

I WILL NOT BE BROKEN



5 Steps to Overcoming a Life Crisis

JERRY WHITE

"Jerry White brings his insight and experience to bear expertly for those facing life's unexpected challenges. He embodies the spirit of survivorship."

—Lance Armstrong, 7-time Tour de France winner, author of *Every Second Counts*

Please enjoy Chapter 1 of *I Will Not Be Broken: 5 Steps to Overcoming a Life Crisis* on us as a way of introducing you to this new book by author and survivor Jerry White and his new organization, [Survivor Corps](#). Feel free to share it with your friends, family, and readers. Be our guest.

About I Will Not Be Broken

The loss of a loved one, a painful divorce, or a serious physical injury---we must all, at one point, face tragedy---unavoidable moments that divide our lives into “before” and “after.” How do we muscle our way through tough times and emerge stronger, wiser---even grateful for our struggle? In 1984, author Jerry White lost his leg---and almost his life---in a landmine accident. He has endured the pain of loss and the challenge of rebuilding. As cofounder of Survivors Corps, White has interviewed thousands of victims of tragedy. With this book, he shares what he has learned.

White outlines a very specific five-step program to coping with disaster; to achieving strength and hope; and to turning tragedy into triumph. In their own words, his survivor friends and colleagues share their stories. It's a group that includes the well known, like Lance Armstrong, Nelson Mandela, and the late Princess Diana, and also everyday survivors. Through their stories and the author's words, the book takes readers step-by-step through the process of not only surviving tragedy and victimhood, but going on to thrive.

1
EVERYONE HAS A DATE

WITH DISASTER



We hate to call bad news normal, but it is. And no matter how hard you try, you cannot stay insulated from life's random acts. Chances are you'll get a phone call like I did several years ago, "Jerry, I don't know how to tell you this, but Dad is dead," my brother Ron said through tears, "he had a heart attack this morning." *Oomph!* It feels like a kick in the stomach. *Not this*, you think. *But he was just here for the holiday.* Nothing fully prepares you for these moments.

Disaster strikes in an instant, unwelcome and devastating. No one has yet figured out how to escape these sudden blows. Last year alone, there were more than 114 million visits to America's emergency rooms. Most of these hospital visits would count as sobering, if not traumatic, family moments. Each year, in the United States alone, roughly 6.5 million will become victims of a violent crime; 1.2 million will get professional help or die from drug or alcohol addiction; 1 million women will be raped; and over 31,000 will commit suicide.

No matter how you slice the numbers, they add up to a hell of a lot of suffering and a lot of grief left in its wake. It reminds us just how normal it is to meet people in crisis *everywhere* in the world. We are all acquainted with grief. It is one of the things

connecting us all, regardless of faith, culture and geography.

But it's more than just pain that unites. The strength and resilience it takes to get through the pain also bind us. Scores of survivors of all types have shared their personal experiences with me for the purpose of this book: to offer a flashlight for dark times. These stories reveal different layers of survivorship, and drive home the point that *everyone* indeed has or will have a date with destiny, maybe even more than one. Knowing you have peers with similar experiences can be a great comfort. But why do some survivors handle their dates better than others? Why do some individuals grow *stronger* in the face of adversity, while others descend into bitterness and despair?

The survivor stories you are about to read are meant to help you face whatever adversity is in your life: the mother recovering from cancer, the family struggling with news of the death of a child, the father losing his spouse or a job, the sibling trying to make sense of an addiction or sudden accident that throws a family into turmoil. In these stories, you will see that, in the wake of catastrophe, survival can sometimes be profoundly beautiful and inspiring.

Through my own experiences, including months of hospitalization and surgery after stepping on that landmine in 1984, I've learned what helped, and what didn't, as I found my own way forward. I've since worked with many survivors and trauma experts and heard thousands of stories of those who have overcome devastating loss, anger, and despair. My work since my trip to Cambodia has been a quest to find those things that help someone recover. I've seen that survivorship and resilience *can be learned*. With

the right support, individuals can actually prepare themselves to cope with misfortune, resume life, and thrive.

