# My Heart Will Go On

An unspeakable crime and a terrible disease claimed the lives of Joy's five children. But that's not the end of the story.

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**From the author of *"They're All Dead, Aren't They"***

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# CHAPTER 1
# ONE FATAL NIGHT

*He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent, watching in secret for his victims (Psalm 10:8).*

September 15, 1977, was the night that changed my life. That was the night that I became a victim to a crime more brutal than I could ever have imagined. A crime committed by a fourteen-year-old neighbor boy named Billy Dyer, a boy I had taken into my heart and my home. A boy who played with my children right up to the hour that he took their lives.

My husband, George, and I had gone out for the evening. Thursday night was Bingo night at the American Legion Hall. We had left our four healthy children home alone under the care of our fourteen-year-old son, Steve. Greg was twelve; Tonya, three; and Baby Stacy, just seventeen months old.

Our oldest daughter, Stephanie, was in a hospital dying of cancer. We had spent every extra moment the previous three weeks at her bedside, watching the life drain from her seventeen-year-old body. We needed this evening out to put Stephanie's illness aside briefly and just have fun before picking up the burden once more.

Less than an hour after we kissed the children goodbye, all four lay dead from multiple gunshot wounds to the head and chest. Tonya had also been beaten and stabbed.

George and I arrived home to find ambulances and police cars lining both sides of the gravel road. Though we tried to force our way into the house to be with our children, we were denied access. Instead, we were put into a patrol car and taken to the police station. For the next seven hours we were separated as we endured interrogations, strip searches, powder residue tests, fingerprints, and mug shots. We were suspects in the killings of our own children. It was an intensely angry night.

By morning, the police realized they had no evidence to hold us. They released us with orders not to leave town until notified, and they put us up in a local motel.

The next day Billy Dyer was taken into custody, along with a twenty-year-old accomplice named Ray Richardson, Jr., who had agreed to give Billy a ride to our house and help him commit the crime in exchange for guns and knives Billy intended to steal from our home. Our family was Billy's first target in an intended killing spree to "kill a whole bunch of people until we got caught."

Four innocent children were murdered that horrible night, but many more victims were left alive to cope with the tragedy and deal with indescribable grief.

Not all of us were able to bear the grief. Stephanie found it impossible to fight the cancer and the grief too. Twenty days after her brothers and sisters were killed, Stephanie lost the battle, and we laid her to rest beside them.

In the weeks and months that followed, George and I learned to adjust to life without the children. Being victims changed us. Slain with the children were all our hopes and dreams—for their future and ours—because we couldn't imagine living the rest of our lives without them. Slain also was any shred of trust or security we might have had. We couldn't trust anybody now. No longer

could we walk naively through life smelling the roses. Life was too fragile, too vulnerable. If the children could lose their lives so quickly, so could we.

Over time the damage done to our hearts finally healed, but we were both left terribly scarred. We were victims. There was nothing we could do to change what had happened and no way to recover what we had lost.

But we did have some control over what would happen to us in the future. We both vowed that we would not fall victim to anyone or anything ever again. From that point on, every thought, every action, was motivated by self-preservation. We might go down, but we would go down valiantly, kicking and fighting all the way.

For years we grieved together. Unlike many couples who lose a child, we hung tightly to each other and refused to let go. We were all we had, and we would not lose each other. Our greatest fear was that death would snatch one of us away, leaving the other completely alone.

Over the course of several years we developed a relationship with our heavenly Father and learned that we could lean on Him for strength and comfort and, ultimately, for answers to our deepest pain. But we were still victims because we refused to allow ourselves to be anything else.

We had three more children, all born victims of the terrible tragedy that had befallen our family before they were even born. We taught them to depend only on the family and God because no one else in the world could be trusted not to hurt them.

They grew to be strong and independent, trusting in their own ability to care for themselves and to work hard for whatever they needed. They left home to pursue their dreams in the cruel world that could not be trusted. They carried a fire in their hearts

that told them they would not fall victim to anyone. They would go down fighting. But like us, they, too, were still victims of the past.

For twenty years George and I grieved for the ones we lost. And then one day I realized that I didn't have to be a victim anymore, not to the future or to the past. In Jesus Christ I could be a victor, if only I would choose to be. I could stand as a victor even over the past. I could not change what happened. But in Christ, I could win the victory over it.

Today I am a victor, and I will stand as a victor for all eternity—all because of one Man from the little town of Nazareth. He is the difference between my being a victim and being a victor. He was both—and so am I.

I write this book for all the people who remain victims of past circumstances. Whether you have been a victim of a terrible crime, of unspeakable abuse, or whatever circumstance beyond your control, there is One who holds the key to release you from the bondage that has held you victim. I stand as a witness to all that we do not have to be held hostage for the rest of our lives. We can break free and stand as victors instead. In the pages that follow, I will tell you how God helped me to become a victor.