

Praise for *She Laughs*

“While I expected to laugh my way through Carolanne Miljavac’s latest offering, I didn’t anticipate the wealth of hard-earned insight and biblical wisdom coming from one of my favorite funny young women, all delivered without a filter in sight to better serve those living and learning with her. Well done, friend. Honored to co-labor with you in this glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.”

–Shellie Rushing Tomlinson, author of
Finding Deep and Wide

“I read Carolanne’s book in the midst of a mental breakdown. I had been trying to control everything around me and seemed to have lost myself in the process. Not only did I find myself laughing and relating to Carolanne’s hilarious stories (like hobbling around with dog and husband pee on her feet), but her ability to laugh through the chaos and learn from each situation taught me that it’s okay to trust in something bigger than me and enjoy the ride, even when I’m not sure where it’s headed. This book came at the perfect time.”

–Tiffany Jenkins of “Juggling the Jenkins,”
author of *High Achiever*, influencer, podcast
host, and advocate for life after addiction

“The Bible says a joyful heart and laughter are good medicine, and *She Laughs* is definitely ibuprofen for the soul. It’s inspirational, biblically sound, and downright funny. I know it will bless readers in whatever season they find themselves.”

–Susannah Lewis of *Whoa Susannah*,
author of *Can’t Make This Stuff Up*

“I laughed out loud so many times. Her writing feels like I’m sitting at a coffee shop with my best friend feeling so comfortable and understood.”

–Adley Stump, *The Adley Show*

She Laughs

CHOOSING FAITH OVER FEAR

CAROLANNE MILJAVAC

SHILOH RUN  PRESS

An Imprint of Barbour Publishing, Inc.

© 2020 by Carolanne Miljavac

Print ISBN 978-1-68322-980-3

eBook Editions:

Adobe Digital Edition (.epub) 978-1-64352-565-5

Kindle and MobiPocket Edition (.prc) 978-1-64352-566-2

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted for commercial purposes, except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without written permission of the publisher.

Churches and other noncommercial interests may reproduce portions of this book without the express written permission of Barbour Publishing, provided that the text does not exceed 500 words or 5 percent of the entire book, whichever is less, and that the text is not material quoted from another publisher. When reproducing text from this book, include the following credit line: “From *She Laughs: Choosing Faith over Fear*, published by Barbour Publishing, Inc. Used by permission.”

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*. New Living Translation copyright© 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Cover Design: Greg Jackson, Thinkpen Design

Published by Shiloh Run Press, an imprint of Barbour Publishing, Inc., 1810 Barbour Drive, Uhrichsville, Ohio 44683, www.shilohrunpress.com

Our mission is to inspire the world with the life-changing message of the Bible.



Printed in the United States of America.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
ANSLEY ABIGAIL SMITH

CONTENTS

Introduction	9
Chapter 1: She Is Restored	11
Chapter 2: She Plays	33
Chapter 3: She Speaks	55
Chapter 4: She Fails	75
Chapter 5: She's Humbled.	95
Chapter 6: She Listens.	121
Chapter 7: She Breaks	139
Chapter 8: She Forgives.	163
Chapter 9: She's a Mess	183
Chapter 10: She Laughs	201

INTRODUCTION

She is clothed with strength and dignity,
and she laughs without fear of the future.

PROVERBS 31:25

We live in a culture overwhelmed with knowledge. Anything we wanna know, all we gotta do is ask Siri or Alexa. . .or if you're an eighties baby like me, you might still manually google it with your fingertips. Wanna know a play-by-play of your high school crush? I don't, but I'm just sayin' if *you* do, it's probably a quick glance at MyFace, InstaChat, SnapTok, or a Tweeter away. Hey, what's this rash on my kid's arm? Oh, okay, it could be carpet burn, could be a flesh-eating virus. Thanks, internets, I feel much better. We know almost everyone's each and every thought, opinion, annoyance, political stance, food preference, bathroom schedule, parenting dos and you-better-nots, financial status, et cetera, et cetera. (Sidenote: How in the world with all of this information does my husband still not know what I want from Subway?)