This book illuminates the path to survival—five steps that can guide a person from tragedy toward a new life of renewed purpose and hope. The steps are not always sequential; they can be taken simultaneously. They can also spiral, skip and repeat. Survivorship is different for each individual. But anyone who has overcome adversity and learned to thrive has come to understand the power of each step.

"No man is wise enough by himself," said Titus Maccius Plautus (third to second century BCE). That's why I've gathered wisdom from survivors living in all sorts of conditions and countries. I also draw lessons from historic figures, literature and scripture—anything that sheds light on the path of survivorship. These lessons apply to anyone—the factory worker or farmer in small-town America, the wounded soldier abroad, or the high-powered lawyer in a city of millions. I believe these steps will guide you out of victimhood and on toward fulfillment:

- 1. FACE FACTS.** One must first accept the harsh reality about suffering and loss, however brutal. "This terrible thing has happened. It can't be changed. I can't rewind the clock. My family still needs me. So now what?"

- 2. CHOOSE LIFE.** That is, "I want to say yes to the future. I want my life to go on in a positive way." Seizing life, not surrendering to death or stagnation,

requires letting go of resentments and looking forward, not back. It can be a daily decision.

3. **REACH OUT.** One must find peers, friends, and family to break the isolation and loneliness that come in the aftermath of crisis. Seek empathy, not pity, from people who have been through something similar. Let the people in your life *into* your life. “It’s up to me to reach for someone’s hand.”

4. **GET MOVING.** Sitting back gets you nowhere. One must get out of bed and out of the house to generate momentum. We have to take responsibility for our actions. “How do I want to live the rest of my life? What steps can I take today?”

5. **GIVE BACK.** Thriving, not just surviving, requires the capacity to give again, through service and acts of kindness. “How can I be an asset to those around me, and not a drain? Will I ever feel grateful again?” Yes, and by sharing your experience and talents, you will inspire others to do the same.

Surviving the initial contact with disaster is only the beginning. What will we need to survive? No one thing can guarantee joy or fulfillment. But each step, sooner or later, will be needed to emerge from crisis alive and strong. With each step you will cross

thresholds of pain, and then discover new possibilities.

Stories of disaster can be riveting. We find it difficult to turn away from the bloody details. But what comes *after* the trauma? The daily news may be filled with victims coming face to face with catastrophe. But how does life go on after the worst happens, the ambulance pulls away and the sirens are muffled? Understandably, the marathon of recovery—months of pain and rehab—is much less riveting. Itemizing our symptoms can be boring or gross—“oversharing” tends to be a turn-off to our listeners. Unfortunately, full rehabilitation takes longer than most people’s attention spans. That’s why months after the funeral, the bereaved succumb to an overwhelming solitude. After a while, a siren might seem welcome, just for something to disrupt the melancholy.

I’m just describing what I observe—most of us have a hard time shoring ourselves up for the long haul of recovery. It is quite common for people to get stuck in their grief. But survival is our most basic human instinct. And if we are strong enough to stay alive after catastrophe strikes, then we owe it to ourselves and our loved ones to seek a way forward.

There is real suspense here. How will our stories end? Will we or our friends turn out okay? Life-and-death moments seize us, but personally I am more interested in the longer journey of life, rather than the emergencies. How on earth do we—do our loved ones—manage to find meaning again, to create order from chaos? How do we move on?

Each of us has a story. Though very few of us may face a war injury or battlefield, most

of us have at some point had to deal with sudden life-changing loss, such as the death of a spouse or parent, hospitalization, physical disability, loss of love, or loss of work.

- Colleen and her sister are playing in front of their house when one of their best friends is run over by a truck, right in front of their eyes. Colleen learns to recognize how fleeting and precious life is, and wonders why her sister never recovers...
- Ken is on a mission in Africa to bring micro-credit loans to villagers, and his jeep runs over a landmine. He wonders whether the foot on the floor of the jeep belongs to him or the driver? He calls for help...
- Karen learns her cancer has come back and spread, but she refuses to succumb to dark thoughts. She goes to a healer and tries something new...
- Irit picks up the phone in Israel and learns her son has been hit by a drunk driver half a world away and is brain dead. Could she come and decide what to do with his body and whether to donate his organs? She boards the plane for New York...

