

# Chapter 12

## *Ordinary Angels*

It was the evening of December 19, 1998 Lee and I were discussing what, if anything, we could do for the kids for Christmas this year. We'd been waiting for Jenny to come home from work. She arrived home later than expected, and we were talking about things that were going on in her life and at work. She didn't tell us about her encounter with the boys in the parking lot earlier that night. She didn't want to cause us any additional stress, but I could tell something was wrong. Just then, the phone rang.

I answered it. Instinctively, Lee sensed that something was wrong. He came and stood by my side and waited there till after I got off the phone.

It was the hospital. They asked me if I was the mother of Jason Llewellyn, and I told them I was. They told me that Jason had been in an accident, and that we needed to get down to the hospital, fast. We told the kids to stay there and we would let them know what was happening as soon as we knew anything.

The moment we walked in the hospital, a policeman investigating the accident wanted to talk to us about possible charges that might be filed against Jason, obviously trying to protect one or all of the other boys involved.

I said, "What? Are you kidding me? I want to see my son. I don't care about that other stuff. I just want to see my son now!"

The doctor took us into a waiting room. He told us that they didn't think that Jason would survive the night. He said that Jason had been run over by a 4X4 truck, by some boys who were drunk. They'd run over the entire length of his body, and crushed his head.

I went into the room where he was lying on a table. I didn't recognize him. His nose had been smashed flat, his head was so swollen, and his elbow and ankle were both turned the wrong way. He was very badly crushed. He was unable to breathe for himself, but the immediate priority was to stop the bleeding in his skull. I looked at Lee. He'd turned white as a ghost. He sat down next to Jason and took him by the hand. I can remember him saying, "Use all that stubbornness inside you and fight! You just fight... don't you be dying... not now... not like this. You just dig down deep and fight!"

A neurologist who was studying the X-rays they'd taken of his head said, "We need to drill a hole in this boy's head. He can't take all the pressure that's building up in there."

Being pretty familiar with the medical field, I knew that this hospital didn't have the equipment or the expertise necessary to take care of Jason.

"Where's your life flight helicopter? Aren't you going to fly him out?" I asked. "You guys can't take care of him here."

They told me that all the choppers were transporting other patients at the time and there weren't any available, not even in Nevada. Words can't describe the hurt and emotion that were going through our hearts and minds at that moment.

Suddenly someone burst into the room and said, "We've located a chopper! It's a big double blade on its maiden voyage out near the Nevada-California border somewhere. It's got a top-notch crew aboard. We're trying to make contact to see if they can assist with Jason."

Meanwhile, doctors were mapping out Jason's head to determine where best to drill to relieve the pressure.

Finally, Dr. Anderson entered the room with a drill in his hand. He studied Jason's head for a moment then began to drill. I knew Dr. Anderson and his reputation as a surgeon but overheard him mention that he had never performed this particular procedure before. This would normally be performed by a neurosurgeon, but there were none around that night. If they waited, Jason would almost surely be dead before he could arrive. I remember thinking to myself, that if anyone could pull this off, it would be Dr. Anderson. As he drilled, I helped hold Jason's head to keep it still.

I've been in the medical field for over twenty years and blood doesn't bother me. But when it's your own child, it's somehow different. I really had to dig down deep for strength to keep going that night.

After what seemed like an eternity, the drill finally penetrated his skull and dark fluids started oozing out of his head. At first it looked almost like motor oil. I quickly realized that it was just old blood that had started to coagulate.

When Life Flight arrived, they told Lee that he'd have to let go of Jason's hand so they could take him away. Lee looked at the doctor and pleaded, "I can't let go...if I do, he'll die. It's my will that's keeping him alive." A member of the life flight crew overheard his plea, looked at Lee and asked, "How much do you weigh?" Lee

told him. "This is your lucky day, we have a brand new double blade chopper out there, and it's big enough for you to ride along. Let's get going."

I looked at the doctor and asked, "Can I come along?" Before he could answer, Dr. Madsen came into the room. He had my other children with him. He'd heard what had happened, gone to our home, told the kids to pack some bags for themselves and one for Lee and me, and drove them to the hospital.

He told my children that they would be going to Nevada for the night.

