

## **Woman's struggle with faith results in book to aid others**

By [Wendy Van Sickle](#)

[The Messenger](#)

Monday, October 10, 2005

Witnessing the energy and joy that fills Tina Bryson's Athens home, one would never suspect just a few years ago she had a reason to feel angry at God.

As 9-year-old Ellis reads a comic book to little sister Sydney, almost 2, while Jordan, soon to be 6, rides his bike around the backyard, and Quentin nearly 3, conks out on a patio chair, Bryson makes mothering four children under age 10 look easy, deftly responding to boo-boos and requests for drinks.

The family moved to their Canterbury Drive home four years ago, when Bryson's husband, Sebastian, took a teaching job at Ohio University.

But en route to their picture-book family, Bryson and her husband suffered some lumps, grieving the loss of a set of premature twins, which Bryson wrote about in a recently published book, "Perfect in Weakness."

Much of the book, Bryson said, deals with her grappling to keep her faith after the loss of her two boys, who died in 1998—Ethan after living only two days, and Elliott at five weeks. Bryson said her reaction to the loss was much different from her husband's.

"Where I blamed God, he blamed Satan," she said, explaining she felt God had forsaken her while her husband believed Satan had targeted them because they were people of faith.

Bryson was five months pregnant with the twins when she and her husband and Ellis, then 2, moved from Milwaukee to Chicago in September 1998. Although finances were tight, things were looking bright for the couple. He, a geotechnical engineer, had been accepted into graduate school at Northwestern University and she, a writer, was well on her way to the family of our children she'd dreamed of.

The couple found out they were pregnant with twins early on, although she said she suspected that might be the case even before a visit to the doctor confirmed it.

"We were really excited about having two kids at the same time," she said.

Two weeks after the move to Chicago, Bryson said, she began having contractions. So new to the city that she had not yet had an OB/GYN visit there, Bryson expected her visit to the doctor that day to result in her being put on medication to stop the contractions and being told to get some rest.

Instead, several hours later she delivered the twins, each weighing just over a pound. Ethan died within two days, but Elliott hung on for five weeks, seemingly getting stronger, before dying—a fact that seemed especially cruel to Bryson.

The twins' ordeal, she said, left the couple struggling with a host of unexpected practical issues, such as dealing with insurance claims, deciding what to do with their small bodies and how to hold memorial services for the infants when the family was living in a new city away from friends and family.

But Bryson said she was even more surprised by her spiritual and emotional response to losing her sons. "All of a sudden, I noticed babies in places I hadn't noticed them before," she said, recounting how she was drawn to babies in supermarkets and clothing stores.

"I just felt like throwing my stuff on the ground," she said of seeing mothers with happy, healthy babies in public. "I felt like a crazy woman."

Having been a faithful Christian, Bryson said she initially felt like God had let her down.

"If you're a person of faith, when you pray you expect it to come out okay," she said, explaining she felt like asking God, "If you made the world and you created everything, why couldn't you save these two little babies?"

Not able to find a book that dealt with some of the grief issues that she was dealing with, Bryson decided to write her own at the prompting of a friend."

Five years and three babies later, "Perfect in Weakness" was published in 2004. Mostly written by Bryson, the book also includes passages written by her husband and friends who underwent similar difficulties.

"I think we all have a story to tell; I had the avenue to tell mine," Bryson said, noting she thinks anyone who's suffered any kind of a loss, not just the loss of a child, will likely find something he or she can relate to in the book.

Bryson also speaks to clubs and organizations about several of the topics touched on in the book. Her contact information is available through the Web site [www.tinavbryson.com](http://www.tinavbryson.com).

"Perfect in Weakness" may also be purchased through the Web site or at Little Professor Book Center in Athens.