It's not enough to survive these life-shattering moments; we must live through them and move forward after them. Everyone, if not now then eventually, has a date—the day something blows up in our face, dividing life into before and after. Things are never quite the same when the dust and debris settle.

It was Diana, Princess of Wales, who first made me ponder the power of anniversaries, and the deeper significance of our dates. We were well into our second day of a trip together to Bosnia-Herzegovina in August 1997. It was an exhausting itinerary, driving in our white minivan through bombed-out villages. I introduced Princess Diana to victims of all ages and creeds—Croats, Muslims, Serbs, many of whom poured out their gut-wrenching tales with tears and unfathomable grief.

One particularly emotional visit was to a home near Gracanica. The family was in enormous pain. The frail mother, Mersiha, looked like she hadn't eaten in weeks. Her mother-in-law could not stop wiping tears off her face. Mersiha's two young sons were clinging to her as we approached. They were only two and four. Two months earlier, their dad had gone fishing. The war was over, and he had served heroically in the Bosnian army, surviving the sieges and violence. It was such a relief to get back to normal. At last he could enjoy a quiet Saturday afternoon fishing on the banks of a river. He felt something catch on the line...a fish? He reeled it in. It wasn't a fish but debris from the bottom of the river. As he reached to pull it off his line, it exploded—the debris was an undetonated landmine, and it killed him instantly.

When we brought Diana into the home, the fishing tackle and rod were hanging on the living room wall. Mersiha's mother-in-law sobbed as she explained how her son had just appeared to her in a dream, consoling her, *Mama, it's going to be okay. You mustn't worry about me. Take care of yourself.* Mersiha then recounted the date in painful detail and distress. The emotion in the room was palpable, and Diana couldn't hold back

her tears. There were no words, nothing to alleviate the pain of such a loss.

She climbed back into the back seat of our minivan and sat silently, looking with heavy eyes out the window. Ken Rutherford, my co-founder, and I were equally affected by the visit, and we joined Diana in silence. We resumed the journey, heading toward the next survivor destination. After some minutes, Diana sighed, then turned to me and said, “Everyone we meet, all the survivors tell me their date. They always mention their dates.” Ken said, “Well, I’m December 16, 1993,” the day his jeep ran over a landmine in Somalia. I added, “I’m April 12, 1984.” There was a long silence. Then Diana said, “I’m July 29, 1981.” She laughed, breaking the tension of all the pent-up emotions we had been feeling. She joked about her own date being the day she married. But what she had noticed was that there were definite “before” and “after” anniversaries. Days that came, and nothing was ever the same.

As we went from survivor to survivor, her astute observation proved true, time and again. These dates weren’t always tragic times, but times that fundamentally changed a person, a family, a community. And we found in talking to these people that it’s all about what we do with a crisis *after* it occurs. Many feel trapped by what has happened to them, unable to move forward. We can get stuck on the events of one day. But today is a new day, and we have tomorrow to seize as well. Why not pledge, “This is the day I will become stronger”? Or, “On this date I will remember that my situation didn’t destroy me, it made me a survivor”?

Princess Diana understood that to survive means to endure something that could have

killed you or “taken you down.” Like the loss of a son or daughter. Like stepping on a landmine. These are experiences terrible and terrifying. Such trauma presents a threshold. The outcome, positive or negative, is *not* pre-ordained. We can do things to foster resilience and strength going forward.

Can you recall your date? Your own before-and-after moment, when life is cut in two by horrible pain or shocking news?

References to dates burned in our memory—when life is dramatically changed—appear in all kinds of survivor literature, including military battles, conquests and political assassinations. Every American over 50 remembers where they were on November 22, 1963, when President John F. Kennedy was shot in Dallas.

One need only say “9-11” to transport us back to a day of tragedy and terror. Hijacked planes. Ground Zero. A hole in the Pentagon. A field in Pennsylvania. The final phone calls.

