

# When Life Hurts

## A Three Fold Path to Healing

*Sample Reading from: [www.BrianStiller.com](http://www.BrianStiller.com)*

### Chapter 1

#### WHAT IS A THREE-FOLD PATH TO HEALING?

Inevitably on the human journey, life hurts.

We obviously don't plan for it, and when hurt comes we aren't prepared to deal with the pain. It all seems so unfair. "The good die young," we murmur and point to those we view as morally inferior yet who seem to get away with no disfigurement or broken hopes or dreams. If only the drunken driver had been killed in the accident; if only the abuser was scared with memories; if only the criminal got AIDS and not the addicted teenager.

As personal as is my hurt, it's universal. A parent in Beirut feels the hurt of his child blown up by a terrorist's bomb as does a parent looking down at the mangled body of her child in Sri Lanka. A jilted lover in a Muslim society knows the same sharp pain of rejection as does a Jew or Christian. The despair engulfing a young mother standing at the graveside of her lover, father of her children, provider and friend is as deep in the mountains of China as it is on wind-swept plains of the North American prairies. All of us, at some place, at some time, experience hurt. A hurt screaming out at the world and at God, demanding to know why.

In our compulsive search for healing we've developed a booming market of therapeutic sciences that apply their ministrations of psychological and emotional medicine. Burgeoning in the 1970s, fuelled by problems in marriage, family, vocational and community life, a plethora of psychological services, self help groups, yoga and mediation surrounds us.

As we look for something to quiet our hurt, we employ a wide variety of chemical helps and stimulants. With the advent of tranquilizers our era, characterized by depression, melancholia or anxiety, found a means of controlling runaway depression. Our nerves are soothed by their wonder-working action, but we still wake up realizing that though we've been helped over the threshold of pain, pills don't provide legs for the journey. Even with these medical and psychological services we are jolted by the shock of pain.

Immobilized and disoriented by the plaguing hurts of our lives we look for reasons. Why me? How does a God of love allow it? What can I do to end it? Who will help? In the end we search for a couch of solace, a hopeful vision or a path of opportunity to find solutions to life's hurts.

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It was Saturday night, around nine p.m. The evening dishes were cleared away and my wife Lily, my daughter Muriel and I were reading when we heard a knock at the door. I was surprised; our cottage is located on a chain of lakes some two hours northeast of Toronto. To find us, you have to know which winding back road to take. This was before a phone line had been strung to the cottages of our lakes.

I opened the door to see the owner of the grocery and boat store out off highway 507. "Trouble," I remember thinking.

"Your nephew Brent called. Something has happened. You are to call your brother Dave," he said slowly, knowing he was bringing bad news.

I climbed into the car and drove quickly to the highway, found a phone and called. Brent answered. Our conversation began the most painful period of our family's journey.

Returning to the cottage I told my family the shocking news: our niece Jill had died of carbon monoxide poisoning. We later learned that after a high-school party she had driven into the garage at home and left the car running; eventually she was overcome by fumes and died.

Waves of grief rolled across our family. They would lift for a few moments. We'd remember a happy and funny moment and laugh - out of sync with the tragedy but in need of relief. Then another wave of sorrow would catch us by surprise and we'd be emotionally swept away. For a week we lived together, walking side by side in unimaginable heartache.

"Why?" formed the starting point of each question.

"What was not done that, if done, would have redirected the course of her actions?" we wondered silently.

"Or, was this just all an accident?"

"And, at eighteen? So unfair. So unnecessary. So cruel."

Not only were her teenage friends asking the question, "Where is my life going?" her parents, uncles, aunts and cousins were as well. The funeral at the church was packed. The car procession seemed endless. Listening to the eulogies and sermon, I asked myself, "What difference is my life making?" Under the crushing sorrow of the death of our beautiful and talented niece poised on the edge of a promising life, we looked inward at self and then tried to peer outward. Would the wounds ever heal? And if so, how?

