

Chapter 11

Heaven Help Us

When Jeremy was diagnosed with MD, the doctors told me that he would probably never live past seventeen. For this reason, I felt like I needed to spend as much time with him as possible, so I wouldn't have any regrets. Looking back on it all, I think that by trying to do my best for Jeremy, I ended up hurting Jason, although I certainly never intended for it to be that way.

I think that because I was spending so much time with Jeremy and the Muscular Dystrophy Association, that the only way Jason felt like he could get the attention he needed was to act out in various mischievous ways. Unfortunately, a lot of his mischief ended up in personal injury to himself.

Besides the things I've already told you about, Jason also sustained some very serious head injuries that have contributed to a life of pain and suffering. This pattern of "acting out" continued into his adolescent years.

After we moved South, Jason found a good friend in a boy named Matt. He was good for Jason. They were inseparable for several years, and I was happy to have him around.

When Matt was about fifteen years old, his father bought him a motorcycle to ride. Jason loved riding around on it, too. One day, Jason and Matt took it for a ride out in the desert along the Arizona Strip. Matt let Jason ride it by himself, and as he was riding, he accidentally went off a small cliff, falling about twelve feet, and landing on his head. Fortunately, he was wearing a helmet. Unfortunately, he hit so hard, it cracked the helmet and knocked him out. Matt hurried down the hill to assess the damage. He found the motorcycle still operable, but Jason was in pretty bad shape. There was no one close by who could give them any help. Matt decided that the only thing he could do, was to put Jason across his lap and drive him back home. He hurried back as fast as he could and rode up to my house.

When I saw Jason, I was terrified. He was all bloody, and still unconscious. I rushed him to the hospital as quick as I could. The doctors were very concerned because of the serious nature of his injuries, but when he came to, he seemed to respond pretty well to questions, and it appeared that he was going to be all right.

A short time after this incident, our church had a social up in Pine Valley Meadows. I was put in charge of the activities. Jason and his friends were playing softball and having a good time. The weather turned cold, and Jason came to me and asked if he could have the car keys. "No," I said, "You're not going anywhere in that car." He assured me that he only wanted to get into it to get his jacket, so I gave him the keys. About half an hour later, I realized that he hadn't returned. I asked Matt and Jenny if they'd seen him. They hadn't. Then I began to panic.

I hurried down the hill to see if I could see my car anywhere. As I got down the mountain, I noticed my car, sitting at the bottom of a steep hillside right where I'd parked it, but it had rocks piled up against the side of it. There had been a small rockslide. I hurried down to the car and looked inside. Jason wasn't there. The keys, though, were still in the door. Finally, I looked down and saw Jason buried beneath some rocks. I let out a scream! He was just lying there, and blood was oozing out of his head.

I noticed he had one big gash on the side of his head that looked especially bad. By now, some men had heard my screams and came running down the hill to help. They removed the rocks and placed Jason in the car.

I hollered up the hill and asked a friend to take care of my other kids. I told her that Jason was hurt and I needed to take him to the hospital.

When we arrived at the hospital, the doctors quickly examined him and then stitched him up. I was really worried because he'd been unconscious for almost two hours. They kept him overnight for observation, and the next day I took him home. They told me to keep an eye on him and bring him back if he exhibited any strange behaviors. If he didn't show any obvious problems, I was to bring him back when it was time to get the stitches out. He seemed to recover quickly, but I noticed that after this injury, he started acting very differently than he had before.

At the time, he was only two merit badges away from getting his Eagle Scout award. Suddenly he lost all interest in that. He even pulled away from Matt. He seemed to be constantly arguing and fighting with him about the silliest things. Before long, he didn't even want to be around him. It seemed very odd to me.

When he started back to school, the teachers said that they thought he'd developed attention deficit disorder, and they wanted to run some tests. They told me that ADD quite often showed up during puberty, and it was really probably nothing to worry about.

He was tested. They told us he did have ADD and said that we had two options. One, they could put him in class with children who had mental problems, where he could get more one on one attention; or two, they could put him in a class with troubled children. Well, I didn't feel he belonged with the mentally handicapped children. For the most part, he was perfectly normal. Unfortunately, I didn't realize what they meant by "troubled children," and so, acting on the school's recommendation, I agreed to the second option.

I wish I'd found out a little more about just where it was they were placing him and with whom! Unfortunately, too many times we just trust the judgment of the "professionals" believing that they'll do what's best for our children, when sometimes that's not the case.