Before he brought them to the hospital, he knelt down with them in our home and offered a prayer. He asked Heavenly Father to give all of us strength and especially to bless Jason. I think he did that realizing that they may very likely be saying good-bye to their brother for the last time. He knew Jason's condition was that critical.

As we walked down the corridor towards the helipad, each of the children held Jason's hand and told him how much they loved him. Then we stopped and watched as Lee and Jason, together with the flight crew, board the helicopter. As we watched them fly away, I wondered if that would be the last time we would ever see him alive. It was so hard to watch them go, and stay behind. But I knew that I needed to be with my other children, and right now, Lee needed to be with Jason.

We turned to walk back into the hospital, and there was Dr. Madsen again. He looked at me and said, "Jenny helped me pack a bag for you and Lee. My Suburban is parked out front. There's money in the glove box, the gas tank's full, and there's a Dr. Pepper in the drink holder so you won't fall asleep. You take it and go to Las Vegas so you can be with Jason. Keep it as long as you need to. Now go."

I was so touched. Here was this wonderful man... this generous doctor who I'd worked for, for five years, giving me the keys to his new Suburban, and money to take care of us on the trip. Not only did he take care of our every need, but he provided love and compassion and strength to all of us at this very difficult time in our lives.

We drove the long hours to Las Vegas and arrived about four-thirty in the morning. As we drove, we discussed Jason's situation, and prayed that he would be all right.

When we arrived, Lee was sitting in the surgery waiting room. We waited for six more hours for the surgery to be complete. Finally, a doctor emerged from the

room and said, "I don't know if he'll make it... I don't think he will. If he does, he'll never be able to function as a normal adult. He'll probably never be able to walk or talk again." Then he said something that really angered me.

"If I were you, I'd be praying for this young man to die."

I looked at him, shocked, and said, "Are you serious? I can't believe that you're asking a mother to pray for her child to die! I could understand you trying to prepare me for the possibility that he might die, but don't ever ask me to give up on my child, and don't ever ask me to not pray for him to survive."

He explained that there was severe bleeding and damage in all four parts of his brain, that it would be a long hard road for him *if he did live*. Lee and I asked if we could go in and see him. "In a moment." He said.

After what seemed like an eternity, they finally let us in the room. They gave each of us badges to identify us as family members, and they said they could only allow two of us in at a time.

I remember walking in and seeing him for the first time after they'd stitched him up. There were tubes everywhere, and he was on a full respirator. His head was bandaged up, and he looked so helpless.

They would only let us see him for fifteen minutes every three hours, but we made sure we were with him as often as possible. After about eighteen hours in the hospital, a case worker came to us and asked if we had a place to stay. We said we didn't. We had very little money at this time because Lee and I had only recently returned from Oklahoma City and were still trying to satisfy the expenses of that adventure. My heart operation had used up all the cash we could spare *after* selling our home and our telephone answering service. The only reliable vehicle we had to use was the truck that Lee's company provided for him to drive back and forth to work. That's why Dr. Madsen had loaned us his vehicle to drive to Vegas. We'd already lost nearly everything.

The case worker suggested that We might be able to stay in the Ronald McDonald House just across the street. I thought the Ronald McDonald House was just for children, but she said that it covered patient's up to twenty-one years of age, including their families. Jason was only twenty.

We went to the Ronald McDonald House and they treated us wonderfully. After a while, I spoke to Lee and told him that he needed to take the kids back home. He needed to return to work and the kids needed to be at home for their jobs. Besides, Jason was still in a coma. I promised I would call them if anything

changed. I still had Dr. Madsen's Suburban, and I began to feel a little uncomfortable keeping it for so long, but Dr. Madsen insisted that I keep it for now.

Lee came back a few days later to see me. He told me that I should come home for a rest; to get a change of clothes, and just get away from everything for a while. Reluctantly, I agreed. I was feeling sad and discouraged. It was nearly Christmas Eve, and there was nothing I could do for my family this year.

Jason had a girlfriend named Faye. Together they'd had a little boy named Michael. He kept asking, "Where's Daddy?" Faye drove to Las Vegas to see Jason and said she would stay with Jason while I returned home. She promised she wouldn't leave until I got back. This way someone would be there for him at all times.