This is not the end of the story. Rather it really is the beginning of a narrative that today is weaving a longer story of hope, faith and love.

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During my first year in high school I picked up a book about an event called the Holocaust. As I read, the stories and pictures seemed beyond believing - like a sick hoax. Only after checking out its validity could I see those skinny, with ribs-you-could-count images as people. Some years later in Toronto, while rummaging through a hardware bin I noticed a tattoo on the owner's arm.

"Is that from a Nazi prison camp" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "I was in Dachau." Reluctantly and slowly he told me the story of his near death.

Some years later as Lily and I quietly walked the enclosure of the Dachau camp on the edge of Munich, I wondered about my hardware friend and tried to imagine his days there. Unable, I tried to feel his suffering while surviving the unbelievable pain of those dark days in that torturous camp. I tried but I couldn't.

When Princess Diana died in the car crash in the tunnel in Paris in late August, 1997, grief was instant and overwhelming. Not since the death of John F. Kennedy have I seen such widespread public and private mourning. Why did people hurt over her death? It went beyond Commonwealth countries like Canada - still linked to the British monarchy - who were devastated by her passing. What did she have to do with people she had never met and why their grief? Then only days later Mother Theresa - the Albanian nun whose work began in the streets of Calcutta and spread world-wide, the diminutive woman who epitomized the greatest of human symbols of love and giving - died. Yet her funeral was modestly presented and sparsely viewed in contrast to Princess Diana's.

As one commentator noted, while Princess Diana touched the hurting, Mother Teresa took them home. So why the massive outpouring of grief for this princess, who had led a charmed life, had betrayed her marital vows and was masterful in using the media? Yes, people saw her as being unfairly treated by her husband and pushed about by the paparazzi, the scavenger-like media. While many try to ferret out reasons for this massive expression of grief, they fall short of offering a satisfying answer. In the end people just did. She had linked soul to soul with millions, far beyond her own comprehension, I'm sure. But grief it was.

While the collective hurt of mass killings is more than we can fathom, when we reduce these overpowering collective stories to those of individuals, the cacophony is reduced so we can hear the narrative of loss and sorrow. We don't, however, have to go the killing fields of Asia or the gas ovens of Europe to encounter suffering. We meet it in our own lives. We hear stories of other people in pain. We discover that no one is immune. We learn that fame, charm or even a life of outstanding goodness is no vaccination against tragedy. Hurt comes in many ways. Some are beyond what most of us have experienced, but hurt is hurt, no matter its source.

When a loved one dies, the hurt we feel alerts us to our deep feelings. Pain is triggered by being unlinked from the one we love, the one with whom we've been closely attached. The greater the attachment, the greater the pain. If a child dies, an entire future is gone, never to be lived. This is in contrast to someone older, about whom we rationalize, "Yes, she's lived a long, good life." Though we feel the loss, at least we know the person had a good crack at living.

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There are many kinds of losses, each bringing its own pain. A couple hearing that their son has AIDS will have questions out of a different context than someone reading a note on the kitchen table saying that a spouse has packed up and taken off. Each hurts in his or her own way for individual reasons, but hurt is hurt.

#### SOURCES OF PAIN

Pain is obvious when we know its source. While I was painting our cottage, the ladder slipped and I fell two stories, breaking seven bones in my right wrist. It hurt and I knew why it hurt. But when we feel a stomach pain we may not have any idea where it is or its cause. Such

unknowing can create its own kind of pain: anxiety over what it may be adds psychological pain to the physical. When Jill died I ached in my gut. It was real, like a tight metal band crushing my innards. Were my innards being crushed? No. But the emotional pain made it feel as if they were.

Pain is felt differently depending on the person and setting. In doing stretching exercises I can endure the pain because in stretching my muscles and limbs I anticipate it. But if while walking I slip and stretch a muscle, though the pain may not be any greater than it was in the morning exercises, because of its suddenness the pain feels greater.