With all of this info overload, does anyone else find

themselves running in circles confused, conflicted, overwhelmed, doubtful, worried, anxious, and worst of all, *afraid*? But scripture says, “She laughs.” This Proverbs woman we all aspire to be laughs fearlessly. I want what she has. I want to have peace. How can I get a little closer to making *she* . . . *me*? In certain seasons of life, you may feel like you’ve lost her. But I promise she is always there. I’ll tell you what I’ve learned about her through my own journey of hilarious stories. I pray it will help you laugh again. A woman who has joy has peace in her heart. As long as you have the ability to laugh, there’s hope for joy in your future.

Chapter 1



SHE IS RESTORED

I trust in you, my God! Do not let me be disgraced,
or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat.

PSALM 25:2

I woke up late as usual to the sound of my mama threatening my life if I stayed in bed one minute longer: “*Git up and git ready before I drag you out of bed by your ankle bone!*” I had already managed by 7:30 a.m. to shatter any hopes my mom had that day of keeping her joy, living in peace, and not yelling. (Don’t worry, I have three little girls now, so I’m “payin’ for my raisin’,” as we say in the South.) Turns out this was one of those days when none of my three pairs of underwears were clean, so I just had to go commando. Meh, no biggie. Not something I stressed about. So I slipped on my loose-fitting, tie-string, popular-from-The-Gap pants my friend gave me that could easily slip down and accidentally show my crack. . . because what’s the worst that could happen?

Backstory: It’s homecoming week, so at the end of every day, the whole high school gathers in the gym for a pep rally. The cheerleaders shake their rear ends in the football players’ faces, the football players sit back

elbowing each other like, “Dude. Cheerleaders. Butts. Britney Spears. Yes, dude.” And there was always a crazy-funny game where two people from each grade were called out to the middle of the gym to compete for their class. As I sat in sixth period getting ready to head to the pep rally, I got some sixth sense that my period was about to make an unexpected appearance. Just so y’all know, I was the class clown but not popular. I wasn’t secure in myself. I didn’t have any good friends in that sixth-period class, so I tried to just take care of things myself instead of asking for help. I rushed to the bathroom and, sure ’nuff, it was a code red. Good ol’ Aunt Flo decided to drop in early to ruin my whole life. Obviously, like any stressed-out genius fourteen-year-old girl would, I decided to just roll up a pound of toilet paper and put it in my pants to hold me over until I could get to a tampon or a pad. Except on this one day, I didn’t have any underwear on, and I was wearing loose-fitting pants. Face palm. I was all alone in the gym bathroom stall sweating, trying to breathe, telling myself not to panic. *You got this, Carolanne. You can just walk with your legs as close together as possible and sit still until the pep rally is over. Yeah, good plan, you can do this.* So I walked nonchalantly out of the bathroom like I just had a

colonoscopy, cool as a cucumber, nothing to see here, and took a seat on the bleachers closest to the door. They started to call out the names for the pep rally game. One boy and one girl from each grade. It dawned on me in that moment that there was actually a small chance I could be the name called out. But that had never ever happened before. So I just started thinking over and over, *Don't say me. Don't say me. Don't say me.* It turns out I have an ability to will things to happen with my thoughts, because I'll be derved if of all the days this could have happened, they didn't call out, "Representing the freshmen girls, Carol Upton!" The entire freshman class looked over at me, clapping, cheering, laughing, and pushing me out there. My entire body got hot as I Gumby-walked out into the middle of the gym floor with my guy partner, hoping and praying the game wouldn't involve running. My thighs squeezed so tight a crowbar couldn't break 'em open. I looked around smiling like, *Yeah, we got this, we're gonna win, and I don't have period paper holding on for dear life in my pants, I swear.* They announced that we were going to have a dance-off. A dance-off, y'all. Blindfolded. With your partner. (Guess embarrassing dancing has always been a part of my story, considering most of you know

