

Chapter 1

How Nick Found Answers to His Questions

As the deafening blast of gunfire rang out, Nick's body lifted straight into the air - then he slumped in a heap to the floor. His legs would not move, and blood ran freely from his back. His friends watched in stunned horror, convinced he was dying!

It was Thursday, February 13 - a day Nick will never forget as long as he lives. A day that would bring staggering and lasting changes into his life.

"I had a strange premonition that morning that something drastic was going to happen," Nick recalled, a slight frown creasing his forehead. "I can't explain it And I couldn't stop it - it was just there."

Nick couldn't seem to shake the foreboding sense of uneasiness. It hung on like an Arctic chill. For some inexplicable reason, he had a strange compulsion to clean his bedroom.

"I started looking through all my things," Nick explained, "thinking that if something did happen to me, my parents would be going through all my stuff - and they would think everything had some meaning for me. But as I looked at most of my things, I realized they didn't have any meaning for me at all. I just threw them out. No need having them around, you know."

The strange premonition stayed with him. Looking back, Nick finds it rather odd that he didn't tell his parents what was going on in his mind.

"I just thought, Well, tomorrow will be all right This feeling will pass."

Nick, twenty-six years old, was a native of a large city in the Pacific Northwest - the son of loving, caring, middle-class parents. He had three older sisters, the youngest seven years his senior.

"I was a spoiled brat," confessed Nick with an engaging smile. "My dad used to call me the Crown Prince. I got whatever I wanted whenever I wanted it, so I had life really easy. I did have a nasty, bad temper, but mostly I was just a sweet little blond kid."

Nick attended military school in grades six through eight. "My father thought it would straighten me out I never thought I needed to be straightened out, really, looking back on it. But my parents thought it would do me some good."

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After high school, Nick got a job at the phone company. He had a lot of friends at work, and he enjoyed running with the fellows and having a good time. "I took a drink once in a while when the guys were sitting around having a beer. I didn't particularly like the taste of it, but later I got drunk with the guys occasionally."

On February 13, after cleaning his room, Nick met some of his friends and went to shoot pool at a local tavern. "I was pretty good at pool," Nick chuckled, "but that day I blew it I couldn't even beat a woman I shot against! Everything seemed out of balance. I felt as if I were walking into something, with no power to stop. Somehow I didn't seem able to change my plans - I just felt compelled to go on."

Later that evening Nick and his friends decided to go to the house of a man who had a drug deal coming down, to buy some drugs. Soon another young fellow came in. No one paid any attention to him. "We had seen him around before. We figured he was OK - that he was there to buy drugs," Nick said, shifting a little in his chair.

But the young man had other plans! Whipping out a gun, he ordered, "All right, you guys - line up against that wall! Now, take off your clothes - and make it fast!"

"He had no intention of permitting us to follow him," Nick explained.

Stunned by the turn of events, Nick and his friends lost no time complying with his request "You don't ask many questions when you're looking down the barrel of a gun," Nick added knowingly.

As Nick began stripping, he ran into problems. He had on high-top laced boots, and he couldn't seem to slip his tight Levis over them. Hurriedly he sat down to unlace his boots. And that's when it happened!

The intruder pulled the trigger, and a bullet crashed through Nick's shoulder, lodging against his spinal cord. The impact sent Nick straight up into the air - then he toppled to the floor.

He lay in the blood gushing from his back. And though shivering in shock, Nick never lost consciousness. Instantly he knew he was paralyzed. No one had to tell him.

Nick was rushed to the hospital, where everyone thought he was dying - the doctors, the nurses, his friends. But Nick knew differently. "I felt I would live - I just had that feeling." He did live, but it was a long, painful recovery. The Crown Prince would not have life really easy again for what would seem an eternity.

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Young Nick's fun-loving, athletic lifestyle was gone forever. The emotional and mental impact of his paralysis was staggering! As he began taking inventory of the far-reaching consequences of his condition and contemplated his unsettling future, he began to seethe inwardly. Everything inside him began to rebel. He was angry - so angry he seemed incapable of controlling his turbulent feelings. He threw his food on the hospital walls.

"It's hard to believe, but I actually did that," Nick admitted, hanging his head in disbelief. "A kind nurse tried to help me cope. She thought it might help if I read the Bible. Do you know what I did with it? I threw it in the trash can! I was hurting - really hurting. My frustration had reached a breaking point."

Tormented by the thought of spending life in a wheelchair, Nick began to think of a way out "Well, I thought, people say there's life after death - a good life - and if that's right, then why sit around in a wheelchair? I began thinking of suicide."

Nick shared his hospital room with two other young men, both quadriplegics. One of them, perhaps unwittingly, helped turn Nick's thinking around.

"I'll never forget it," Nick reflected. "I was having a bad time trying to dress myself. Everything seemed so difficult without the use of my legs. I became more and more frustrated and angry. I griped and grumbled, cursed and shouted - loud and long. Finally, one of the quadriplegics said, 'I'd be happy to trade places with you. I'd gladly take where you're at!'"

That seemingly backhanded reproach cut him to the quick. "It really shook me up. I knew right then that I couldn't continue to wallow in self-pity. So many other people were much worse off. I felt I just couldn't complain ever again."

Of course, Nick wanted more than what seemed apparent at that time. He could never be content just rocking and reminiscing about the past. He was young and wanted to live life to the fullest. He started searching for another way out of his seemingly impossible situation.

