

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 4 of *I Will Not Be Broken: Choose Life* 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.

Step 2:**CHOOSE LIFE**

Crisis and pain can hold us hostage for a time, but we still have a choice in how we will respond to our circumstances, no matter how dire. When something disrupts our life, how do we move forward? I've seen it time and time again in my work with victims of war atrocities—there are those who fight for their lives after devastating loss and those who succumb to their suffering. Why the difference?

To truly thrive, we must *consciously choose* for our lives to go on in a positive way. I have had to do it more than once. Most of us have, or will.

We may feel like giving up, but few of us really want to roll over and *die*. We'd rather be Rip Van Winkle, and wake up in 100 years, after our crisis is long gone. In the end, we don't want to surrender to death; we just want this suffering to end.

Choosing life is akin to swinging between two monkey bars, letting go of one just as you reach for the second. It requires faith that the second bar will hold your weight. It can take all the inner strength you can muster to let go long enough to choose a new path out of your personal nightmare. But it is an endeavor that must be undertaken. Passivity is

a killer. Choosing life requires a willingness to fight. Your mind, spirit, and body must all engage in this daily battle to align for life.

After my experience in the minefield, a common question was, “*Aren’t you pissed, Jerry? Shouldn’t someone pay for this?*” It’s not that I didn’t have my angry moments—especially in the beginning. But, my expectation of *myself* was that I wouldn’t go there. I didn’t like that image of myself—bitter, whiny Jerry who let a bad thing take over the rest of his life. There is a life to be lived—my life—and if I had to hop, roll, or whatever, I was going to get back to it.

At first, getting out of bed each morning was a challenge. The alarm sounds. Get out of bed and wheel yourself to physical therapy at 7:30 A.M. Just get up. Or just get yourself to the park every day. Call friends and make plans even when you don’t feel like it. Eventually it becomes easier, even habitual. A routine, little by little, will ensure progress, an opportunity to see light flicker at the end of the tunnel.

Are you willing to try? *Willingness* to be open to your future is crucial. Curiosity helps. In the depths of pain, we might ask ourselves, How much worse could this get? One reason we survive crisis is our hope and belief that this moment will change. *No, this is not the end.* Each minute is excruciating, but we have to stay in the game. The question is, What can I do now that the scourge is upon me? Alcoholics live O.D.A.T.—one day at a time—but in crisis we must survive O.M.A.T.—one moment at a time.

Death seems like an option—a *choice* in the midst of darkness. “I can choose to end this now.” But is death really a choice? It’s saying our situation is larger than we are. My

own choice to live is visceral. I'm driven to see what's over the next hill. Choosing life is also intellectual, in the sense that we must apply our minds to think differently about our moments of crisis. Don't just feel what's happening. Think about it; think past it. The threat comes when we believe a moment is larger than life. The key is to remember that life is larger than this moment. That is the perspective we must grasp.

Only by gaining perspective, by looking forward, by staying connected to life, can we move forward. We reclaim life. Not some noble, sad, shell of a life, either. But a red-blooded, laughter- and tear-studded life that demands us to live it.

One of my friends talks about her suicide attempts before being diagnosed with bipolar manic depression and starting medication. She is clear about her hard-won decade-long battle for mental health:

The darkest depression is like a tight chain that makes your whole emotional being smaller, limited and rigid. It is so narrow and tight, you feel like you cannot turn away. It is being stuck. There is no light in this hole. Sometimes I lived in the darkest suicidal depression and other times I soared to the highest of highs. And the common thread of this painful existence was a commitment to self-destruction.

The craziest part was that through it all I functioned. Some force kept telling me, "There is another way." Day-to-day I was hanging on by the slightest thread. I had a million friends and always managed to earn money in interesting and meaningful jobs. I had a loving family. But every day was a little death that could not come soon enough. Pills, razors and a flight of stairs were all strategies to make the pain go away.

At one point my psychotherapist said to me, “Be careful...in one of these suicide missions you might really hurt yourself.” In retrospect, I believe my shrink was very effective at deferring the moment of suicide. “Wait another hour and call me.”

When the pain is so intense that you choose to kill yourself, you do not want to choose life. You are not really choosing death either...you just want the pain to go away. At the points that my shrink persuaded me to wait and call him back and then wait until the morning, I discovered that things do organically change and the impulse to destroy yourself is quieted. At those moments deep in the pit something usually small touches you. I went to therapy for an emergency session and the shrink had a can of Diet Coke. I was babysitting at one point. The ten-month-old saw a funny toy and burst out laughing. Or the weather changed...It is those subtle moments—almost distractions—that energize you to look for a way out of the pits... Then step one is almost always asking for help.