However I don't need to describe pain to you. You know when it is and when it isn't. We all have our own thresholds - of all kinds of pain. And we know when pain is pushing us over the brink. But what brings it into my life?

We hurt for many reasons. Regardless of its source, emotional hurt is real, not to be dismissed by rationalizing: "There is no real reason for this, it's just in my head."

Death. While working as a volunteer with the Grace Children's hospital - specializing in children with tubercular illness - in Port au Prince, Haiti, one day I went with Gerard, a staff member, to inform a family that their daughter had died at the hospital. Because the child was one of thirteen, I assumed there would be the normal grief but with so many children, the loss of one child wouldn't be that catastrophic. What I encountered forced me to rethink my assumptions. We parked the Jeep and picked our way along the sewage-littered street to the child's home, crowded in one of the many shantytowns of that Caribbean country. As we did, Gerard warned me to be ready to leave as soon as he informed the family about the death.

He knocked on the door. When the parents saw him without their daughter, they knew the news was not good. As gently as he could, he told them that their daughter had passed away that morning. The reaction was instant. There was an outbreak of frenzy, hysterical weeping and anger. It was time for us to leave. We quickly retraced our steps and drove away. As we did, I wondered, "Why this outpouring of grief?" Then I realized that in such extreme poverty, all that really matters is relationship. When you have little or nothing of material goods, and when just surviving the day takes all the energy you have, life is very precious. When all you have to live for is life itself, death is a thief.

Death is the end; there is no going back. Unresolved issues lie face up, calling on those who remain to handle them. Death is final. All the sorrowing the world will not change that. And it brings pain, varying degrees depending on accompanying realities.

Guilt. It was late at night when the phone rang. Late night phone calls usually mean trouble. It was. I heard my mother's broken voice and knew it was about dad. He had been in the hospital with coronary problems for some months. Though Dad and I had a mentoring relationship (In fact, when I think of God I have this childhood image of God being five-foot-nine, one hundred and ninety pounds and bald. That was Dad!), I felt guilt over not giving him enough attention during his final months. My two older brothers were in the medical field and I assumed they would know best what should be done and so, foolishly, I let the opportunity of those final months slip away. I still feel the pain of guilt over my failure.

If guilt is not resolved, pain increases. Parents naturally feel guilty if a child takes his or her

own life. "What did I not do that I should have done," or "What did I do that I needed to ask forgiveness?" The unfairness of suicide is that the person who does that holds all the cards, as it were. That person alone finally knows the reasons. For some, the ending of one's own life exercises power over people left behind as they are now not able to do or undo actions affecting the relationship, and throughout life will they live with those regrets. Such guilt is destructive.

**Broken Relationships.** Since the untying of marriage bonds by way of legal divorce has been made easier, we have seen an avalanche of broken marriages. Though many marriages should never have occurred in the first place, and even though in some cases children and spouses are better off by separation, today we crash about trying to find the means to heal the hurt caused by broken relationships.

**Financial Failure.** At a recent high school reunion in Saskatoon a school mate told us about her father, a man my brother and I had known when we worked at a Safeway grocery store as teenagers. Leon, a respected member of his eastern-European community, in his desire to provide for his family the good things of life, took high risks on horse betting. In the end he lost everything and brought great embarrassment to the entire family. For ten years he worked three jobs to pay off the debt. (He refused bankruptcy.) The pain was made worse by the anger he took out on his children. In the end the debts were paid, he was restored to respect in the Ukrainian community and the family found joy and solace, but only after living years of hurt.

**Injustice.** What can cause greater hurt? Paul Moran, a young man just north of our home, was convicted of the murder of a young girl. The police thought they had the case figured out before they had sufficient evidence, and in the end the prosecution constructed the facts to fit their theory. Years later, when DNA testing was used, everyone learned that the accused was not the person responsible - after having spent years in prison. What hurt!