me from the infamous “Push It” video.) Next thing I know, I’m blindfolded in the middle of the gym, getting awkwardly dipped and twirled, while a huge wad of bloody toilet paper slowly creeps down my pant leg. I had my blindfold, so I could see out of the bottom of it for when the inevitable happened. While everyone in the gym watched us dance hilariously blindfolded, what they didn’t see was me tapping into my inner Sherlock Holmes configuring a TP situation plan in the midst of music, cheers, and chaos. Just as I felt the paper make its way past my ankle to the top of my shoe, I pulled my partner down to dip me to the floor and in one fluid motion I swooped up the paper wad and shoved it in my pocket. *Victory is mine!* Except my blindfolded partner’s pinky got caught in the loop of my drawstring pants, pulling them down with the unexpected dip just enough to reveal my bare-naked butt to God and all my peers. Which is why nobody noticed me shoving the TP into my pocket.

The Lord works in mysterious ways, doesn’t He? If a bare-butt distraction is what it takes, then so be it. I think that is easier to live with than period paper in the middle of the gym floor. I did what I always do and laughed it off with everyone like, “Hey if anyone missed

it, I'll moon y'all again tomorrow." Hardy-har. All the while my thoughts raced frantically: *My naked butt. My buck-naked butt. They all saw it. Wonder if they thought it was a good butt or. . .wait, what? No, I gotta go. I gotta get outta here.* You ever have a code red situation that left you in need of restoration? Maybe it wasn't quite on this level of nightmare embarrassment, but I'm sure you've had plenty of experiences that left you feeling like hiding under a rock for a while. If there's one way to recover from complete humiliation, it's an ability to laugh about it.

That wasn't the first time I embarrassed myself in a gym full of classmates.

The gym is packed at Maddox Middle School for our first basketball game of the season, and *I Am Pumped*. It only took me until eighth grade to finally muster up the courage to take my ridiculous b-ball skills from my granny's driveway to an actual court. I just wasn't sure the team would be prepared for all this talent. I mean, ask my mama, I sink it nothing but net from halfway across PawPaw's yard forty percent of the time—every single time. Apparently in a real game, there are rules, plays, and other things than just shooting—like dribbling and stuff. Those things didn't

come as easily to me, so for our first game, I started off on the bench. Totally fine. No worries at all. It wasn't like I wanted to waltz in with all this natural talent and take a starting position from one of the girls who had been playing all her life. So I sat on the edge of the bench, heart pounding, waiting for Coach to give me a chance to show him what I could do. Finally, he turns to me and says, "Carol! Sub in for Sam." *Oh, okay, this is it, it's happening!* I immediately shot off the bench, sprinted straight out onto the court, and stopped the game midplay, announcing to Sam that she's out, I'm in. My time to shine. Take a seat. Party's here. Everyone, including the ref, just stood there staring at me with a look of confusion mixed with a stifled chuckle. *Um, what is happening? What did I do?* Something embarrassing, I could feel it. I turned to look at my coach, and he was motioning for me to come back while grinning ear to ear. Nobody ever told me you had to wait on the side for the ref to check you in when it's time. As I took my jog of shame back to the check-in spot, I could feel every person in the gym looking and laughing at my failed attempt at playing in my first-ever basketball game.

Or how about the other time I rammed my

forehead into a metal flagpole right in front of my crush? Yeah. In junior college. I was trying to be all flirty and cute while walking into the school building by turning around to look at him and smiling with my long, flowing hair fluttering in the wind. My slow-mo love gaze was working too, until I turned around only to plow my face right into the flagpole so hard that my head bounced back and the pole sounded off a loud *diiiiing*. Pretty sure he was grinning back at me because he knew I was about to walk into that pole. Jerk. I had to sit through class holding an ice pack on the red lump growing out of my forehead. I actually hurt myself trying to flirt. You'd think I would have learned not to look at this guy after almost running my car into the ditch in front of the baseball players' apartments on my way to class when he walked out shirtless. I didn't mean to turn the whole wheel with the turning of my head. These days kids endanger others while texting and driving; back in my day, we got distracted by real-life muscles.

