child."

After all my healing because it was a process of forgiving myself for the choices that I made in that control of my life. Just truly trusting the Lord that he had a plan no matter what because I thought, gosh, I'm never going to have that family. Those words spoken I had to shred and truly trust that he has a plan for me. He does love me. He does cast that sin as far as the east is from the west no matter what.

**RANDY:** I want to ask you about something because the word *transgression* was in there and transgression is a sin but it is not just oops, I made a mistake. I knew something was wrong and I did it anyway.

You loved Jesus at this point in your life. You knew the abortion was wrong, that was a life. When you brought that to God, because we had that shame instinct that is not of God, we want to hide our nakedness, we want to hide our sin. When you brought that to him, what were you met with?

**ANNE:** Just an abundance of grace and his glory that I cannot -- I've got goosebumps sharing that, I can't describe. I did go through naming the baby whether it was a boy or a girl, I did give it a name. And I went through that visual of meeting Jesus at that bench and those flowers and just letting him -- and just the grace and the compassion and the love. It is not like a rod -- he is not going to get his wooden spoon and spank me. He wraps us in his arms and takes us under his wings and he loves us, that relentless pursuit of my heart. Because I did love God. I did want to be good but it was almost like I kept him here and I was here.

And I love the analogy, I shared this with a couple of people, if you can imagine a rope, and I knew that I was sinning and I knew that that was not what God's plan is, and then when I did it

that rope was cut. And but he comes back and he ties it back and so we're this much closer. But I would do it again and he would cut -- I didn't have another abortion but I would sin, whether it's worry or whether it's you know, he cuts it and then he comes back and he ties that knot so now we're here. And so I would like to think that we're so close. No one's perfect. We all fall Short.

**RANDY:** But his love is.

**ANNE:** But his love is perfect -- and His grace and his mercies and his forgiveness! And that's what he just wants to draw us closer to him.

**TAMMY:** And he wastes absolutely nothing -- absolutely nothing! The messes that we created from our choices or decisions, I love that God doesn't waste it, he doesn't put shame on us. We have to walk through that if it's there and find healing through that and forgiveness for sure.

**ANNE:** And not hide it. Like you said, do not hide it. We all want to come looking like we're all fine and we're all perfect. But there is so much healing.

**TAMMY:** There is so much healing when we surrender that and we bring it to the foot of the cross. And say, Jesus, here are all the pieces of my life. Can you do something beautiful with this? Can you put me back together again? And he looked at you, Anne, and he said absolutely! And I'm going to make it more beautiful. And your art is going to be more spectacular. It is going to be incredible.

**RANDY:** That's really so much of what I love about your story. Is through the difficulty, the brokenness, is coming back and surrendering. I mean when you were at that most difficult point in your life, could you imagine all that God had in store for you? And the way, not only that your dreams would come true but the way you would bless other people?

**ANNE:** I had no idea. No idea. And it is back to that, today, it is just that surrendering back to him what he's put in my hand, which happens to be a paintbrush, and I do love to write but you know, and surrendering it back to him.

Many years later, I mean, many years, I've got four children now. I'm involved in a very intimate prayer group and I've dealt with God healing that part of the woundedness and that part of my journey. I want to get God out of that small box that I tend to keep him in and say, God use me. Use me for your glory. Use me for your kingdom.

**TAMMY:** Every bit of your story -- use it all! Don't waste it, use it all. And he will.

**ANNE:** And he will not waste it.

**RANDY:** I think people will be blessed with this book, *The Brush Strokes of Life*. Thank you so much for sharing. And thank you for not only blessing us with your art but with your life and your story.

I want to send this book to you today. And the way that we will send this to you is if you will just surrender and say yes to the Lord as we reach out to give life to other people around the world. You can radically change someone's life for the better and do it in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because that's how we operate. Watch this and see how you can be a part. And when you do, you can request Anne's book today.

### **On the mission field**

**ISAK:** I've just been talking to Monica and she's been explaining her story to me. The story of her life, the story of how water has impacted that life. She's got five children. But then she explained that she's lost two of those children. She lost them because of exactly where we're sitting today, where we found her, and what she's doing. She actually said this water, maybe it looks like it's clean to you, I've got to tell you it doesn't look clean to me at all. But she said, "Maybe it looks clean to you," she said, "but you don't know what's in there." And she explained how she lost two children because of waterborne disease.

The pain was so evident when she spoke about the fact that she had lost these children. That's



why she cried out to God as she said angrily, "Why didn't I die first?" I can understand. I think you can understand. If we lost our children, I think we'd feel exactly the same way. Why could I not have died first?