Now he was spending five of his seven periods every day with *troubled* kids. Basically, they were kids who were out of control.

These were kids who had been, or were on drugs, kids who smoked cigarettes, kids who were in trouble with the law. Of course, I didn't want Jason doing any of these kinds of things, but I didn't really realize he was immersed in this situation on a daily basis. When you spend that much time around people who do those things, unless you're very strong, it will influence you.

Before long, Jason was running around with all the wrong kids. He was constantly lying to us and not coming home when he should. He became quite a trial for Lee and me.

We decided that maybe we needed to create some kind of an incentive and reward program to see if we could help him. He was suffering from low self-esteem, and I think a lot of that was because he felt like we'd favored the other kids and didn't love him as much as we loved them. Lee helped Jeremy get a fixer upper car when he was a junior in high school so he could drive around, and he'd mentioned to Jason that he'd do the same for him. Jason already had his driver's license, and one of the neighbors had an old pickup truck for sale that Jason really liked. We decided to buy the truck for Jason to drive, but we put a lot of stipulations on it. He had to do well in school; be home on time; he had to behave himself. For a while, it seemed to be working quite well. But one night, he didn't come home on time. I waited for a while, but it got later and later until it was past ten. Then I really got worried. I called the police, and they said that he was probably just out with friends. They told me there was nothing they could do, because they wouldn't file a missing person's report until he'd been missing for at least forty-eight hours! I was sick all

night long. The next morning I called the school and asked if they'd seen Jason the previous day. They checked their records, and said that his sister had come by in the morning and checked him out of school to go to a doctor's appointment.

"His sister? She's three and a half years younger than he is. She can't drive. She wouldn't have checked him out!" I said.

I asked the name of the person who signed him out, and they said it was "Jenny Llewellyn." I asked them to describe her to me. They did. I didn't recognize her at all by the description they gave to me.

I went around and spoke to all his friends that I knew of, and asked if any of them had any idea who this girl was who had checked him out. No one did. Finally, after three days, a girl came forward and identified the mystery girl. She was her friend, and she was beginning to worry about her too. The girl told me that her friend told Jason that her stepfather was sexually abusing her, and that she didn't want to go home and be around him anymore. She asked Jason if he would drive her to California so she could be with her real father.

"Did she have money for this trip?" I asked the girl.

"No," said the girl. "Jason said that he would pay for all the expenses of the trip."

I was shocked. Where on earth would Jason get money for a trip like that?

About two weeks before this all happened, I'd gone to my bank and taken some money out of the ATM machine. In my haste to get back home, I'd placed the ATM card on the dashboard of the car, and when I had to stop rather abruptly, the card slipped down into the defrost vent, and disappeared out of sight. I was irritated, but I didn't think it was anything more than an inconvenience. I figured that when Lee had time, he could pull apart the dashboard and get it out. It didn't seem like a big deal. I went to the bank, told them what had happened, and they said they would issue me a replacement card in a few weeks.

With Jason missing, I was going crazy. I couldn't just sit around, so I went to the bank again to get some cash to buy gas so I could drive around and look for Jason. The teller informed me that I didn't have any money left in my account!

"What? I just deposited Lee's check and my check in the bank five days ago. Where did all my money go?" I asked.

The teller said, "I don't know, but if you'd like you can come in and look for yourself." So I did.

I looked at my account balance, and sure enough, all the money was gone! "How could this happen?" I asked. She told me that it had all been taken out through various ATM machines.

"Whose card are they using?" I asked. "It's your card," the teller said. "It's your account number and your card."

"I don't even have a card!" I said. "I lost mine in the dash of my car last week!"

I later learned that in the middle of the night, Jason snuck down from the hills where he'd been hiding out with this girl, and when everyone was asleep, he tore apart the dashboard, retrieved the ATM card, and put the dash back together again without anyone knowing.

By now, I was getting really upset. I asked them if they could tell me the locations of the ATM machines where all the money had been taken from. The lady in the bank told me that it wasn't possible. She told me it would take two or three weeks to find out that information! I guess I got a bit "huffy" with her. I told her that my boy was missing, and this information was needed RIGHT NOW, and could just possibly save his life. She made a few calls, and before long, we had a paper trail of when and where these debit transactions had taken place.

There were debits from Great America, Disneyland, Sea World, and other interesting places. They showed a pattern of the direction they were heading. It looked to me like they were heading for Sacramento or possibly Reno, so I took the information back to our local Police and asked them if they could put out an APB (all-points bulletin) on Jason. They told me that they still couldn't help me... there wasn't any reason to issue an APB.