Humiliation isn't always a funny story. It's not just a red face when you walk into a flagpole. It's also how you feel when you've been overlooked, pushed aside, or outright rejected. Has there been a time in your life when you weren't chosen, and it chipped away at your value?

Maybe in a relationship, friendship, or promotion? Or maybe your brand-new puppy only snuggles with your roommates. It hurts and leaves your worth in need of restoring.

Picture this. A little girl about six years old staring out the large front window of the hair salon where her mama works, watching every single car drive through the stop light. Each old truck with a blinker sparks a hopeful flutter in her heart before it passes on by. She sits like this for hours until her mom comes over to tell her, “Your dad isn’t coming.”

There were a lot of days he didn’t come. When a parent seems to be indifferent about spending time with you, it really crushes your self-worth. Parents are supposed to be the two humans you can always count on for love. A safety net of acceptance. No matter how hard my mom tried to play both parts when I was a child, it could never cancel out the pain my dad’s decisions planted deep in my heart. What that seed said to me was this: *You’re not good enough*. As I grew older, the fear of that heartbreak grew stronger. The chance that I wouldn’t be good enough kept me to myself. The crushing confirmation that I wasn’t significant became something I avoided at all costs. It got so entangled in my thoughts

that I truly felt I'd never overcome it.

From fourth grade to seventh grade, I decided it would be easier to just keep to myself and get through each day than to risk being rejected in any way. Nothing felt more humiliating to me than rejection. I scared myself straight into seclusion. It wasn't risky; it was easy. And although it was lonely, it was my choice. I would watch the other kids in my class seem to be able to just naturally express themselves. I found that so frustrating. I couldn't speak without first imagining all the many ways people might react to me. Would they agree, laugh, respond, or—the worst thing possible—ignore me? The idea of saying something among my peers and being completely ignored terrified me, because that would mean I wasn't worthy enough to even be acknowledged. That I might as well not even exist. So as I sat quietly in the corner of math class, so in my own head that I couldn't even look at anyone, I wondered, *Why am I like this?*

Once a stronghold of insecurity gets into your head, it is really tough to overcome. You just feel like you can't help it. Your thoughts and feelings seem out of control. And that was it. Control. I was trying so hard to be in control by choosing to hide. But I realized that in

hiding, I wasn't in control at all. My fears were. Hypothetical reactions that could maybe possibly happen were putting me in a corner. It was only in the middle of one embarrassing moment after another that I realized nothing was in my control. So what was the point? I wasn't happy overthinking all alone. I wouldn't be happy if people didn't like me either, but at least I would have given myself a chance. If I opened my mouth and found myself in a "funny or flight" situation, I was gonna choose to laugh. Because laughter is contagious, and surely someone at some point would join me. That's how choosing to see the humor restores us. It helps us be brave enough to set aside worries and show up, insecurities and all.

What is it about rejection that you are afraid of? Is it a pride thing? Is it a people thing? Is it a skill set thing? Is it an idea that you just know is good, but *they* might not validate it? Is it a job you want so bad because you just know you were made for it, but *they* might not see your potential?

Who is this "they" who might reject you and ruin your whole purpose of existence? If *they* aren't God. . . Oh, this is about to get good. If *they* are not Him, then *they* do not matter. He does not reject you. He does not

turn away from you. He knows your value.