Personally, I feel upset, even angry, when I think of my friend wanting to kill herself. I don't want to believe it, but it's a fact. It's her life, not mine, but I lose if she opts out of life prematurely. Her life has enriched mine enormously, and that of countless others. Apparently, I want her to live for selfish reasons. Why? So I can bask in her gifts and potential; so the world can benefit from her living, thriving. I believe the world can't afford the good dying young, before their time.

Everyone who embraces survivorship will be in a position to help others. It's a ripple effect—we touch many more lives than we imagine. Consider who would be affected

for better or for worse if you were to die before your time. If you answer, “no one,” then you need to get professional help. I’m not being glib. It’s a fact.

Studies on people who say they want to commit suicide, or have attempted to, reveal we don’t really want to *die*. Most of us fear death and the unknown. We really just want to *end the pain*, to be *released*, finally. But wouldn’t it be better to be released into life?

I know survivors who didn’t want to survive at first. Jesús Martínez in El Salvador was seventeen and living through civil war in 1989. He had a job in the city and had to take a bus to work. Because of roadblocks set up by guerillas, he had to get off his bus, walk around the roadblock and get on another bus to continue his journey to work. “I was a teenager, and not aware of the danger of mines. Everyone just got off the buses and walked on the side of the road. I don’t know why I was walking where no one else was, but I remember someone saying there might be mines. I didn’t think about it much.” Walking along the side of the road, he stepped on a mine that blew off both his legs on the spot. The explosion was so powerful that others walking near him were wounded. He never lost consciousness, but he did lose hope.

I fell in a hole. Both of my legs were blown off. I had blood in my mouth. My arm was wounded, and really, I thought it was all a bad dream. I tried to kill myself with an explosive that was lying on the ground near me. It didn’t explode when I picked it up. When the soldiers arrived, I took a gun from one of them and begged him to kill me with it. I remember being so desperate to die, and saying over and over, “Please kill me.”

Jesús did not die that day. He became a survivor.

The healing process was very difficult for me. There was the healing of my body, and also the trauma in my mind. I am thankful that I had the support of my family. It was very important for me to meet other disabled people, and seeing how they lived their lives. Sports had always been a part of my life, and I was very happy when I saw people practicing wheelchair sports in the hospital. It has been a long journey from wanting to die to getting where I am now. I am very happy and excited about many aspects of my life. I have a wife, my children, a family, my parents and siblings, and a very wide circle of friends.

My greatest satisfaction is knowing I can help others. It is surprising to see other survivors arrive in hospitals who are going through the same process I did. They are like me. They look at me, I talk to them, and they can see that I went through a similar experience and that I survived. Then the next time I visit with them, or I run into them, they are showing a completely different face. That joy is something that cannot be compared to anything. Wow. I am part of making another person happy.

Jesús learned to think of his circumstances differently. Again, what happens in the mind and heart is key to survival.

Your willpower and courage cannot be found in another person. There are people around us who give support, but we have to reach deep and dig up our own power for the struggle. Only *you* can make the choice to muscle through your present darkness.

As British writer Gilbert Keith Chesterton warns, “Every man has his own courage, and is betrayed because he seeks in himself the courage of other persons.”

This is a very important point. You *will not* find salvation in another person. You have to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” as Paul writes in his *Letter to the Philippians* (2:12) in the New Testament. *You* must choose life. You will find your own words in your own language to describe your journey forward.

I confess that for me, it was cursing and loud groaning. I’m not much of a sailor, but I did discover a string of favorite despicable words to blurt out. I wanted to let the darkness know how much I hated it, cursed it, every second of it. But I did not want it to defeat me. I wanted to live. (And secretly, I wanted others to know I was in *a lot* of pain.)

Pain is a wake up call. It sends out warnings loud and clear. David is another one of us who was given second chance at life. David used to be a clown with the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus, but now makes a living as a business consultant and change management coach living in New Hampshire. He recounts a stark turning point on February 3, 1998, when intense pain concentrated his mind on what matters most: life and purpose.