"My son's gone, and he's taken all my money out of the bank! Isn't that a reason?" I exclaimed.

"That just makes him a runaway. We still can't issue an APB," the officer responded.

I was feeling very upset and totally frustrated now. I took the information I had and went home. I contacted one of the local police detectives and asked him if he could help me out. He informed me that the only way the police could help get him back, is if I submitted a stolen vehicle report, and then they would have a reason to apprehend him.

It was the worst thing I've ever had to do. I would have to file a complaint against my own son, knowing that the only way I could get him back was to have

him arrested when they spotted him. I felt just awful, but I didn't know what else to do. I just wanted to get him back home.

We swore out the complaint, saying that he'd stolen our vehicle, and two days later we got a call. They arrested him in Reno, NV and he was being held in detention until we could come and get him. It would cost \$500 just to get the truck out of impound, plus additional fines for him breaking the law. We were angry and relieved at the same time. This was not one of the happier moments in our lives.

I thought I'd better call this girl's parents and let them know that we'd found their daughter and that she was all right. I was sure they must have been worried sick, after all, the kids had been gone for a week now.

I called her mom and said, "We found your daughter. She's with our son and the police are holding them in Reno." Her reply shocked me! She simply said, "Well, tell them to put her on a bus or something, because we're not interested in driving out to Reno to pick her up."

I was stunned. How could a mother feel that way about her own daughter? If it had been my daughter, I would have been worried sick!

We needed to go get Jason and pick up the truck. We had no money, so we had to borrow some from my parents to make the trip. When we arrived, I actually felt sorry for Jason having to spend the night in that place. I don't know why they called it detention; it looked just like prison to me. All the kids were in orange jump suits. Jason was so happy to see us. When they brought him out to us, he had shackles on his feet, and handcuffs on his wrists, and they'd shaved his head. He really looked like a little felon, but I was happy to see him anyway. It had been very hard on me not knowing where he was, what he was doing, and whether or not he was all right. I don't know how happy Lee was to see him... he was still pretty angry. But I was glad to finally be able to put this behind us.

We asked about the girl, and they told us that her parents had been contacted and had directed them to put her on a bus and send her home. I was relieved about that. I didn't especially want to spend the next day riding back home with this girl who had talked Jason into going on this crazy ride.

We took him home and kept him inside and supervised for some time. He wanted to sell the truck to help pay back some of the money he'd stolen from us, which he did. Someone asked me if I thought that all these crazy things Jason was doing might be connected to all the head injuries he'd had over the years. I began to think that there just might be a connection there.

Things settled down for a while until Jason turned eighteen. Legally, Lee and I couldn't keep him confined anymore. He knew that too, and before long, he found another friend, who got him hooked on drugs and alcohol and other bad things. This new "friend" provided a place for him to sleep whenever he wanted to leave home, and before long, he wasn't coming home at all.

It was this kid's mom, of all people, who supplied the kids with their alcohol. I went over to speak with her about Jason and she said, "He's not interested in seeing you! Just go away!"

This was really a hard time for Lee and me. We didn't know what to do to help our son and we could see that he needed help badly.

I remember getting this impression that the only way I would have a chance of helping him, was for me to pray night and day for him, and to read my scriptures. I constantly prayed that Heavenly Father would find some way to help him come back to us.

One day Jason dropped by the house and got into an argument with me. He said some really nasty things and called me some names he shouldn't have. Lee overheard him. He grabbed Jason by the shirt and slammed him up against the wall.

"Don't you ever speak to my girlfriend like that! You wouldn't let anyone speak to the girl you love like that, and neither will I!"

Jason left the house. It was obvious that he was not ready to come home yet. He continued his lifestyle of drinking and other destructive habits.

One night, as I lay sleeping in bed, I heard a voice say to me, "Get up! You need to go find Jason." It startled me, and I laid there for a few minutes, wondering if it had just been a dream. Then I heard it again, "Get up! Go find Jason."

I woke up Lee and said, "Lee, I know it's three o'clock in the morning, but we need to go find Jason. He needs our help!"

Lee said, "What are you talking about? I know this isn't a really big town, but it's not that small either. He could be anywhere. What makes you think you could even find him? Besides, he knows what he has to do if he wants to come home."

I knew he was probably right, so I lay back down in bed. My head had barely touched the pillow, when once again I heard the words. . ."Get up NOW and go find Jason!"