And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory. What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? (Romans 8:30-31)

This scripture confirms that God gave you a destiny before you were even born. Before anyone heard the flutter of your heart, you were already called. Wow. How does that feel? To know that your worth has already been written, your purpose justified. Would you still be scared if you believed that rejection of the world only brings you closer to the glory of God's plan for your life? Who could possibly keep you in a corner, when He who knit you in your mother's womb says you have a purpose? Knowing that scripture and walking in that scripture are two very different things. You have to believe it. Your absent dad, peers, coworkers, ex-boyfriends, and worst enemies do not determine your value. Who can reject you when you've been accepted into the University of Jesus through mercy and grace? They can turn

you down, sure. They can tell you no. They can walk away, break promises, shut doors, and hurt your feelings. But He will heal your heart and show you a better way—away from *they*. The Holy Spirit will overwhelm every rejection of your flesh. The door they closed just allowed you to focus on the one God was about to open. The no they just said got you closer to a better yes. Those who walked away weren't supposed to be there in the first place. Rejection simply sets you off in a different direction. Sometimes it takes a detour to get where you're going with a fresh perspective, so when you arrive, you're ready to serve in a way you weren't previously prepared for. You can laugh when they close a door, because every bit of value they denied will be restored. Keep your faith and one day you'll look back and laugh at how glad you are that the job, relationship, or opportunity you thought you wanted didn't pan out. What does that look like in your life right now? Is there something that didn't work out in your past that set up the path to a much better door in your future?

Do you know that even when things are not okay today, there will come a time when you will be okay again?

You will be okay.

You are okay.

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. (Romans 8:28)

That verse doesn't say "we *think*" or "we *hope*"—it says we *know*. I want you to think of the hardest thing you have ever been through in your past. Do you remember a situation that felt truly hopeless? I can't tell you how many times I've thought to myself, *I don't know how we are going to make it through this*, or *What are we going to do?* Sitting up late at night worrying my sanity away because I didn't think praying would matter.

As a girl, I could glimpse a future for myself, but I also feared failure. I feared rejection.

I'm not a fan of disappointing people. I mean, the whole reason I fell in love with comedy as a child was because it helped me feel accepted. I used to watch Carol Burnett, Gilda Radner, and Lucille Ball with such admiration. The way they were able to let loose, be silly, and put themselves out there while giving people joy was so appealing to me. When I was laughing at them, I wasn't worried about struggling with insecurity at school the next day. And any pain I harbored momentarily faded away. They gave me peace just being goofy. I loved them

for that. I had such a strong desire to do what they were doing. One, because I felt validated every time my mom or siblings laughed at me. Two, because I wanted to help others feel the peace that laughter brings, the way I did. I would lie on my granny's trampoline all day, staring at the clouds and daydreaming about breaking away from my little country town and making it big goofing off on *SNL*. That dream felt bigger than the sky. But when I actually imagined the risks it would take to make it happen, the fear of falling overcame the exhilaration of the calling. I was too afraid I'd fall short if I pursued being a comedian. If I tell that joke, make that face, or act out that story with the downright goofiness that makes up a huge part of my identity, and I get crickets, then I've been deeply rejected. So I settled for being class clown, doing skits for the team in the dugout, and being the comedic relief when situations got tense with family or friends. The problem was that I wasn't seeking the Lord within my passion. I was seeking approval. That need to be accepted by the world kept me locked in a cage, afraid of shame.

When I let God in and gave up all of myself to His will, that feeling of fear faded to faith in who He created me to be. Notice I said that it faded, not that it

disappeared. Stepping into your calling is the scariest feeling. Making the choice to believe in yourself comes with the challenge of recovering from as much failure as it takes to develop your gifts. I've never felt more vulnerable than when standing on a stage under lights with a mic, telling jokes or lifting others up. Backstage I try telling myself to calm down, to not let the nerves overwhelm my ability, to take deep breaths and slow down my heartbeat. It doesn't work. But I've learned it's not a crippling fear I'm feeling. It's an excited fear. With the first step onto the stage, I come through the anxiety and feel at home. And I am so in awe that God loves us so much, He gives us opportunities to experience purpose.

Fear feels pretty hopeless, but God's voice causes fear to melt as He restores us with our purpose.

Gosh, I've felt so hopeless at different times in my life. I had less than \$50 to my name when I found out I was pregnant with my first daughter. My boyfriend (now husband) wasn't making much playing shows on the weekend while recording an album with his band. Fun fact, record deals don't mean you get paid. I worried relentlessly while searching for a job. Found one in outside sales, worked my butt off, and saved up enough cash to have an apartment ready for a baby.