Hurt also arises from feeling the injustice done to someone else. Pastor Martin Niemoller was a leader in the Evangelical Church of Germany who stood up to Hitler and his Nazi enterprise. Niemoller's deep sense that the church and the German people were being wronged by the demagoguery of the Third Reich, along with his growing awareness of gross violation against the Jewish people, led him to oppose the Fuhrer. His hurt in seeing his church pulled into the evil of the regime overpowered any sense of personal danger. In the end his courage put him behind the barbed wire of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

**Lies and gossip.** Though gossip may not land one in prison, its personal impact is enormous. I recall a senior leader who spread gossip about me. Someone who had heard the story asked if the rumor had any validity. I was not only hurt that this person for whom I had high regard would spread such a tale, but I was personally affected by the rumor's influence.

**Stress.** One generally doesn't experience stress from working too hard but rather as a result of working outside of one's gifting. For example, a pillar holding up an overpass will not be crushed by the weight of the overhead road. Stress is when the weight is unevenly distributed on the pillar or if the foundation of the pillar is not properly designed. Yes, too much work may crush us. But usually we experience painful stress (for a certain amount of stress is good) when our lives are not living within the boundaries of our gifting and expertise.

**Moral Failure.** Like any other hurt, the pain from moral failure will vary with the person. If a person, for example is an investment counselor and absconds with funds, that is a moral failure that would cause pain to the entire community. However, we all at some time in our lives morally fail, at least by our own standards if not those of others. Our own embarrassment and humiliation are part of the pain, but the hurt of knowing we have caused hurt to others adds to that.

**No Time.** Pain comes by not having enough time. By failing to plan for the needs and the time allotted, I bring pain on myself and others. There are times that things come on us with no warning. But when I continually get trapped into having not enough time, hurt is inevitable. Here, children are the most vulnerable. Recognition of their importance is transmitted by how we use our time. Parents who have little time for the children inflict life-long pain.

**Exhaustion.** Like having no time, hurt comes from physical exhaustion. And usually exhaustion is a function of trying to do too much in too little time. When Grandpa worked the farm with horses and plows, the days were long and demanding. The physical weariness of his day was real. One of the differences today is that the speed of life, combined with the surrounding environment of business and activity, plays on one's emotions to the extent that a person suffers from physical and emotional exhaustion.

**Illness.** This brings more than physical hurt and discomfort. A colleague who has lived with enormous energy is suffering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. There is no physical pain but the impact on his sense of self and family is nothing short of painful.

**Change.** Alvin Tofler in Future Shock describes the social/psychological disease caused by the fast-changing pace of life. In the past we had time to absorb changes as the time-lapse between major shifts gave time for people to absorb the change. Today with the rapidity of change, we are disoriented as change falls upon change.

**Misunderstandings.** These hurt. Often they are small and maybe insignificant, but they annoy like a pebble in a shoe. These happen as we work and live side by side with co-workers and family.

**Unrealized Dreams.** Those in middle age tend to be especially affected by this. As we move through the last few decades of our lives we wonder if we've lost our chance to do what our dreams foretold. We all have a desire to write our signature on some part of the universe. At a recent high school reunion, I met old friends who I could feel had, in their view, fallen short of their youthful dreams.

## DISCOVERING NEW PATHS

Each generation cries out from its own moment for answers, searching for meaning in the context of their age and within their own assumptions of life.

I'm a war baby, born in 1942. The 1950s was my school era and the turbulent '60s my university period. Each generation finds a focus both out of necessity and interest. Landon Jones reminds us that in the 1960s we studied sociology to change our world; in the '70s we studied psychology to change ourselves; in the '80s we studied business management to guarantee our economic future, and in the '90s we studied the environment to ensure we have a place in which to live. I anticipate that in the first decade of this millennium we will study

the matters spiritual to discover our future.