I agreed, and Lee took me home. We'd no sooner left the hospital, when a miracle happened. Faye was sitting with Jason and he woke up. He sat up in bed and pulled the tube out of his throat. He was breathing on his own! The nurse hurried in, saw what was happening, and decided they'd better tie him down so he couldn't pull out the tubes that were keeping him alive. He drifted in and out of consciousness for some time after that, but at least he seemed to be recovering.

I returned the Suburban to Dr. Madsen, but he insisted I take his other car to drive back to Vegas. Lee was worried about me being all alone in Las Vegas and not knowing anyone. He told me that he didn't want me going any place by myself, and that I was not to stop and talk to anyone. I promised him I wouldn't.

After a while, they transferred Jason to a different medical facility that required me to drive a fair distance each day. I'd drive by the same church every day, and one night as I was driving by it, the impression came very distinctly into my mind that I should find the missionaries. It kind of surprised me, because I hadn't even thought about talking to the missionaries. I couldn't think of anything they could do for me, so I put the thought out of my mind and drove on.

In the Ronald McDonald House there was an Asian family, who was struggling very much at this time. They'd been driving an SUV when the front tire had a blow-out, causing the SUV to roll multiple times. The father sustained minor injuries, the mother had a few broken bones but nothing life threatening. The two little girls had suffered severe injuries and were both in critical condition in the same hospital Jason had been in. Their little boy however, was killed in the rollover. This little family was devastated. They believed that this was the end of their relationship with their son, and they would never see him again. I spoke with her and assured

her that because of Jesus Christ, they *would* see their son again. I told her that they could even be reunited once again as a family. She seemed to find great comfort in my beliefs and wanted to learn more about them. Her husband flew home to make funeral arrangements for their son, leaving her there. To look after the girls. We had many conversations together.

I started to think that maybe she was the reason I'd gotten such a strong impression to find the missionaries. Maybe they could talk with her and give her some more comfort and peace. The next time I drove by the church, I again felt impressed to find the missionaries. Well, when I returned to the Ronald McDonald House that afternoon, I noticed on the bulletin board that this particular church I kept driving by was the same church that had volunteers coming over that evening to bring food and goodies to families staying there. I was really excited because I thought that the folks from this church might be able to tell me how to get in touch with the missionaries.

It was Christmas Eve, and Lee and the kids had come to town to be with me and Jason. They arrived shortly before dinner. Lee dropped Jenny off at the hospital. She wanted to be with Jason. I was so excited to see them once again.

After a while, the folks from the church brought in treats and goodies for everyone. The last two people to walk through the door were the missionaries! I was so excited. I wanted to go right over and talk to them. Lee noticed me getting fidgety and said "Calm down. Let them do their jobs and take care of their business. You can talk to them later." I couldn't wait. I wanted to tell them about this woman who was suffering so much over the loss of her son. I hoped they could give her more help than I was able to.

After a while, I approached the missionaries and introduced myself to them. I told them about this woman and about her son's death and asked if they would speak to her. They did speak to her and she found great comfort in the things they told her. They spoke to her for some time and then left her to think about the things they'd said.

I went over to them and thanked them for talking to my new friend. Then, I started telling them a little bit about Jason. I told them how he'd left the church and his family and become involved in a horrible lifestyle. I also told them that I felt impressed several times to contact them. I assumed it was to introduce them to this other woman. One of the missionaries looked at me and said, "So you're the reason we had to come here tonight. We were supposed to go to a member's home

tonight for dinner, but our church leader called us up just before we left the apartment and told us there was someone at the Ronald McDonald House that needed to see us. He said he'd really appreciate it if we'd come here and see who it was. Let's go and see your son right now." He said.

"Oh... I'm not sure that's such a good idea right now. He's in really bad shape," I said.

Jason had been moved out of the main hospital, to the Health South Head Injury Rehabilitation Hospital. He was talking by now, but he was cussing like a sailor and was very combative. I didn't think bringing the missionaries to visit him was a good idea, especially since he'd made it very clear he wanted nothing to do with church.

"I'm really not sure he'd want to see you guys," I said. "He'd probably say some things to you that aren't very nice."

"Ahh... that doesn't bother us; we walk by the high school every day and hear all kinds of stuff like that. Don't worry about us! We'd like to go and see your son."