More recently, ask anyone who has lived in New Orleans what August 29th means, and they will recount the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina. It killed more than 1,600 people; destroyed 200,000 Gulf Coast homes; and displaced about 1 million people.

Most people, when telling stories of a crisis, will date their turning point. One 1990 survey found that 85 percent of people feel they have experienced such turning points.¹ It is not unusual for people to refer to other events in their lives relative their more

¹ Gillian A. King et al., eds., *Resilience: Learning from People with Disabilities and the Turning Points in their Lives* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 35.

formative date. *That was the last time I saw her before the flood. Or that was the year after mom died.*

Our dates are unforgettable because they change not only the facts of our lives—*I used to have a leg*—but our worldview and self-concept—*I come from a broken home*. They force us to redefine our expectations and attitude toward life. The emotions stay with us longer than the physical adjustments. In my case, I learned to walk again with an artificial leg in a matter of weeks, but didn't really get used to looking at my "residual limb" for years. It always surprised and slightly saddened me each time I caught a glimpse of it in the mirror after a shower or in the gym. *Is that stump really part of me? Where's the missing piece?* Likewise, some friends say it doesn't take long to learn to operate a wheelchair, but it does take time to learn to feel attractive, capable, and energetic again.

The anniversaries of these events can bring back powerful emotional memories. My mother, for example, calls me every year on April 12th to say, "I remember today, Jerry." It's one of her anniversaries, too.

The decisions we make after a crisis—the ways we choose to think about it—ultimately determine its impact on our lives. For some of us, the power of our crisis-date doesn't conclude until its full impact is understood. The late Christopher Reeve recognized the same truth during his recovery from the horse-riding accident that rendered him paralyzed on May 27, 1995.

Juice (my nurse) thought my injury had meaning, had a purpose. I believed, and still do, that my injury was simply an accident. But maybe Juice and I are both right, because I have the opportunity now to make sense of this accident. I believe that it's what you do after a disaster that can give it meaning.¹

For many people, there isn't one precise moment of crisis. There is no unexpected phone call to bring tragic news. It's what my friend Deirdre calls the "accumulation effect." A few unpleasant things overlap, and a crisis sneaks up from behind. Deirdre ponders her season of accumulated sadness in Montana:

In my case, the world fell to pieces over a series of months with unhappy surprises. I learned that my husband's law practice was dissolving, and I had basal cell carcinoma on the end of my nose. Soon after, while half of the country protested the possibility, the US government took us to war in Iraq. My eldest son was heading into high school and I could no longer pretend that I still had lots of time ahead with my children. By spring, what I had believed about who I was and where I sat in the world had been so nibbled away by these events that I found myself confused and in the midst of a depression that turned everything gray for another year.

Throughout history, people have struggled with low and high points. We all have a date or dates with destiny. But it's how we *respond* to our dates—life's anniversaries—that will determine whether we become true survivors who can fulfill our potential and

¹ Reeve, Christopher, *Still Me* (New York and Toronto: Random House, 1998), 121.

ultimately thrive.

I am confident the example of my friends and fellow survivors will inspire you to persevere, to hold on for another minute, to try to imagine a future even after the worst has happened to you. You are about to meet survivors of all types, speaking in their own words. Their confessions of vulnerability may humble you, and their humanity will encourage you.

It may surprise you to find that you are one of us.

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“In *I Will Not Be Broken*, Jerry White brings his insight and experience to bear expertly for those facing life's unexpected challenges. He embodies the spirit of survivorship.”

—Lance Armstrong

“[White’s] courageous personal experience is a beacon for all who are searching to recover and reclaim life.”

—Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan, bestselling author of *Leap of Faith*

“An excellent guide to navigating and overcoming the traumas we face in our lives.”

—Deepak Chopra, author of *Buddha: A Story of Enlightenment*

“Offers wise, practical, and inspiring steps to come back from life’s worst setbacks.”

