

We begged God to heal our little boy



Above: Seven-year-old Christopher Goddard lies in hospital after contracting a rare immune system disorder; below: Christopher today aged 10, with his mum Jane and sister Charlotte, 9

GOD answered Jane Goddard's prayers when her son was seriously ill – and it changed her life and gave her a new career.

The Isle of Wight mum hadn't been particularly religious before the family's ordeal, but the care of her parish church guided her towards a new faith.

Jane, her husband Steve, and their two children all fell ill in February 2007. They assumed it was a winter bug and took the usual cough and cold remedies to relieve the symptoms.

But seven-year-old Christopher started to develop an unusual rash and swelling around his mouth. Jane took him to see the family GP in East Cowes, and he was concerned enough to send him straight to St Mary's Hospital on the island.

Over the next two weeks, the couple experienced every parent's worst nightmare, as they watched

their young child's health deteriorate rapidly. Painful lesions appeared all over his body, even internally, and Christopher was transferred to Southampton General Hospital as a medical emergency. Jane and Steve could only look on helplessly.

The doctors in Southampton were able to diagnose quickly that Christopher was suffering from Stevens-Johnson Syndrome – a

became worse still. Steve developed chest pains and, after being examined in the A&E department, he was also admitted to the hospital suffering with pneumonia.

As if that wasn't enough, the family learned they had fallen victim to identity theft. Their credit card was fraudulently used to run up thousands of pounds of debt.

It's still very upsetting for Jane to recall how much Christopher

my faith

When her seven-year-old son developed a life-threatening illness, Jane Goddard started praying. When her prayers were answered, she kept her promise to commit herself to God

rare immune system disorder affecting the skin and mucous membranes that can be triggered by bacterial infections. It's an extremely serious and painful condition, often life-threatening.

Waiting at the bedside of their little boy as he underwent extensive treatments, the trauma

suffered. For her young daughter Charlotte it was also a distressing and confusing time. Jane can't help recalling her own desperation and helplessness either.

But just as vivid is the memory of one special moment when – amid all the gloom and despair – she received a text message. It came out of the blue but was, quite simply, a turning point in her life.

"At the time, I wasn't a particularly religious person," she said. "Steve and I both believed in God, though he wasn't a big presence in our lives. In my job as a carer, I had regularly accompanied one particular client to church every Sunday – a young man with learning difficulties. Although, I really enjoyed going to St James Church in East Cowes, I was mainly there because it was my job."

The text actually came from the vicar of St James, the Rev Jonathan Hall. His message was that he and the entire congregation were thinking of the family and praying for Christopher.

"I had been praying myself already because we really thought that Christopher might not survive



– what parent wouldn't in the circumstances?" Jane said. "But Jonathan's text message was so thoughtful and kind, not to mention unexpected. It inspired me to pray even harder, to have true faith in God and believe that he would make everything well again.

"I know you shouldn't bargain with God but there and then I made a vow to him that if Christopher recovered, I would worship him with all my heart and soul in future. I also pledged to devote myself to making life better for others – to use my skills and talents to help as many people as I could."

Anyone who knows Jane will realise that when she makes a promise – especially one as serious as this – she will follow it through to the letter. Having always been quite entrepreneurial, a new business idea began to take shape in her head as she watched her son gradually recovering.

When Christopher was discharged from hospital several weeks later the family returned to the island. Straight away Jane signed up for an Alpha course and her faith began to blossom and grow. Within a matter of months her business idea also took off and Community Spirited was born – an organisation that offers caring

services to enhance quality of life for vulnerable and lonely people.

Three years on, Christopher is now healthy and thriving. And so is Community Spirited. The business now employs eight carers and four sub-contractors and has looked after more than 50 clients since it was set up. "When people ask me about the business and its origins, I always tell them that I have a business partner and his name is God!" Jane said.

Spurred by her Christian faith and promise to God, Jane is determined to run Community Spirited so that she can make a living for her family, pay her staff well, and ensure that all clients are shown genuine respect, love and caring.

In parallel with developing her business, Jane has also continued to explore her Christian faith. In November 2008, she was confirmed at Portsmouth Cathedral. Earlier this year, she also enrolled on the Bishop's Foundation Course and joined the St James PCC.

Longer term, she would dearly love to open a Community Spirited care home.

"It's a big step but I know that this is the direction that I want to go in next," she said. "It will take a lot of hard work and faith but I do have the best business partner!"

Our family business

COMMUNITY Spirited is about giving clients the warmth and care of a family, with the trust and support of a friend.

Jane Goddard launched the company in August 2007, offering a home help and support service to individuals in their own homes and also activity sessions in care homes.

"We can help with everyday tasks and chores such as laundry, cleaning and cooking, but our role is also about bringing joy and laughter to people's lives," Jane said.

"We also offer round-the-clock emotional support because I don't want anyone to

have to go through pain, sorrow, grief or crisis on their own."

To celebrate the third birthday of Community Spirited, there will be a special service at St James Church on Sunday 1 August at 4pm.

"The service will be attended by the Community Spirited extended family – our clients and staff, and their families and friends," said Jane. "But it's open to everyone and I can promise that if you do come, you will have a warm Community Spirited welcome."

For more information, see www.communityspirited.com.