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SAFELY HOME

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It cost him everything he had... but gained him everything that mattered.

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RANDY
ALCORN

Author of the best-selling book *Heaven*

an interview with the author

Where did you get the idea for this story?

I was raised in a non-Christian home. I came to Christ as a teenager and read *Tortured for Christ*, *God's Smuggler*, and *Fox's Book of Martyrs*. I was deeply touched by stories of people who put their lives on the line for their Lord.

When I was in Bible college, I led a weekly prayer group for China. At that time accurate information was hard to come by: Mao was in power, pastors were imprisoned and sometimes killed, and the country was closed to missionary activity. When the fog cleared and China started to open up, some expected to see that the church had been exterminated. In fact, it had multiplied hundreds of times! What happened in those years was astonishing. There have been more martyrs for Christ in China than in any country in history. And yes, though overall conditions have improved, there are still some believers dying today.

The story is based on the painting *Safely Home* by Ron DiCianni. How did that partnership come about? And what made you choose this setting and topic after studying his painting?

I first met Ron DiCianni many years ago at the Christian Bookseller's Convention (now called ICRS). We had a nice chat, and he signed one of his prints and gave it to me. I admired his paintings; he enjoyed reading my books. Eventually Ron Beers from Tyndale House asked me to write a novel based on Ron's powerful painting called *Safely Home*.

Tyndale sent me a beautiful signed painting of *Safely Home*, which I immediately hung on my office wall, where it remains to this day. It's the one that's in each copy of this novel. It portrays a man on his knees. His clothing is worn and tattered. He's just walked down a long strip of blood-red entry carpet that has led him to the foot of a throne.

The man's arms dangle at his sides. He appears both exhausted and relieved, overcome with emotion. His head rests on the chest of one kneeling down to him, holding him tight in a loving embrace. The one hugging him has stepped off the throne. It's the King, the Creator of the universe, who is also, incredibly, a man. King Jesus.

A few feet to the right, open shackles lie on the palace floor. The man had been a prisoner on earth. He'd suffered terribly at the hands of those who despised him because they despised his King. In his right hand, hanging limply to the ground, is a beautiful gold crown.

This man is a martyr. He has lived out Revelation 2:10—he's been faithful unto death, and his Lord has given him the crown of life. To many, the single most important thing is the preservation of their life on earth. To this man, obeying his Lord was more important than prolonging his earthly life. He's one of those who "did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Revelation 12:11).

In the background of *Safely Home* stands an angel, reverently watching, holding out a white

robe. The angel is the man's guardian. In the stonework on both sides of the carpet walkway you can see the continents of earth below.

Several things strike me in this painting. One is heaven's view of earth below. Another is the look on the man's face, at long last freed from pain and persecution. But what really strikes me is the look on the face of King Jesus. He, too, is full of emotion. His face radiates compassion and approval. His nail-scarred hands, drawing the martyr to Himself, are silent testimony to the extent of His love.

The artist could have named the painting *Well Done* or *Overcomer* or *No Longer a Stranger* or something else. But he named it *Safely Home*. This man who has endured great suffering is safely home at last. The evil that pursued him in the Shadowlands can no longer touch him. He's forever beyond its reach, for between evil and the man stands the Lord of the cosmos, the one who embraces him and says, "Never again will I let you suffer."

How did you research this story? Did you have any unusual experiences along the way?

In the fall of 1999, I spent a week in China, met Christians, read lots of books, and interviewed people, but I still didn't feel qualified to write this book. Along with the ongoing help of a prayer team who plays a vital role in my writing, I often got on my knees a few times an hour, praying He would give me the words. Writing this book made a deep impact on me.

Who am I to convey the joy and trials of Chinese Christians? On my computer is the verse, "Apart from me you can do nothing." I'm always keenly aware of this truth but never more than when I write a book. *Safely Home* was a particularly huge challenge. My goal was to tell a compelling story, one which fueled the reader's imagination, and also served the purpose of Proverbs 31:8-9, speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

One funny experience was when I was in China and we were in this gigantic restaurant in some city one hundred miles from Beijing—I don't remember the name. (The population was only six million people, so I'd never heard of it.) They were bringing out plate after plate of fabulous food. Then our Chinese host called out the chef and stood talking with him in the corner and pointing at the plates. He seemed very concerned.

When he came back and sat next to me, I asked him what he was discussing with the chef. He sheepishly told me, "I wanted to make sure we were not serving our American guests dog. I know how you feel about that." I assured him he was right about our feelings, and he assured me that the chef said we had *not* been eating dog. (The food was delicious, even what I couldn't identify. I don't know and don't want to know everything I ate. And the seating capacity of this restaurant? The manager told us he had tables for eight hundred people.)