I got up, got dressed and went out to the car. I was pretty scared. I didn't want to go driving around the dark streets at three in the morning, but this feeling or impression or whatever you want to call it was so overpowering. I knew it's what

I needed to do. I had no idea where to go, so I just started driving, trying to see if I could spot his car anywhere.

I came to a stop light and stopped. Just then, here came Jason driving right in front of me. I followed him for a short distance and honked my horn. He pulled over and rolled down his window.

I walked up to him and he was drunk. He looked at me and said, "Hi Mom! What are you doing driving around this time of the morning?"

I said, "Jason, I was told to come and pick you up. You're supposed to come home now. You shouldn't be driving around drunk." I pulled my car off the road and locked it up. Then I got in his car and drove him home. I put him to bed, and then I went back to my bed.

Jason's destructive behavior continued for quite some time. I kept hoping and praying that something would happen to help him straighten out his life. I was constantly thinking about him, and this actually became a point of contention between Lee and me. He thought that I was too obsessed with Jason, trying to change him, when it was obvious he wasn't ready or willing to change.

"He doesn't deserve you or the time and worry that you're wasting on him!" Lee said. "He'll learn what's right one of these days but he's gonna have to learn it the hard way," he said.

I agreed with him there. I knew that Jason was in for some hard times if he didn't change his ways. I'd given up on the idea of him coming back home I just wanted him to get out of this destructive lifestyle he was caught up in.

About this same time, there was a boy who was trying to make unwanted advances towards Jenny. She was a junior in high school and had become quite attractive. This boy, however, was not the type of boy Jenny was interested in, and she wanted nothing to do with him.

One night, he decided to go to the place where Jenny worked and wait in the parking lot for her to get off. He was looking for trouble, and he'd brought along a few of his drinking buddies. They arrived at the parking lot, and while they waited for Jenny to come out, they continued their drinking, getting thoroughly drunk and obnoxious.

Eventually, Jenny came out to get into her car and found the boys waiting for her. They started verbally accosting her, calling her names and insulting her. She began to fear that they might get physically abusive. Fortunately, a friend of Jenny's came along and helped her out.

"You'd better just leave me alone!" said Jenny. "If you don't, I'll tell my brother Jason and he'll take care of you!" Then Jenny got in her car and came home.

Jason had developed somewhat of a reputation around town of being a scrapper. He didn't mind "mixing it up," especially if he'd had a few drinks himself. In their drunken state, they decided this might be a good time to find Jason, and show Jenny they weren't afraid of him. Eventually, they did find him, standing around one of the streets, also somewhat inebriated.

They drove up to him and began heckling him. They proceeded to call Jenny all sorts of vulgar names, goading him on, trying to get a rise out of him. It worked. There were three of these guys, in the front seat of a 4X4 pickup truck. Jason was standing alone on the sidewalk. But he didn't care about the odds. He was not easily intimidated.

Even though he had basically alienated himself from the family, he wouldn't allow other people to badmouth them. He walked over to the passenger side door and reached into the truck. He grabbed the kid in the passenger seat by the shirt and began punching him. The boy in the middle grabbed Jason by the arm and pulled him into the truck. The first boy put him in a headlock and held on tight.

One kid yelled, "Get going! Get going!" The driver punched the accelerator, and started driving off, with Jason hanging halfway out the window. The kid made a U-turn in the road, and the two passengers pushed Jason back out the window. When Jason fell out of the window, the tire caught him by the foot, and dragged him underneath the truck, driving completely over his body and crushing his head. He rolled a few times underneath the truck as it sped off down the street, leaving him lifeless in the middle of the road.

A couple happened to see the whole thing unfold. They watched in horror, as these kids drove away from the scene of the crime, and in their state of intoxicated stupidity, they went to a local fast food establishment and ordered some food. The man, who witnessed all this, followed them and ordered them back to the scene of the accident. When they arrived, the police were already there.

When the witness told the officer what had happened, he was told to go away.

"What are you talking about?" He demanded. "I saw the whole thing happen! Don't I need to fill out an accident report or something?" he asked.

The policeman said, "Look, we're trying to deal with some drunken boys and a dead body here! Just go away. We'll take your name and address and get a report from you later."

Jason's mutilated body was just lying there on the pavement. The police thought he was dead. One officer took out a spray marker and painted the outline of his body lying in the street.

An off-duty ambulance just happened to be driving by and asked the police if they wanted them to transport his body to the hospital. The officer said that was a good idea. As the ambulance headed for the hospital, one of the paramedics noticed that Jason still had a faint pulse. He wasn't dead after all! Not yet.