At the age of forty-two, on the first day of vacation in Lima, Peru, I collapsed with chest pains in the National Museum. One moment I am laughing about erotic pottery with my wife and planning my next day’s hike to Machu Pichu, and the next thing I am scared

beyond belief, grabbing my chest and sitting in a pool of my own vomit. I am medivaced to the United States, where I'm told I am an immediate candidate for quintuple bypass surgery. Seven major blockages, two at 90 percent. I was a day away from dead.

Before surgery, I wandered a bit in life. There were lots of good times, but also a litany of comatose behaviors that often got me in trouble... My life was frequently complicated.

It's been nine years, and I am still working to integrate what was into what is. I am still working to understand the "bypass" of my own life. A few years ago I returned to Peru and climbed Machu Pichu. I went back to divinity school...

Heart surgery has given me this: the understanding that life is short, it can pass in a blink. And our dreams don't care if we are happy; our dreams only care that they are lived.

David tells me his goal is simple—to stay awake. That's a nice way to think about how to Choose Life. Stay tuned to what is happening around you and inside you. Mindfulness and consciousness are a discipline, much like getting out of bed in the morning to face the day.

Halfway across the world from David, Jacinta is a Mozambican woman I met through my work. Her husband was disabled from an injury during the civil war, trying to help a fellow soldier. They live in extreme poverty and her husband often has trouble finding work. But Jacinta sees their life as good, filled with love and laughter.

I am here living. We are missing a lot of things, yes, but we can live like that... He is able to do some things at least for a week, and he laughs here with us at home... I even tell him stories I hear in church so he doesn't feel so bad.

I will never send my husband away, as many have told me to do because of our poverty, because I believe one cannot buy love in the market. You cannot buy love with furniture or money. What belongs to love is love, and whatever this poverty is in our house, we are living according to our means with our three children here at home.

I like that thought: *What belongs to love is love.* You may be surrounded by poverty and want, but you can still expand your home tent hospitably to let in love, light, and laughter. Some days we go looking for them, and they seem to be hiding. We have to believe they will return. In this way, choosing life requires a seed of faith. The point of believing is to create options for the future. We hope by making this or that choice we will open the door to bigger and better options ahead.

I used to think God was the one responsible for guaranteeing my future. So, when I was injured, I struggled spiritually. I was hurt, feeling God had fallen asleep at my wheel. I had to learn that God would not dole out special favors to spare His children from disaster. I also learned that God did not lessen my physical and emotional pain after each surgery just because I asked Him to. It turns out that this Creator was not a big gumball dispenser in the sky, activated by my two-quarter prayers. I began to understand that my fervent prayers, unanswered over time, were more about me venting

my fears and anxiety than about securing miracles. Venting, it turns out, is very useful. It is a plea for empathy in the universe. *Please, someone out there, tell me you understand, dammit!* God wasn't my wishing genie—it was up to me to use whatever I had left to get on with my life.

The ability to choose life is a frame of mind, a decision that may be encouraged by faith and spirituality, but is certainly not dependent on a particular religious belief. What I have found is that the most resilient survivors I meet around the world agree that we are more than our bodies. Our circumstances and DNA don't fully define us. Spirituality can play a very important role in recovery, across all faiths, religions, and cultures.

I know many people of faith who don't see themselves as particularly religious or spiritual. Ross is a family friend and avid yachtsman. He has seen a lot during his seventy-odd years. He has had his share of trauma (starting with the death of his younger brother, Richard, from an aneurism at age thirteen, and soon thereafter a college roommate, and another close friend) and his share of triumphs (graduating from Princeton and crewing the first American entry in the Sydney–Hobart yacht race, breaking the course record). Then the wake-up call.

Two years after Kathleen and I married, we were not having any luck making babies. Kathleen was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, fatal then and fatal today with only the rarest exception. Kathleen endured a tough operation and the torture of cobalt radiation that burns up your insides for forty-five days. I was a wreck. The wire of strength within all of us is incredibly strong but oh so thin, and when it breaks, one's world

changes forever. We got through. She survived. Her terrific doctor went to bat for us so that we have two wonderful adopted kids, and now their wonderful spouses and grandkids.

Most important, Kathleen's victory snapped me to attention. I knew in seconds as never before why I am here and who and what is important, Love, Sharing, Helping, Trust, Communication, Building Life as a Family, all the tenets of Friendship and spreading them out to others. Most important, us.

Thinking of turning points in my life—so far, the crises are important! People who (appear to) go through life without the odd crisis will miss a great deal including the instant snap into focus of reasons for living, or even a slow progress toward it.

