

# Football, Fireworks, and a Big Green Piano



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*Have you found that God loves to teach us powerful lessons in the most unexpected ways and times?*

*My dear friend, and fellow Carolina Panther fanatic, **Leigh Ann Thomas** never expected what God had planned for her when she went to cheer on the Panthers.*

*I'm thrilled to introduce Leigh Ann to you now and let her share her bizarre and powerful experience with you. Her message gripped me. It will grip you, too.*

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# ***Football, Fireworks, and a Big Green Piano***

*by Leigh Ann Thomas*

*Every nerve-ending was fully engaged as I approached the massive football stadium in downtown Charlotte—home of the Carolina Panthers.*

*For most of the noisy throng pouring into the stadium, this was a typical Sunday afternoon amusement.*

*But not for this girl. Only my second-ever pro game as an adult, and wearing my new Panther's t-shirt, I soaked in the sights, sounds, and smells like a kid at the county fair.*

*Tailgaters played corn-hole and tossed a football as smoke from their grilled hotdogs and sausages made my stomach growl. "Salesmen" held up hand-scrawled signs advertising extra tickets. Music of various styles and decibel levels floated from every direction.*

*In my over-fired brain, we were on track to having the best day ever.*

*After making our way through several security checks, my husband and I approached the gate and with a big silly smile, I handed the agent my ticket.*

*The last-hurdle-to-my-dreams gatekeeper scanned my ticket.*

*Then she scanned it again.*

*Um...and again.*

*Nothing.*

*She scanned my sweetheart's ticket with the same results and then sent us to the ticket window to "clear up the*

*confusion."*

*Half an hour later we accepted the inevitable—our tickets were invalid.*

*All those nerve-endings felt weighted with disappointment—I was so close to seeing my Panthers!*

*We couldn't afford to do business with the "salesmen" around the stadium, so we began the slow walk away from the game.*

*I looked over my shoulder as pre-game fireworks filled the air. The national anthem began and the fireworks display intensified. The crowd roared and I envisioned the mighty Panthers running through a fogged tunnel and onto the field.*

*As we walked through the downtown area, my sweet husband did his best to put a positive spin on the day. Maybe we could find a place to eat with a big-screen TV?*

*Not impressed, I commenced to sulk (which is not very attractive for a grown woman).*

*After a couple of blocks, my husband stopped mid stride. "Hey honey, look at that...it's a piano."*

*Indeed, there was a piano sitting outside in the middle of Charlotte, NC. With little-boy enthusiasm, he grabbed my hand and pulled me toward the crosswalk. "Come on and play for me...it'll be fun!"*

*"Um...no. I don't think so. That's just..." I started to say "dumb" or "stupid" but I stopped at the look of eagerness on his face.*

*With a sigh, I crossed the street and sat down at the biggest, greenest piano I had ever seen and began to play a tune to humor my spouse.*

*The weather that day was pure southern magic with a touch of*

*October cool and just enough sunshine to keep a jacket at bay.*



*With no printed music, I played from memory. I began with favorite hymns, then moved to a couple of childhood recital pieces. The breeze kicked up a notch and I closed my eyes as my fingers found the notes to a song I learned as a child...*

*He can turn the tides and calm the angry sea...He alone decides who writes the symphony...*

*And in that moment, I began to worship.*

*He lights every star that makes our darkness bright, He keeps watch all through each long and lonely night...\**

*The words of the song filled my heart as the notes drifted throughout the city block. The Holy Spirit began His work...*

*See, Child? The pleasures of this world will come and go...but worship of Me is eternal.*

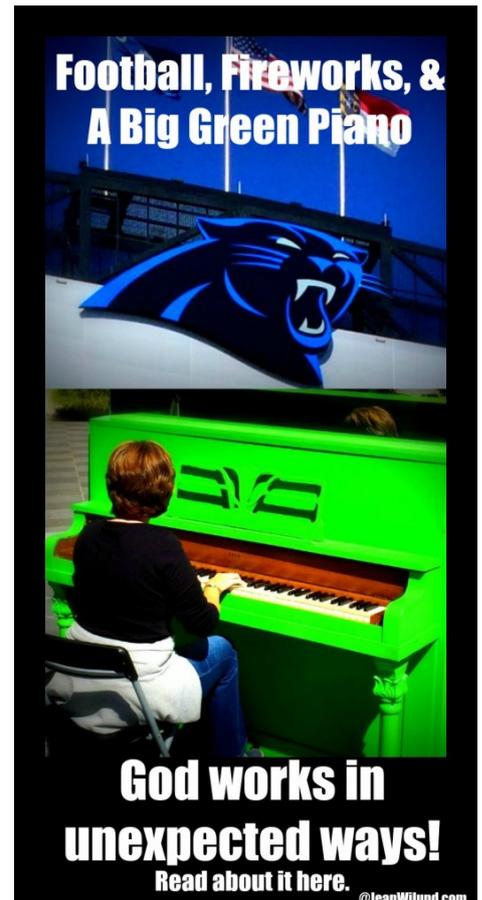
*That afternoon, with the ballgame a distant roar, my sweetheart and I took joy in the moment, in each other, and*

*in the crazy-fun of a big green piano. We laughed and giggled like kids and did manage to find a pizza place with a TV to catch the last quarter of the game.*

*I can't even tell you who the Panthers played that day.*

*But the Lord used the experience to remind me of a couple of things:*

**1. Without the right credentials, there was no way I could enter that football game.**



*It didn't matter that my dad helped me obtain the tickets. My new Panther's t-shirt didn't matter one iota. The fact that I had driven three hours, spent money on a hotel, and was really excited meant nothing.*

*See where I'm going here? Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)*

*When the reunions and celebrations begin on the New Heaven and the New Earth—with heavenly fireworks and incredible*

*music—the only way to be invited in is to have the right credentials. Jesus. Only Jesus.*

## **2. And sometimes, God has other plans.**

*If I dig in and insist on my own way, I may miss out on something better—something God-designed just for me. Am I willing to trust in His purposes?*

*My husband and I view our day of almost seeing a Panther's game as an adventure and a treasure. We wouldn't trade the unexpected joys for anything.*

*On track for the best day ever?*

*Absolutely.*

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\*Song-“He” by Richard Mullan, Jack Richards



**Leigh Ann Thomas** loves to pen devotional material, church worship drama, and short fiction. Her stories have won several awards and her latest work is included in the Southern Writers Short Story Edition 2015. She is the author of [Time Out: A Quiet-time Devotional for Busy Moms](#) and a columnist for [AlmostAnAuthor.com](#).

Leigh Ann blogs at [leighathomas.com](#) where she encourages others to live full lives in Christ.