

# 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 9 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.

**BUILDING RESILIENCE**  
**TO TRAGEDY**



Now that we've dealt with defining victimhood, how can we learn to embrace resilience? Why are the survivor voices in this book so *damn resilient* anyway? What's their secret? Where do they find the capacity to rise above the ashes of catastrophe?

I'm here to tell you that survivors are everyday people in the car next to you, behind you in the grocery store, next door mowing the lawn. I meet these people everywhere, from every walk of life, on every continent. I only wish I could share more of their stories. I hope their examples will teach and inspire you to want to thrive. Just think: if someone can overcome that level of crisis or abuse, then maybe I can hang in there too, just long enough to get through my crisis.

What is resilience exactly? Resilience refers to our capacity to bounce back and resume function and health after a confrontation with disruptive or traumatic events. It's about elasticity and resourcefulness. Resilient people are somehow able to draw on past experiences and find inner strength to navigate their troubles and make the transition to a healthy, flourishing future.

The path to positive survivorship I have described in this book, with its action-orientated guidance, is drawn from the lived experience of survivors themselves, including my

own. But there is real science and years of research behind it.

I think it's important to look at how trauma inflicts its damage. Humans have suffered from injuries, conflict and natural disasters throughout history. But it wasn't until 1980 that we put a label on the residual effects of trauma: post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. Since that time, PTSD has become a popular area of research, in part because it is considered one of the only psychiatric disorders whose cause is an external event. It wasn't until the mid-1990s that research about the consequences of mass violence and war broadened to include studies of social, cultural, moral, and spiritual factors that influence our human response to trauma.

Allow me to boil down some of the research jargon. Put simply, traumatic stress—not just everyday traffic-jam stress—is caused by a confrontation with helplessness and death, a complete loss of control. And it is more common than you may think. Life seems to lose meaning and predictability. Our worldview is altered. From childhood, we all develop expectations about how the world will treat us. We are influenced by our upbringing, personality, cultural norms, and belief system. After a catastrophe, new information must be thought through until the negative experience is integrated into a new worldview. This is what we call the coping process.

Thankfully, most of us will never fight in a battle, witness a massacre, or find ourselves trapped in a minefield. And many of us will muddle through adversity without ever exhibiting any dramatic psychological scars from their trauma. Why the difference? It turns out that nearly every survivor of disasters, injuries or assaults will face either

positive or negative long-term consequences. What intrigues me is that positive outcomes—growing stronger through crisis—are not at all uncommon.

Am I suggesting that disasters bring blessing? Yes, depending on how we respond to them. In many cases, crisis will catalyze unexpectedly positive outcomes. But again, this happens only if we *decide* it will, if we are willing to search for meaning and purpose and thereby rediscover our common humanity. It's not the crisis itself that is important, but how we respond to it. Hundreds of survivors I have met describe how they grew stronger post-crisis.

There is a new term for it: post-traumatic growth (PTG). Also called “adversarial growth,” I am referring to the development of positive attitudes and goals that can come out of even the most ghastly experiences.<sup>1</sup> Researchers now believe that PTSD and PTG actually result from the same mental processes. A survivor experiences predominantly negative or positive consequences depending on events and feelings they experience *after* the trauma. As we discussed earlier, strong and caring social support can ensure growth, whereas isolation and social antipathy will foster the symptoms of victimhood. So, resilience isn't about the depth of trauma we experience, but, rather, about what we think about our trauma—how we process our personal nightmares.

Hurricane Katrina was an awful experience for hundreds of thousands of people. A study by Harvard Medical School evaluated the emotional responses to Hurricane Katrina from a cross-section of New Orleans residents. While almost all respondents

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard G. Tedeschi et al., eds. *Posttraumatic Growth: Positive Changes in the Aftermath of Crisis* (Mahwah, NJ, and London; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998); P.A. Linley and S. Joseph, "The Human Capacity for Growth Through Adversity" [Comment]. *American Psychologist*, 60, no. 3 (2005).

reported feelings of intense stress, grief, and fear during and after the event, the study also found that the vast majority of people reported significant postcrisis growth;

- 88.5 percent reported an increased sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.
- 77.3 percent reported an increased feeling of spirituality or religious faith.
- 85.9 percent reported an increased awareness of and confidence in their own survival abilities and inner strengths.
- 89.3 percent felt they were now better equipped to cope with future stress.