He thought of trying the Bible. Maybe it would help. But when he began reading, it didn't seem to make any sense at all.

Then one day he watched a movie about faith healers in the Philippines. Apparently people with all sorts of physical problems were being healed. Hope surged through him. If others were being healed, why not himself? He learned of a woman who was organizing a group

of people to take to Manila for healing. The possibility appealed to him. True, it was a long shot, but it was tantalizing.

In mid-November Nick and his mother, with keen anticipation, boarded a plane for Manila. The trip proved an agonizing one for Nick. His skin began to break down as a result of sitting so long on the plane. By the time he and his mother arrived at their hotel in Manila, Nick was physically and emotionally spent. The pain he experienced was agonizing.

Because of his condition, Nick was taken to his room where he could lie down. The others in the group were taken to a large room in the hotel where many faith healers came to interview them. "All in all, there were probably sixty to seventy people in the group - maybe more," Nick guessed.

Later, some of the faith healers came to Nick's room. As he recalled it, some of their rituals bordered on the bizarre. And though they returned several times attempting to heal him, they were unable to do so.

During the time the faith healers were coming and going, someone gave Nick some books to read on spiritualism. "Part of the reading made good sense," Nick said, "but I had the unsettling feeling that something was wrong after I studied it - it just didn't all fit."

When the regular faith healers were unable to heal Nick, they announced that they had asked the chief healer to visit him. Surely he could help Nick. A few days later, the most important of the healers arrived with several of his protégés. After trying several times, the man frankly admitted, "I can't do anything for you. The only thing for you to do is pray and read the Bible."

"He didn't even heal me so I could sit without pain!" Nick added. "I began to pray - 'Please heal me. I want to be healed.' Over and over I prayed, but nothing happened."

The Christmas holidays were now approaching, so a discouraged Nick and his disappointed mother returned to the United States. The trip back proved even more torturous for Nick than the trip to Manila had been. He felt as if he were sitting on a searing hot iron all the way. By the time the plane landed, Nick's nerves were nearly shattered - he was too weak to go home. From the plane, he was taken back to the hospital. But the reception his doctors gave him there was less than enthusiastic.

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“Well, here’s the kid that went to the faith healers in the Philippines to get healed,” they seemed to be thinking. “Now he’s back, worse off than ever, for us to heal.”

But through all his ordeal, something had happened to Nick. No, he wasn’t healed. But at least something had changed. He no longer lashed out in his frustration. His inward seething had simmered to a more controllable level. “My desire to commit suicide was gone,” Nick said. “And I had also made a decision to live with my problem. I started reading and studying in earnest - searching for meaning to my life.

“I read Eastern philosophies, one by one, and decided that some parts were nice, some parts were true - but that ultimately they didn’t hold water. All the while I felt as if something were missing. My heart ached with emptiness. I couldn’t shake it, and I didn’t understand it.”

Nick wanted to return to work. He tried to get on again with the phone company where he had worked, but they wouldn’t take him back. Through one of his counselors, he found a job with the local art museum on their admissions desk. The job was pleasant. Nick felt good about working again, but the ache in his heart was still there.

In his new position, Nick had plenty of time, between admissions, to read. He read about various religions. And again he discovered some things that sounded good and seemed right, but something seemed to be missing from each of them.

Nick became friends with some of the guards at the museum. They were always interested in what he was reading and offered suggestions that they felt might help him. One day a guard brought him a book called *The Desire of Ages* - & book on the life of Christ.

“It took me six months to read that big book,” Nick remembered. “But it had a certain ring. I knew it was all true. As I studied the life of Christ, it did something to me. I decided that I wanted to become a Christian - to do what God wanted me to do. I wanted to accept Him and become His follower, but I wasn’t sure how to do it.”

Again Nick picked up the Bible and started to study and read in earnest. Now it was thrilling. It made sense - good sense. He couldn’t seem to study enough. The Bible had come alive!

Soon Nick attended some religious lectures and listened to some tapes about becoming a victorious Christian. What he learned melted his heart. “I didn’t like everything I heard,” Nick admitted, “because I knew I’d have to change my lifestyle - eliminate some things from my life, you understand. But I knew that at last I had found what I was

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searching for - TRUTH. I now had discovered meaning to my life. I had hope for the future - and a peace I can't explain. I truly have been blessed."

Today Nick is still in a wheelchair. The bullet is still lodged against his spinal cord. But he has a peace, a radiance, and joy beyond all description.

"It's strange, but the dull ache is gone," he says. "It left me. I'm not saying that I like where I'm at - but I am saying that I wouldn't trade what I know now for the ability to be back walking again."

Nick would like nothing more than to share what he has found with everyone everywhere - for millions are longing and searching for peace in this troubled world. Millions are seeking answers to troubling questions that seem to have no real answers.

Nick found what he was searching for in the study of the Bible - and in a book given to him by a friend. The truth and hope he found is clearly presented in the upcoming chapters of this book.

So friend - if you search for solutions to your problems - if you seek answers to your questions - if you need help where you're hurting - If you look for something to fill your inner emptiness - the end of your search could be as simple a matter as turning to the next chapter.

As with Nick, what you desire too deeply for words may seem to be an ever-retreating mirage - an elusive secret. But be assured that if indeed it is a secret, it is an open secret.