Then my anxiety moved on to how we'd ever afford a crib. I was so tired, so pregnant, and so depleted. Then my coworkers threw me a baby shower, and everyone in the office pitched in to get us a crib *and* a dresser, decorations, blankets, and diapers. In that moment I laughed hysterically as the tears poured, and in an instant, all hope was restored.

At the most stressful times in my life, somehow there was always the exact right person or people around me to help me through. Have you ever felt really scared about a situation, and out of nowhere a solution appeared? Or you happened to read the exact thing you needed? Or a text arrived with an encouraging word from a friend? Or you realized later that what you couldn't see was that you are always going to have what you *need*. One way or another, there's nothing you've been through that you didn't get through.

The woman who can throw her head back and laugh knows there's a plan for her. She knows there will be good times and bad. She doesn't fear the bad, because she is rooted in the truth that even through the worst, there's so much more good. Those called according to God's purpose will always be shown a way to make something of their pain. So today, lay down your worry

and lean on what you *know*. God is good. His plans for you are good. Troubles will come and go, but one thing consistently stays true. He loves you.

Y'all ever had a massage? I hate 'em. Great for your body. Loosen up some muscles, flush out some toxins, release some endorphins. Great for *restoration*. Torture getting through it. Mentally, physically, emotionally, all of it. Just horrible. I'm not a manicure-pedicure-spa-experience type of gal. But it was my and my husband's first vacation *ever*. We never had a honeymoon or anything, so I really wanted to go all out and try new things while we were in Mexico. He loves massages, so against my better judgment, I scheduled us for a nice relaxing appointment to have a stranger rub us down while stark naked under a sheet in the same room together. I thought I could be a grown adult woman and unwind during it. I was wrong. First of all, we were in Mexico. So my Southern butt embarrassingly can't understand most of what anyone is saying, and I find it mortifying. I will apologetically say, "I'm sorry, I didn't hear you," no more than two times before I panic and just say, "Okay, thank you." We walked into the massage room, him in a robe, me still fully clothed with no idea why I didn't get a robe and too afraid to ask because I probably

wouldn't understand the answer. We listened intently as she explained to us what to do before they came back, and the only word I caught was *naked*. She said okay and looked at us, we said okay as if we had a clue what to do, and she left. As the door shut, my husband and I turned and looked at each other wide-eyed and I said, "We just get naked? Like underwear too? Is that what she said? Do we lie on our stomach? I'm freaking out." To which he grinned and shrugged his shoulders. Y'all, I've never felt so awkward in my life. I know what you're thinking. He's your husband; you have three kids. None of that matters, okay? I'm modest, and these things make me want to die. We began to disrobe, and not in a sexy way. Rushing to strip off my clothes in a large open room with no idea how much time I have until a stranger walks back in is not my idea of romantic. I slung my clothes in a corner, slowed down enough to tuck my undies in my pants like ladies do, and dove under the sheet facedown. When the ladies came back, I was ready to be done. Turns out this was an all-out sixty-minute, full-body massage. Head and shoulders to shins and toes. *Kill me now*. My husband snoring loudly beside me as I tried to hide my self-tanned disaster of a thumb during the hand massage. She must've asked if I

was okay at least six times while trying to pry my Cheeto-orange thumb out of my palm. I walked out of that massage riddled with tension, my husband loose as a goose. Now it is confirmed for me that I do not, in fact, ever in any circumstance enjoy a massage. Restoration doesn't always feel good. When you aren't ready to let go of fear, insecurity, or rejection, you carry the tension in your spirit. But there's a gift to help you relax while God tries to work all the strongholds out of you. Laughter. Humor is like the oil that helps Him work out the kinks so the aches of the process aren't quite so deep. The massage message here is that you've been given laughter as a buffer through the pain of restoration. There's no heart too hardened for laughter to restore.

She laughs without fear of what the future holds, because with faith her worth is always restored.