I warned them about Jason and how he felt about religion in general. I told them that whenever I brought up the subject, he'd get very angry and say awful things to me. Still they insisted they wanted to see him, so in spite of my better judgment, we went.

Jenny stayed very close to Jason throughout this whole ordeal. It seemed like she wanted to cling onto him and never let go. At first, I thought it was because she was so sad to see her brother in such a horrible situation. I figured this was just her way of dealing with her emotions and showing her concern.

We arrived at the Health South building, and Jenny was sitting in the room holding Jason's hand. There was a nurse in the room who stayed there 24/7, to make sure he didn't hurt himself, or take out his tubes.

The elders said they'd like to go right in and see him now. Knowing how he felt about the church and missionaries, I looked at Lee, he looked at Jeremy, and then Lee said, "We think we'll just wait out here, just so he doesn't feel overwhelmed." The truth was, we didn't want to be anywhere around when the sparks started to fly.

When the missionaries walked in the room, Jason immediately sat up in bed. He got a big smile on his face, and said, "Hey! Missionaries! How are you doing? It's good to see ya!" Jenny and the nurse were shocked. Jason hadn't been doing much talking, not in full sentences that made any sense anyway.

After some brief introductions and some small-talk, one of the missionaries asked, "Do you believe in God and Jesus Christ?"

Jason thought for a moment and said, "Yeah... yeah, I do. I remember about Jesus... that's why I'm still here."

They asked him if he'd like a blessing and he said he would. They told him that his family was just outside the room and asked if he'd like them to come inside the room too. He said yes.

They called us in and we watched as they gave him a blessing. It was wonderful to see how Jason responded to their kindness. It was a side of him we hadn't seen for many years. After the blessing was over, Jason lay back down in the bed and started rambling incoherently once again. The missionaries left. The nurse and Jenny couldn't believe what they'd just seen.

These missionaries weren't assigned to the area Jason and the hospital were in, but they called the Mission leader, told him of the situation, and asked for permission to visit Jason daily. The Mission leader said that would be fine. They would read to him, talk to him, and give him encouragement to keep improving. They were a great help not only to him, but to our entire family.

It really helped me a lot, to have the missionaries come and visit Jason. It got to the point that he didn't want me to ever leave him, but it was so hard to be there all the time. The missionaries provided a great relief for me during this difficult time.

Jason was in an area of the hospital that was always on lockdown. You had to have proper clearance to get in or out of the doors and had to wear a badge at all times to identify who you were.

One day I arrived at the hospital and found everyone running around like there was some kind of emergency or something. I wondered what was happening. When I got to Jason's floor, the doctors called me in to talk with them. They informed me that Jason had decided he didn't want to be there any longer so he figured out how to break the security code. He left the hospital and went to find the bus stop. He wanted to go home. For whatever reason, Jason's injuries had actually made some of his mechanical reasoning and aptitudes seem to increase. I have to admit, it seemed pretty funny to me that he could do all this. There were people running everywhere, reprogramming computers and changing the codes so they could lock the place down again.

One doctor said to me, "If anyone could break the code, Jason could."



It was one of the orderlies who found Jason. After considerable coaxing, he was able to convince him that he should come back.

Soon after, the missionaries arrived and told Jason they wanted to take him to church on Sunday. Jason told them he'd like that.

When Sunday arrived, the missionaries came to pick him up. One of the missionaries was about his same size as Jason and brought an extra suit for him to wear. He stood next to them and said, "Look Mom! I'm a missionary! I'm a Missionary!" He was so excited.

I drove him to church and we met up with the missionaries. When he walked inside the building he looked and acted just like he was one of the missionaries. He shook everyone's hand, said hello to people, and seemed so happy to be there. I couldn't believe my eyes. Here was this boy, this young man who just a few months before was doing such awful things, drinking, smoking, swearing and using the most vulgar language, being so mean and disrespectful to me and the rest of his family. Now he was like a new person. It was nothing short of a miracle that this boy, who just months before was not expected to live or talk or walk or ever be anything but a vegetable was thoroughly enjoying life again. I was so happy for him and for our entire family.