“La dicha es mucha en la lucha ” —literally, “The reward is great in the struggle.” Set out and find it, especially if it does not find you.

Most of the time we don't have to look for it, because struggle will find us. That's a guarantee. And when it comes, it sure helps if we can maintain our perspective and a sense of humor. Life is diminished without laughter. Humor is one of the most important keys to choosing life—a way to see through our dark circumstances.

For many survivors emerging from years of sadness or depression after a deep loss, the hint that they might want to live again came in the form of an unexpected chuckle. *What was that? Wait, did I just laugh?* It might have been months or years since feeling that release in the belly. A mother told me once it was a full ten years after her son died

before she remembered genuinely laughing at something. It surprised her so much that she figured it was the first indication that she might, in fact, want to live again. Humor heals. Christopher Reeve recalled,

As the day of the operation drew closer, it became more and more painful and frightening to contemplate...I lay on my back, frozen, unable to avoid thinking the darkest thoughts. Then, at an especially bleak moment, the door flew open and in hurried a squat fellow with a blue scrub hat and a yellow surgical gown and glasses, speaking in a Russian accent. He announced that he was my proctologist, and that he had to examine me immediately. My first reaction was that either I was on way too many drugs or I was in fact brain damaged. But it was Robin Williams...and for the first time since my accident, I laughed.¹

In Israel, there was one guy on the ward, probably in his fifties, who never laughed. He had recently lost his limb above the knee to diabetes and vascular disease. He seemed ages older than the rest of us, and no fun at all. At this point, most of my roommates were waking up off and on in the middle of the night with irregular attacks of phantom pain. Most of them would beg the nurse for sleeping pills or muscle relaxants. We'd unsympathetically tell one another to shut up. One night, this guy, I can't remember his name, responded to my joking asides by saying, "This isn't funny. Look at us. We can't sleep. We can't walk. What type of life is this?" He went dark on us. The room went

¹ Reeve, Christopher, *Still Me*. (New York and Toronto: Random House 1998) 33.

quiet. I rolled over in my bed with a note to self: *Stay away from him. He's toxic to me.* I have come to respect how ruthless we can and should be when it comes to our own recovery path. I know I was. Laughter is my way of choosing life, of releasing tension, of gaining perspective, even through the dark nights of hospitalization. I needed as much as I could get of that oxygen. If a person was distracting me from that imperative, I would just roll past him or her in my wheelchair. I couldn't have this person in my circle. *Stay away from the negative guy.* In a crisis, taking on others' depression can feel toxic, contagious, and somehow dangerous.

A friend of mine who struggles with manic depression credits her survival, at least in part, to humor.

In my years of depression, life was a crisis, but I hung in there for some reason. When people helped me laugh at myself that was always helpful. Most people were afraid of my black world, but some just helped me laugh and the laughter made me realize there was some choice.

You'd think MK, a young woman who stepped on a landmine while herding her family's cattle in Eritrea, would not find too much to laugh at. But sometimes there's nothing quite as silly as joking about our lowest common denominator: gas. MK recounts, "In the hospital, there was a lady who would slap anyone who farted in her presence. But whenever I did it, she slapped the others—my visitors! I always burst into loud laughter." MK describes how she loved to laugh, as it helped her to keep some

perspective and try to stay positive, even through the dark days of homelessness after she was kicked out of her uncle's house.

The fact I had to leave my uncle's place was good for me. I would have idled away my time there, doing nothing. I could have never reached this stage in my life. So, I know that even unfortunate incidents can change things for the better in one's life. When they denied me access to their house, it was good for me because I was able to make acquaintance with other people and start to progress in life.

Research indicates that just having a positive outlook like MK can extend one's life.¹ Today, 93 percent of Americans believe that perceptions, thoughts, and choices affect physical health.² Survivors in recovery can testify from experience that a dose of hope and optimism will bring more healing than gloom and pessimism. High levels of hostility are in fact better predictors of heart disease than high cholesterol, cigarette smoking, or obesity.³

We are waking up to the mind-body health connection. We understand the two are linked, but we are still more likely to seek psychological help only when facing deep depression or suicidal thoughts. People are proactive in treating their physical wounds, but disappointingly passive when it comes to dealing with the mental struggles

¹ Anderson, Norman B. and Anderson, Elizabeth P., *Emotional Longevity: What Really Determines How Long You Live* (New York: Penguin 2004).