Entering the third millennium, new attention is directed to issues about spirituality, an interest that flies in the face of the dominating scientific materialism which defined the twentieth century. Two factors fueled this fascination with the spiritual. First is the expected metaphysical hype that always seems to accompany the turn from one century to the next. The turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries was marked by a rise in a variety of new forms of western-flavored religion, including Christian Science founded by Mary Baker Eddy. Then, as we approached the twenty-first century there were expectations that either we would face a collapse of world systems or there would be a dawn of unbounded freedom and peace. The buildup to this millennium flowed from the radical days of the 1960s, driven interests in matters religious. So, during the last few decades of the twentieth century, increased forms of spiritual manifestations kept popping up, everything from mystics of Asia to baby-boom churches of the North America.

In addition to the usual turn-of-the-century anticipation, however, this spiritual consciousness was driven by another factor, one unique to our times.

For 200 years the western world was shaped, nurtured and defined by ideas formulated and promoted during the period known as Modernity or the Enlightenment. Sociologist David Lyon marks this period from the fall of the Bastille in Paris France in 1789 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Five fundamental ideas - the inevitability of progress, liberalism (meaning autonomy of the individual), rationalism, scientific materialism and secularism - became the heart and soul of the western world as Enlightenment thinking defined our laws, academies, social arrangements and politics, and were especially fundamental to the defining of the new political entity, the United States of America.

The formulations associated with this period of time have become axiomatic: we've become so used to them that they fit like an old slipper. We just don't think of life without them framing our assumptions, hopes and plans. This modern era, or modernity, was so fixed on these concepts that questioning comes as a major quake, unsettling what we thought were rock-solid assumptions. Today they are under attack. This remarkable turn in thinking allows the pursuit of ideas which the Enlightenment tended to downplay, if not outright pooh-pooh.

What these ideas created was an overall lens through which we collectively saw life. The combination of the Enlightenment ideas asserted that human life progresses by natural selection; that the rational mind will select as true only that which can be proven scientifically; matters "religious" are to be pushed off the stage of public human enterprise and privatized to the person or groups; faith is to be seen at best as being highly personal, and not helpful to the solving of human issues or assisting in the human enterprise.

The common assumption to this collage of thought is that there is no place for truth beyond what can be seen and tested. The only real world then, is defined by a rational, test-tube approach. The surprising reaction to this rationalistic premise is what we daily see on newsstands and television - a wild assortment of reading and viewing based on sensational news gathering and speculation in which people bare their souls on everything from "My mother stole my boyfriend" to "I was abducted by a Martian." As G. K. Chesterton warned us, in a world where people believe in nothing, they'll believe in anything.

There is a weakness to having these five primary pigments determine the colors shading the picture of life. We now know that rationalism and scientific certitude, which we assumed would inevitably lead to improvement, in the end offered no ultimate hope. The bubble of optimism burst as two world wars, accompanied by the Holocaust and horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Cambodian killing fields of Pol Pot, the murderous squads of Latin America and the massacre of Rwanda displayed the evil side of human life.

So if society was progressing out of the swamps of bestial genocide - as scientific materialism posited - where was the evidence of that in the twentieth century? We saw scientific materialism for what it was - a means of creating material well being for some, but unable to speak to the most basic needs and concerns about life.

So for those caught in pain, to what does one turn? If societal assumptions shut out both a belief and understanding of the metaphysical and spiritual, how does one find a path that is reasonable, valid and effective?

Is There a Way Out?

Bernice Boyes and I became good friends from our first meeting at a writers' conference at Briercrest College in southern Saskatchewan. She loved and prayed for me like few I have ever known. As we got to know each other, I found I could talk to Bernice with amazing candor, even though she was the age of my son. Because of a condition with which she was born (myositis ossificans progressiva, a disease in which the fluid in a bruise turns into hardened calcium), by the time she was in her early twenties walking was difficult; her arms became increasingly immobile and eventually she could move about only in a wheel chair. I was amazed at her resilience and optimism. One day I opened a parcel and there was a painting she had done for Lily and me. I knew that her arms were not flexible enough to paint. What an exercise of love went into this painting.