I was so grateful to the church members there in Las Vegas too." Just like the people in Oklahoma City, these people had rallied around Jason, me, and the rest of our family. These people helped us so much when we needed help the most. It was simply wonderful!

As time went on, the doctors were amazed at Jason's progress. They told us, however, that he was not mentally capable of taking care of himself, or of making important decisions and handling his own affairs. He would have to remain a ward of the state of Nevada.

They put him into an apartment with other mentally disabled people, where of course, I was not allowed to stay. He was miserable. He kept saying, "Mom, I don't want to be here. Take me home with you. It was hard on him **and** on me. Since he had never signed a Power of Attorney document, the state didn't recognize us as his legal guardians, or even people who could voluntarily take him back to his home.

After a while, I got a lawyer to come and visit Jason. He worked with Jason and myself and eventually got the courts to allow us to take custody of Jason. It was such a relief. After two and a half months, we could finally take him home.

As I drove home with Jason, I became frightened about how things would be after we arrived. Would he remember what had happened? Would he remember his old friends, and go back to his destructive lifestyle? Would the progress he'd made in becoming such a wonderful young man these past few months, reverse itself? Would he revert back to the "other" Jason? Then I caught hold of myself and said that I was not going to allow myself to get caught up in all these doubts and negative feelings. I would just go forward, do the best I could, and leave the rest in God's hands.

When we arrived home the kids had made a big welcome home sign for us. It was wonderful to be a complete family once again. I noticed, though, that Jenny wasn't herself... something was wrong with her. She wasn't the happy, bubbly girl we'd known before the accident. She saw how Jason was struggling with his short term memory and how he wasn't able to read yet and still had a lot of other problems to deal with. It seemed especially hard for her to accept his situation. I noticed that every time she watched him try to do things that were difficult or impossible for him to do, she'd get tears in her eyes and start to cry.

Lee and I discussed it and decided to have a talk with her and see if we could be of any help. We pulled her aside and asked her what was wrong. She broke down and started to cry.

"It's my fault!... It's all my fault Momma!" she said.

"What are you talking about Jenny?" I asked. "What's your fault?"

"It's my fault Jason had all this awful stuff happen to him!" she replied.

Jenny then recounted her experience of the night of December 19th and told me that these same boys that had nearly killed Jason, were the same boys who had accosted her in the parking lot that night.

She told us how she'd been tormented these past three months by the reminders she saw almost daily, having to drive past the spot in the road where Jason's body outline had been painted on the street. She read the accounts of the accident that came out in the newspapers periodically, telling how "Jason was the aggressor," and basically "got what he deserved."

She didn't know until she returned from Las Vegas and read the accounts of the "accident" that these were the same boys who had terrorized her that night.

I felt so bad for Jenny. All this time she had been blaming herself for what had happened. We tried to console her and assure her that this wasn't her doing.

It was Jason's choice to return the taunts and go after these drunken kids that night. But I still believe she struggles with it, even to this day.

We tried to put all the sad memories behind us. After all, Jason had returned home, and once again we were a family. Then the bills started to roll in.

To give you an idea what kind of bills we now had, just the hospital bill was \$379,000.00. That didn't include Life Flight, Health South bills, anesthesiologist bills, trauma room, ambulance, rehab, or surgeons. You can just imagine how overwhelming this was to us, especially poor Lee. ***He'd always been such a good provider for us, but through no fault of his own, he kept seeing his future disappear, ravaged by the medical bills that constantly plagued us.***

We had nowhere to turn now for help. We'd sold nearly everything we owned to pay for my heart surgery. Now, *by taking custody of Jason*, and removing him as a ward of the state of Nevada, ***we had unknowingly assumed all his medical liabilities.*** If we'd left him in the state's custody, the state of Nevada and Medicare would have picked up the entire the bill. ***At the time, we didn't know that, and all we could think about was bringing our son home.***

When you're hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt, with no possible way to pay the bills and already nearly fifty years of age, the future starts to look pretty bleak. After consulting with religious leaders and legal advisors, we were advised to declare bankruptcy to help ease our financial burden. A burden that was virtually impossible to overcome. This was one of the hardest decisions we have ever had to make. *Yet I knew that if we didn't take this step the pressure would crush all of us... and would probably kill Lee.*