² American Psychological Association, "Mind/Body Health" *APA Practice Media Room*. May 25, 2007. <http://apahelpcenter.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=media_library>

³ *ibid.*

associated with life's ups and downs.

One of my wife's closest friends since childhood, Chrissy, is a kick-ass practical person. She's a gifted athlete and a generous friend. She never over-dramatizes but does find humor in life. Except for that miserable year after her husband left her. "The jerk," we called him. He walked out only days after Chrissy had knee surgery and they had moved into a new condo. It turns out her husband had just completed parole. She had told no one, not even her closest friends, as she worked faithfully to keep her "jerk" out of jail in a failed attempt to save the marriage. Chrissy remembers the first few months without her spouse:

I would wake up every morning, and the television was still on from the night before. It would stay on until I went to work. I'd come home from work and lie in bed, turn it back on and stay there until I fell asleep. I did that for a long time. I finally got mad at myself and thought, "What a loser!" And that's when I started to come back.

She refused to accept defeat and began to rebuild. It meant going to daily physical therapy to get her knee back in shape, while getting her condo furnished and unpacked. She didn't *feel* like doing any of it, but she believed she had a different future ahead. She hoped for a different future anyway. Chrissy decided to buy her ex out of the condo and make it *her* home, decorated just the way *she* would like it.

I wasn't going to let this person, who I had protected and helped, get the best of me. My

“revenge” was to pick up the pace of living and find some fun. Sure, it meant a lot of weekends partying at the beach with a tad too much drinking and dancing, and then working like a madwoman during the week, but I got through it. I swung like a pendulum, but then found myself again. After about a year of this, I was able to let go of the marriage, of him, of what was meant to be, but wasn’t. I would take responsibility for my own life going forward.

True to her survivor instinct, Chrissy, refuses to accept defeat. She starts over. Today she is re-married and has a spunky daughter, much like her mom.

I remember reaching my lowest emotional point in a hospital bed the day after major surgery to cut through another piece of bone. I was physically and emotionally exhausted. Two friends from Jerusalem were sitting by my bedside, but I was feeling absolutely and utterly distraught and alone. I didn’t think I could take this pain for another moment. I began to sob uncontrollably. My heart and brain were at a breaking point. It felt as if someone were sitting on my head and chest, suffocating me. *I can’t take another second.* The next second comes and goes. *I’m serious, I can’t take even one more moment.* Then another moment passes me by. This went on and on. Finally, I realized I had a choice: live or die. I chose to live.

My high-school friend Kate suffered for years from anorexia. Looking back she remembers, “I realized I was killing myself slowly.” When I had visited her in the

hospital, she confessed through tears, “I don’t want to die.” But she was already at death’s door, her skeletal body shutting down, exhausted from years of punishment. I told her, “I can’t help you. What am I going to do? Tie you up and feed you oatmeal? *You* have to do it. No one can force you to get better.” Kate chose to climb out. Thank God it wasn’t too late. She channeled her formidable willpower to live, relearning to care for and feed herself. No one could do it for her. Not her friends, her mom, not even God. Kate bore the responsibility. She is now a nurse, successful manager, and mother. How do we, like Kate, turn things around? The American Psychological Association says it’s a mental rather than physical battle. We build our resilience mentally by:

- nurturing a positive view of ourselves
- keeping things in perspective
- maintaining a hopeful outlook.

Dragana, who lives a continent and ocean away from Kate, in Bosnia Herzegovina, learned to master all three.

I was waiting in my doctor's office. I did not realize the words I was to hear next would cause me to feel a chill like I had never felt before.

“I am sorry to give you the bad news, but you have cervical cancer.”

I felt numb and voiceless. The only thing connecting me to the reality of that moment was a bad headache I instantly got. In disbelief, I simply could not take in the full meaning of what she was saying. I felt nothing. Just emptiness. I have no idea how long I was sitting in silence or what happened next. I switched onto my autopilot and

we 'calmly' agreed to the next steps, biopsy, surgery. When I stepped out into the cold, I felt so, so alone. A million questions were racing through my mind: Why? How will I tell my parents? Will it hurt? Will I live? Can it be possible? My throat was aching with suffocated tears. I felt that something was taking away the sense of control over my life.

I cried. The crying was good. I needed to release the tension in order to start thinking straight. While I was calming down and regaining composure, I tried to recall all those things I was brought up to believe: “Regardless of the situation, I have a choice” “Do not be afraid, or let fear humiliate you.” “Distinguish the things that are under your control and influence.” “Do not give up before you even try to fight” and “Try hard!” As I talked to myself, the meaning of this “thing,” the cancer, a threat to me, started to change and take the shape of an opponent—a life test that I had to and wanted to resolve.