But you know what else she said? She said that she dreams of having a water well here. Right now, what her immediate need is, is water. Monica's story broke my heart. I'm sure it's broken yours but don't leave it at that. You can't leave it there. Because then all we're left with is three broken hearts, yours, mine, and Monica's. And what Monica is left with is no future for the three children that remain. But if you'll act today, we'll make Monica's dreams could true. If you'll give that gift to Water for LIFE, you'll be giving life for Monica, life for her children, and life for the people of this area.

**End of video**

**In the studio**

**TAMMY:** No mother should ever have to bury her child, let alone two. When I sit here and listen to that story with Isak, I just -- I feel hopeless hearing the devastation. And yet, at the same time, I know there is a solution and it brings me hope to know that this doesn't have to be the rest of the story for Monica. We can go in there, we can drill a well for her family, for her children, for many other children in that village. We could change everything for them.

We could bring them Water for LIFE! I don't want to see her lose another child. I want to help lift that burden from her life. And it is so easy! Giving her a cup of clean water could change it all. Could bring her hope. I want to be a part of that. And Randy, that's what I love so much about this ministry. We don't just tell the sad stories, although, there are many of them -- so many of them and they're real. We also tell the stories of what the difference it makes when we partner together and we go in and we drill these wells all around these different countries, these different places, and we change everything for these families. And I love that!

**RANDY:** Yeah, that's the only hope I think we have in doing this. Because unfortunately, Monica's story is not just one, it is over and over and over. That's why we want to go into 20

different nations. We want to drill 350 wells this year. We can only do it when you support the Water for LIFE outreach.

We have a choice. They don't, oftentimes. It is why they drink that water, they have no choice. But we have the choice to say no to the death. No more small graves where children are buried. No more drinking water that is discolored or oily, and full of impurities. No more no choice. We say look, we have a choice. Here's clean water! Drink of it!

But that choice is only made possible when we come together and we say, okay, for \$48, I'm going to give clean drinking water to ten people for life. That's the average when we look at the global outreach of the program and the overall cost and we break it down. \$48 will give clean drinking water to ten people for life!

A gift of \$144 today will give clean drinking water to 30 people. That's 30 lives that may potentially be spared, definitely improved, definitely changed not just by the physical water but by the love that we're extending to these people. People, strangers coming in, why do strangers love us, they wonder. And we tell them it is because of the love of Jesus Christ.

Some of you can give an entire well. \$4800 is the average cost of one well that lasts an average of 70 years. That's why we say Water for LIFE. Tammy and I and my parents, all of us, the missionaries in the field, Isak, and the staff here at *LIFE Outreach International*, we are inviting you to be a part of something great, something beautiful, something life-changing, something lifesaving.

Will you go to the phone or go online and make the best gift you can? When you do, know that you are a part of sharing God's love, not just in word, but in deed. And Tammy, when you see someone like Monica, and you know that they're praying for their own children, to be able to be an answer to that prayer, there is nothing like it.

**TAMMY:** That's why you see the smile on my face because I know, I know that we can change this. I know that if we come together, we partner together, like you said, so many of us, we're

strangers. Some of us we've met, some of us we've never met. But it doesn't matter. The body of Christ, we come together and we say here's my \$48, here's my \$52, here's my \$144. Whatever it is that you can give, let's do it together. We partner together, and we do something for the kingdom of God that is eternal and that will change lives forever. Let's do it right now. Go to the phone or go online and give the best gift that you possibly can and let's do it together today.

### **Begin Video**

***ANNOUNCER:** Every day, thousands of lives are lost 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's 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 provide for ten. \$72 will provide for 15. And \$144 will help provide life-giving water for 30 people for a lifetime!*

*With a gift of any amount, we'll send you Daughter, written by James and Betty's granddaughter, Laney Rene. This insightful book invites all girls and women to walk in the freedom of their God-given identity and embrace who they really are.*

*With your gift of \$100 or more, you may request the "Great is the Lord" decorative blanket featuring the words of Psalm 145:3. This beautiful blanket is perfect for comfort and cold weather and a reminder of your help with Water for LIFE.*

*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 new bronze sculpture, "A Cup of Water," inspired by Jesus' words in Mark 9:41.*

*Please call, write, or make your gift online.*

**End of video**

**In the studio**

**RANDY:** We do hope you'll be a part of Mission: Water for LIFE. It's a beautiful thing. You can have such an impact! And Anne's book will impact you or maybe someone else in your life as a gift. I hope people will request it today when they make their gift towards Water for LIFE.

**TAMMY:** Yeah, make sure to do that. I promise you, you will love this book. I have loved it and I loved getting to know you, not just as the artist but as the person. God bless you for every step you've taken, for every stroke you've made, it has changed so many lives, especially yours, I know. We love you.

And we love you. Thank you so much for watching *Life Today*. We'll see you next time.