—Daniel Goleman, author of *Social Intelligence*

From a co-recipient of the **Nobel Prize for Peace** and founder of [Survivor Corps](#) comes an astoundingly effective guide to recreating a happy and fulfilling life after catastrophe strikes—a book that Bob and Lee Woodruff call “a road map for the individual and their family to re-enter the land of the living.” In **I WILL NOT BE BROKEN**, Jerry White reframes the question “why do bad things happen to good people?” and asks, *given that bad things do happen, how do people absorb the blows and move through them?*

Tragedy happens to everyone. Whether it’s the loss of a loved one, a painful divorce, or a serious injury, we all face unavoidable moments that divide our lives into “before” and “after.” These events take a heavy toll on everyone, but there are those who have muscled their way through tough times and

emerged stronger, wiser—even grateful for their struggle. Jerry White is one such example. In 1984, he lost his leg—and almost his life—in a tragic accident, and has personally endured the pain of loss and the challenge of rebuilding.

As cofounder of Survivor Corps, White has connected with thousands of victims of tragedy, and in **I WILL NOT BE BROKEN**, he shares their collective wisdom, which he distills into an effective five-step program for turning tragedy into triumph:

- **Face facts**
- **Choose life**
- **Reach out**
- **Get moving**
- **Give back**

In their own words, his fellow survivors share their stories—a group that includes the well known like Lance Armstrong, Elie Wiesel, and the late Princess Diana, but also everyday people including soldiers and veterans of the military. With compassion, White takes readers through the process of not only enduring tragedy and victimhood, but going on to thrive.

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JERRY WHITE is a global survivor activist who has dedicated his life to helping victims of violent conflict. While camping in Northern Israel in 1984, he stepped on a landmine, and he spent nearly six months in Israeli hospitals learning to walk on an artificial leg. Since then, he has become a recognized leader of the historic International Campaign to Ban Landmines, co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Prize for Peace; and a cofounder of Survivor Corps. He has testified before the US Congress and the United Nations and appeared in hundreds of media interviews and profiles.

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Jerry White is a recognized leader of the historic International Campaign to Ban Landmines, co-recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace; as well as co-founder of [Survivor Corps](#). Jerry White lives in Maryland and Malta with his wife Kelly and four kids.

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For more information about *I Will Not Be Broken*, visit: iwillnotbebroken.smnr.us

For more information about Survivor Corps, visit: survivorcorps.smnr.us

To purchase this book click [here](#)



About Survivor Corps

Around the globe, people are inflicting harm on one another on an alarming scale with alarming ease. There were approximately 250 wars throughout the 20th century. Today, there are more than 39 conflicts raging in the world –from armed conflicts in Latin America to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to genocide in Darfur.

More than 35 million people have been displaced from these conflicts—innocent people who have been robbed of their dignity, their homes and their livelihoods. With no hope or tools to rise above their circumstances, far too many victims lash out, seeking revenge for their plight and perpetuating the cycle of violence and suffering. Something has to be done to break this downward spiral.

Survivor Corps operates under the credo that no one is better equipped to change the world than those who have been most scarred by what’s wrong with it. There is a way to break the cycle of violence, and it begins with showing survivors a new, more hopeful way forward.

What is the Survivor Corps philosophy? No one is better equipped to change the world than those most scarred by what’s wrong with it.

Whom does Survivor Corps serve? We serve people who have been injured by global conflict, primarily through training and support of the organizations that serve conflict survivors at the local level.

Where does Survivor Corps work? Wherever communities are experiencing or recovering from conflict – currently in over 50 countries.

Why should I support Survivor Corps? Survivor Corps (formerly Landmine Survivors Network) has a ten-year track record of results, improving health, creating economic opportunity, and changing laws & policies for survivors of conflict.

How does Survivor Corp work? We work across the spectrum of issues and organizations that affect the lives of survivors.

Can Survivor Corps really solve this problem? Yes. We believe that by showing survivors a new, more hopeful way forward, we can help break the cycle of violence.

Survivor Corps provides the tools and support survivors need to rise above their injuries and give back to their communities. Learn more at www.survivorcorps.org.