I know it sounds like a contradiction, but I believe that the hardest tests and losses I have lived through have made me a richer and, in many ways, better person.

Dragana is a role model for thriving. She decided to take charge of her own life, not only to choose it but to fight for it. What a difference a decision makes. What a difference her mind-set made. I hear from many survivors like Dragana who became thrivers when they *decided* to live. Even with friends who eventually succumbed to death, there was nobility in their fight to the end. They did not *go softly into that dark night*. That was their life’s choice.

The most resilient among us seem to benefit from an internal moral compass such as fighting for your country or surviving for the sake of your children. Having a purpose can strengthen a survivor's feeling of self-control, the sense of being in the driver's seat. It's okay if you feel a tad superior to victims and victimizers sinking around you. You must cheerlead yourself forward.

I think of Margaret in northern Uganda, who was riding the bus a few days before Christmas in 1998, when it drove over an antitank mine and was attacked by guerillas.

We heard gunshots and knew we were in an ambush. Everyone went wild. When I tried to run, I noticed one leg came out and the other, there was no shoe, no leg, and there was a very ugly thing I was looking at, not my leg, but something with the flesh hanging. But my mind was still, "Huh? What happened to my leg?" So I started to hop, and I lowered myself to the grass and tried to crawl. It was the dry season, so the grass was very high and dry and thick. So this hanging flesh kept getting caught, until I just gave up, and laid still.

That's when the soldier came. I closed my eyes, but I could feel his presence. And the next thing, he started to undress me. I was wearing jeans. And I thought, "Now, what does he want?" Normally, the rebels, they want clothing. And I had on a jacket and trousers. But there were also stories of how they abuse. And that's when I started praying. And then my trousers got stuck, and he's yanking on them, and going through my pockets.

All through, I kept my eyes closed. I would hold my breath, so he could not see

me breathe. Then, he shot me. I think he wanted to know if I was still alive. And I just kept still. So he just flung me, and I fell where he threw me. He shook me four times, threw me this way and that way, this way and that. And then he hit my leg with the gun, very hard. The pain wasn't so much. But I did feel pain, and was sweating. And he had seen the sweat, but when I didn't move, when I didn't say a word, I never opened my eyes, and I heard his footsteps walking away. This all happened in about five minutes.

About an hour later, the government soldiers came. And when I crawled out and saw all these guns pointed at me, one of them said, "Are you a rebel?" I said, "No. Are you the army?" He said yes. I crawled to him and I grabbed his leg and I wouldn't let go. Two other soldiers tried to pry me off, but they couldn't. Finally he said, "Let go so we can help you." And they took me to the hospital... I knew I had to live... I kept thinking of my babies.

When she first told me her story, I was stunned. Can you imagine the strength needed to play dead? Margaret, a single mother, didn't budge for the sake of her five kids who needed her to live.

Will you choose a future? For your own sake, as well as for your family?

Historic and literary figures alike grasp what's at stake: a life-and-death battle for our minds and hearts. "Sometimes even to live is an act of courage," writes poet Carl Sandburg in the twentieth century, echoing eighteenth-century Italian playwright Conte Vittorio Alfeieri, "Often the test of courage is not to die but to live." Why not give the

new day a chance? *How much worse can this get?* That's what we ask when we want to convince ourselves to keep the door open. After all, why give up a minute before the miracle? You just might discover a flicker of hope, even as the abyss of despair mocks the thought. Harriet Beecher Stowe counseled, "Never give up, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn."

By choosing life we step across the second threshold of survivorship. It may be one of the hardest steps. It requires imagination and perspective in the midst of pain. It comes on the heels of brutal facts and a long look in the mirror to see who we are and where we stand. How do you choose your way forward with scars and bitter memories? You don't let your situation define you. You reframe how to think about it. You choose humor and connections and love—you choose to live. One of the essential ways we start to embrace life is by reaching out to others.

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I WILL NOT BE BROKEN

5 Steps to Overcoming a Life Crisis

JERRY WHITE

“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.

#

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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**I WILL NOT BE BROKEN: 5 Steps to
Overcoming a Life Crisis
By Jerry White
May 1, 2008
\$22.95
0-312-36895-X**



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.