Though Bernice faced her reality, that didn't mean she didn't think about not being able to experience the fulfillment of her dreams. She wrote me after I had sent our family picture. "Brian, even though I am trapped in this body, which is anything but attractive, and even though I know I will never marry and have a family, the same desire for intimacy, loving and parenting others have, I do as well." My heart ached for her. What counsel could I offer? I would be offering an untruth if I tried to pretend her hopes would someday be realized. I knew she wouldn't marry, and I realized her life-expectancy was shorter than others. Locked in her deteriorating body with its limited resources, she rose out of them.

I would often receive notes of love and encouragement. One day she wrote, I am not disabled. If you were to look at a picture of me in my wheelchair, you might want to question that, but let me explain. Most of us want to be accepted primarily for who we are and what we can contribute to society. How short we are, how tall, how thin, how stout, how beautiful, how plain - we don't want to be judged by such factors. We can be four foot eight inches, scrawny, with a big nose and two left feet but have a "heart" the size of Texas.

So then, if we look beyond appearance, I am not disabled. My body happens to be, but I am not. Does this change how we view a person with a disability when we meet them? I think it should.

Over the years, I've seen a variety of reactions to my disability, ranging from the bizarre to the

disappointing. There was the boy who thought I was someone's science project when he saw my friend pushing me in my wheelchair one day. Then there were those who told me not to bother completing high school because it would be too difficult for me to handle the workload.

Since then I have started a career in writing, been on a Christian mission trip, and participated in disability research and government negotiations. I don't plan to spend my time merely filling my days playing bingo or watching talk shows as some might expect me to. Life has all kinds of potential!

My disability is not the worst thing that could ever happen to me. I know people who have no physical needs to speak of, but are severely "handicapped" because of the troubles they've experienced in life, and how they've chosen to handle them. We all have challenges, strength and weaknesses. I can help you with yours and you can help me with mine.

You see, when it gets right down to it, everyone has a disablement of some kind, be it physical, emotional, or spiritual. I believe that handicaps of the soul are infinitely more intense than any physical disability. And healing of our souls through the forgiving love of Jesus is infinitely more critical than physical healing (although that can happen too).

Bernice hurt physically. She also told me about the inner hurt of not being what she dreamed or desired. But that didn't deter her from living a life filled with adventure, creative public concern and prayer.

There is a way out from the trap of suffering. It isn't to pretend that suffering is a figment of one's imagination. This way out doesn't deny pain's existence; neither does it find its solution in "ten easy steps." It is tough and demanding, requiring effort and time. As surely as the pain is real, so is the healing. The formula isn't lifted from a pop-cultural fix-it bag of tricks. Neither is it a language of New Age psycho-babble. It does not deny modern medicine's ability to correct chemical imbalances; neither does it ignore our increased understanding of the mind/body relationships, nor the enormous strides in care providers' ability to assist us by way of therapy. Indeed it celebrates what we have learned and what we now can do.

This path to healing is, however, much older than modern therapy. The path has been walked on by many before us. Its essentials have been tested by wise sages, in many situations, by people who have gone down into the deepest caverns of hopelessness and despair. And it has been walked by the very giver of life itself. The path is not a simple "self-help" formula. If that is all it is, then I'm stuck alone with my pain with no one to help me find and enable me to walk the path. Though it involves all of who I am (and in that sense I work at helping myself), if all I can do is help myself, then despair is the fitting response. Unique to this three-fold path is the promise that I'm not alone.

The journey helps us see who we are, and understand our connection to the rest of creation. It helps us tap into the eternal wisdom of the ages so that our inner selves are nourished, our minds released of despair, our broken hearts mended and our human nature released to live as we were intended.