Are the characters based on any people that you've met?

Nearly all my characters are fictitious. Some are composites of several real people. Whenever I was thinking of someone in particular, I changed his name and life details so it would be impossible to identify him.

Though *Safely Home* is a work of fiction, some aspects of the life of the persecuted church in China are true. Were the "chair of honor" and Li Quan's wife's deep reverence for the box the Bibles came in based on a family's real experience?

The box was based on an experience a friend of mine had in Moscow back in 1990 where they were passing out free Bibles to people. They had run out of Bibles and a man saw one of the empty boxes and asked if he could have it. Even though he couldn't have a Bible, he wanted to have the box because it had held the Word of God.

The chair was something I made up. I suppose I got the idea from the empty chair of the Passover seder, the "chair of Elijah." It symbolizes the wait for the return of the prophet Elijah, who will come back and prepare people for the coming of Messiah.

Your novels have scenes that take place in the heavenly realm. What made you write from this perspective?

I want the reader to have the sense that things are not always as they appear. There are things going on behind the scenes and beneath the surface of life. There is an eternal realm. It's not simply about all that we can see and touch and taste and feel and smell. We're deceived if we think that the limits of our senses are the limits of reality. Even as Christians, we can be tempted to think, *Well, what I see is what there is*. We fail to recognize how limited our perspective is. I include the scenes in heaven in order to convey to the reader that there is a whole lot going on in the universe that we're not aware of. By drawing that into the story line, readers become more alert to this reality.

I've been asked before what my distinctive mission as a writer is. I think it's to probe beneath the surface into the deep longings of people, then to open a door into the invisible spiritual realm so people can see ultimate realities (including God, angels, demons, heaven, and hell) with the eyes of faith and imagination.

Once you catch a glimpse of the other world, the real world, you are weaned from the illusion that reality is limited to our five senses. You can't help but live differently once you learn to see differently. My life verse is "We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). I seek to help readers see the unseen through my writing, both fiction and nonfiction. My prayer is that God would use me as his instrument to represent accurately the truths of His Word and the greatness of his Being, in purity and passion.

What would you hope the reader would take away from this story?

Without a doubt, in terms of their global impact, the two most significant countries on the planet are China and the United States. As historical events have shown, the countries have had a profoundly uneasy relationship. *Safely Home* is a tale of two countries, embodied in two men, the American Ben Fielding and the Chinese Li Quan. These characters and their families came alive for me, and I am grateful to say that by God's grace they have come alive to countless people who have written to me over the years.

One hundred percent of royalties from *Safely Home* go to help persecuted Christians and to spread the gospel in their countries. This book is my gift to the Lord and to my persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. I hope readers will enjoy this story. It isn't a downer; it's an inspiration and encouragement. It has its light moments, and it conveys a fresh view of heaven. I pray it helps readers to find their joy in Christ and serve Him with greater joy and abandonment.

My prayer ten years after writing it is the same as it was back then—that readers will come

away with a greater love for their brothers and sisters overseas, a greater love for Christ, and with a deep sense of anticipation for heaven.

What is your most frequently asked question as it relates to *Safely Home*?

People ask whether Christians in China continue to suffer persecution. See the note “About Persecution in China” in the front of the book for a detailed answer to this question.



eternal perspective ministries
with author Randy Alcorn

Learn more about *Safely Home*

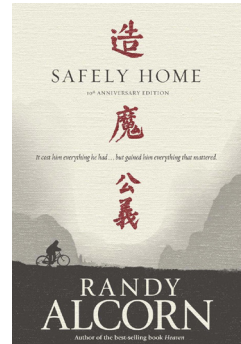
Is this the day I die?

Quan stiffened at the shout behind him. "You meet in the night like the criminals you are. How dare you defy the law? In three minutes we will shoot every man, woman, and child who does not declare himself loyal to the people rather than the gwelios, foreign devils.

American business executive Ben Fielding has no idea what his brilliant old college roommate is facing in China. But when they're reunited in China after twenty years, the men are shocked at what they discover about each other.

Thrown together in an hour of encroaching darkness, watched by unseen eyes, both must make choices that will determine not only the destinies of two men, but two families, two nations...and two worlds.

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About Randy Alcorn

Randy is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries and the best-selling author of over 50 books (over nine million in print) including *Heaven*, *The Treasure Principle*, and the Gold Medallion winner *Safely Home*.



About Eternal Perspective Ministries

Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) is a nonprofit ministry dedicated to teaching principles of God's Word and assisting the church in ministering to the unreached, unfed, unborn, uneducated, and unsupported people around the world.

You can order all of Randy's books and products through EPM's online store at www.epm.org.