Respondents specifically reported having discovered these strengths after, and as a direct result of, their experiences with the disaster. Surprisingly, higher incidents of post-traumatic growth were found in populations that were already marginalized and experienced a lower quality of life before the storm, such as minorities and the poor. They had fewer material and financial resources to fall back on, but developed even stronger emotional resources and felt more optimism and hope than their more privileged counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

Wow, reread the paragraph above. The vast majority of survivors seem to have been jolted by crisis into increased purpose, stronger faith, higher self-esteem and more resilience. They are feeling *enhanced*, not diminished by catastrophe. There is something important happening, and it is not the result of Prozac or years of

<sup>1</sup> Brewin, Chris, et al., *Hurricane Katrina Community Advisory Group - Baseline Report*. Harvard Medical School Department of Health Care Policy (2006) 17-21. May 29, 2007  
<<http://www.hurricanekatrina.med.harvard.edu/reports.php>>

psychotherapy.

Leading theorists are working to develop something called the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) to assess the extent to which an individual has grown stronger and more resilient after a traumatic event.<sup>1</sup> Post-traumatic growth involves a positive evolution in people's personalities and social life. For instance:

- *Interpersonal Relationships* are improved; friends and family valued more, with greater openness and self-disclosure and increased compassion and altruism.
- *Self Perception* is changed, and there is increased self-reliance. "If I have coped with this, I can cope with anything." Paradoxically, there can also be a sense of greater vulnerability.
- *Life Philosophy* is altered with survivors re-negotiating what really matters to them, realizing life is finite; and re-assessing their understanding of existence and spirituality.<sup>1</sup>

How do we make sure we fall into the PTG group and not the PTSD group?

My first tutors in the rapidly advancing world of neuroscience and resilience were Dr. Dennis Charney (dean of research and professor of psychiatry and neuroscience,

---

<sup>1</sup> Tedeschi, Richard G. & Lawrence G. Calhoun, *Trauma and Transformation: Growing in the Aftermath of Suffering* (Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage).

<sup>1</sup> Brewin, Chris, et al., *Hurricane Katrina Community Advisory Group - Baseline Report*. Harvard Medical School Department of Health Care Policy (2006) 17-21. May 29, 2007.

pharmacology, and biological chemistry at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York) and Dr. Steve Southwick, a research professor at Yale University. Vietnam vets are a major source of their data, particularly those prisoners of war who never developed depression or stress disorders. Charney and Southwick tell me they were especially struck by the role faith, spirituality and humor played in getting the most resilient soldiers through their toughest physical and psychological tests. Based on their research, here are the top ten characteristics of resilience: *Optimism; Altruism; Having a Moral Compass; Faith and Spirituality; Humor; Having a Role Model; Social Support; Facing Fear; Having a Mission; and Training.*

Complaining is obviously not on the top-ten list. What strikes me about this research is that resilience seems to be something we can incubate and grow. It is in us and all around us. And, apparently, it's predominantly social. (Notice there's no mention of self-reliance.) At least seven of the ten characteristics, in fact, we can choose, develop and *do*. I take great comfort knowing we can *learn* to become more resilient. It's not just a question of our DNA or upbringing.

The other encouraging news is that tough times can be good for us. Life experience will nourish and make us stronger. For example, studies of emergency personnel indicate that having survived one traumatic experience increases resilience and, in a sense, inoculates workers who will face subsequent traumas at work.<sup>1</sup> Most of us can point to early life experiences that afford us at least some practice in building resilience.

---

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare-Finch, Jane et al. *The Prevalence of Post-Traumatic Growth in Emergency Ambulance Personnel*. *Traumatology*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 58-71 (2003).

Although my small-town life was admittedly privileged and sheltered, I was exposed at an early age to life-and-death issues that may in fact have helped prepare me for my date with the minefield. There were the deaths of classmates in high school and the divorce of my parents. One winter night when I was about twelve, there appeared to be a growing ball of fire burning outside my window. Our next door neighbor's house was on fire. My mother ran through the house to wake and collect her children. It's the only time I remember her counting us out loud. One, Two, Three, Four, Five... where is the sixth? I heard panic in her voice as she screamed for my older sister, Lisa, who was found brushing her teeth in her bathroom. Gathered around my parents' bed, we dropped to our knees in prayer for Mr. and Mrs. Vosoff. I closed my eyes tight and squeezed my hands, praying my hardest for this kind elderly couple, who used to pass me candy and quarters for weeding their garden path. *Please God, I begged, save them.* But no, they were trapped inside. I overheard one of the fireman saying how he found Mrs. Vosoff "crouching and charred" in a corner, as he carried her out in a body bag. It left an indelible impression. Another tragedy. Another prayer unanswered. Dare I say another lesson? How strange that the tragedy of others—the deep sadness we brush up against in our childhood—serves to teach us, somehow prepare us for living. Another terrible thing had happened—and I was still alive. Upon reflection, I suppose each visit to a hospital emergency room, a funeral parlor, an orphanage or nursing home, incrementally opened my eyes to the potential for danger and sadness, but also to endurance and the gift of life.

Josephine Hart observed, “Damaged people are dangerous. They know they can survive.” Every time we come through tough times, we should feel some sense of pride and achievement. After all, getting through the experience may have been the hardest thing we’ve ever done. And we might be surprised to discover an inner voice and competitive spirit coaching us: *I refuse to be taken out by what happened to me. I will not be defeated by this. I still believe in the possibility of the future.* Even when our loss is the death of a beloved, and we may not feel like going on without them, we still honor their memory by healing and living strong.

From the first day I was injured, I wanted to go through it “well,” to heal fully, whatever that took. Now when storms of crisis come my way, I think back to what it took to heal mentally and physically from that minefield, and I am not easily derailed.

My friend Becky has a lovely daughter, Anna. Anna was born three months premature and lost her twin sister at birth. Becky doesn’t bemoan what they both had to go through. Instead, she connects suffering with strength, both for herself and little Anna.

When I took my daughter Anna to see a pediatrician for the first time after three months of specialists in the neo-natal intensive care unit, the doctor asked me if I had ever been through tough times before. I told her, yes, that my mother had died, suddenly and unexpectedly, at the age of fifty-one, when I was twenty-eight. The pediatrician didn’t say anything, but I knew what she was thinking. “This mom will be fine. She’ll hold herself together. She just needs to know how to handle this baby, when to give which medicine, how to change oxygen tanks, and when to call me...” Looking back on this, I

think my doctor knew that people who have survived one trauma will survive subsequent traumas. “Emotional toughness,” I’ve heard it called. Trauma-proofed would be another name. I wonder, now, nine years past those times, about people who spend their whole lives trying to achieve or maintain smooth, easy lives for themselves or their children. I wonder if life without tough times is less good for us. Maybe we actually need “bad times” to teach us how to cope with them. Maybe we need to experience hardship, disappointment, pain. Maybe we need to be forced to keep going despite our fears...

Now Anna is nine years old, and she has her own brand of emotional toughness. She holds her head high, literally, to show the scars on her neck, when she sees someone with a tracheotomy or on oxygen. She tells them with that posture and with her eyes that she knows what it means to have trouble breathing. I’ve seen it happen several times, in the Metro in D.C., or in a shopping mall, this glance of understanding that passes from her to a person who has a trach tube or an O<sub>2</sub> pack, and I see how strong and tough and compassionate she is. Because she had to fight for her life so early on, she is already tougher in some ways than many adults I know.

So, believe you can be strong. The Five Steps are doable. You will get through and become even more resilient. This is an important perspective, and implies a call to action. Come one, come all, gather around and listen up. The time has come to stop running from our troubled childhoods. We don’t have to like being abandoned or abused, watching our parents fight and divorce, but we can be stronger because of it.

Experiences can be hateful. But we can appreciate how we have learned to toughen up emotionally. Let's stop complaining about everything that went wrong in the past—a habit of victim-speak—and start getting grateful. Think of it, your difficult upbringing and losses have made you more resilient than you may think.

I am encouraged by this focus on inner strength and health, rather than on sickness and symptoms. Some doctors and psychiatrists I have met seem a tad stuck in old-fashioned medical models of mental health and trauma recovery. Grief counseling, for example, as practiced by some psychologists in the United States and Europe, was not especially helpful to me and several of my friends. It somehow becomes more about surveys and acronyms than about rebuilding resilience and relationships. It turns out that naturally resilient individuals are not especially helped by grief counseling. Some people, like me, would prefer to share with close friends and family members. Others might want to share with peers, strangers or a professional counselor. Letting someone choose their preferred means of support is critical. Good practice is about empowerment and choice. And with practice, survivors learn to go after what they need as they increase their emotional strength and build resilience for the future.

Resilience is there for the taking, for all of us. All we have to do is want it. Reach for it, and, as the verse promises, "Seek and ye shall find." Half the battle is believing we are up to the challenge: "I *will* get through this well. This will *not* take me down." Then get busy. It's not just the 'other guy' who will inspire with his strength and grace—it's you.

PUBLICATION DATE  
May 1, 2008

Contact: John Karle  
(646) 307-5546  
[john.karle@stmartins.com](mailto:john.karle@stmartins.com)

# 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.

**TO REQUEST ADDITIONAL REVIEW COPIES AND/OR AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR,**

**PLEASE CONTACT:**

**John Karle**, Associate Director of Publicity  
(646) 307-5546/ [john.karle@stmartins.com](mailto:john.karle@stmartins.com)

**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.

**For Press Inquiries:**

Elizabeth Miner  
[eminer@landminesurvivors.org](mailto:eminer@landminesurvivors.org)  
202-250-3929  
2100 M St. NW Suite 302,  
Washington, DC 20037

For more information about *I Will Not Be Broken*, visit: [iwillnotbebroken.smnr.us](http://iwillnotbebroken.smnr.us)

For more information about Survivor Corps, visit: [survivorcorps.smnr.us](http://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](http://www.survivorcorps.org).