Since childhood I've been fascinated by my father's Swedish ancestry. In summertime our family would often drive eastward some 500 miles from Saskatoon to the farms of our

Swedish relatives near Minnedosa, in southwestern Manitoba. I'd listen to the gentle, rolling Swedish sounds as Dad would exchange childhood stories with Aunts Edith and Elsie and Uncles Alan, Henning and Ted. With that memory of family I've searched for a linkage to our European ancestry. With my father and his brother dead, with no written history and few records, my search had little to go on. It began in earnest in 1990 when a friend and I traveled into north Sweden to research the history of my dad's mother. What I learned was not what I had imagined our past to be.

We travelled north of Stockholm to the Baltic port of Umea and then west to Vanessa (both a with .. on top) to meet a distant relative, John Norberg, who explained the family tree. On a Sunday morning he began telling me the story of Grandma Stiller, and continued as we travelled from one place to another. He would tell her story only as we drove from site to site, places important to her story. It was like sitting in live theatre, waiting while the scenery changed behind the closed curtains. It was only then that I began to learn of her past and pieced together the events and places of her early life.

The pilgrimage began at the homestead of Per Persson, grandfather to grandma Stiller. The farm house was just as I imagined, a large well-constructed building along side a wide, flowing river, elegant and well preserved, obviously the home of a prosperous family. What a pleasant way to begin a look into my past, I thought.

We left that home and drove by many lakes. John parked the car on the edge of Lake Ostansjo, walked up the edge of a hill, stopped at a clearing and said, "Here is where Jon Hansson and Maria Margareta, your great-grandfather and great-grandmother set up their first home, and here their six children were born, including your grandmother."

"What an idyllic spot," I whispered to myself.

John paused, seemingly reluctant to go on. He looked away, speaking slowly and softly:

"Something happened to Jon Hansson, your great-grandfather. He was sent to a mental institute over in Umea. To protect her children, your great-grandmother, Maria Margareta, for some reason got a divorce somewhere around 1880.

The picturesque landscape lost its charm. I felt robbed, as if the facts of the past had no right to intrude on my imagination. The surrounding scenery took on a new look. The tree in the centre of the clearing seemed different. As I looked down on Lake Ostansjo, I tried to imagine the heartache and sense of desperation as Maria Margareta did all she could to protect her six children. I wanted to forget it all and leave with my imagination intact but I was compelled to follow the trail. We got back in the car. Nothing was said; I was lost in my thoughts and John respectfully gave me time to absorb this unwelcome history.

We next pulled into a cluttered farm yard, got out of the car and walked to a building under renovation. As we walked he said, "Here your great-grandmother raised her six children - alone. After Jon Hansson was sent away to the 'insane asylum,' Maria asked one of her brothers to build a house for her. So he built a one-room log house. It was here, alone, a peasant and living during one of the worst periods of famine in Swedish history, your grandmother was raised with her brothers and sisters."

I walked up to the door; the owner stepped back to let me in. The old log house had been stripped to its original logs and fire place. I looked around the area - just one room - where great-grandmother Maria raised her family. My friends left me alone. I stood still and closed my eyes, listening for the cries of hunger, aloneness and anxiety. Over a hundred and twenty years ago, Maria raised my grandma Hanna and her five siblings without a father, no social security and with the humiliation of a fragmented family and poverty.

I left the site reluctantly. On one hand I wanted to pretend this never happened and yet I wanted to absorb the hurt and heartache of the grandmother I never knew. We climbed back in the car and drove down the country road to the next place of harsh memories. We turned into what seemed like an old, typical farm, now the summer home of a family from the city. We drove around the house to the back of the yard. John spoke, "See that small cabin? That's where Jon Hansson, your great-grandfather, lived out his life." I walked into the small log cabin, behind the main house where his sister lived. It was here he lived after being sent home from the mental hospital.

I walked around the yard and stood alone, looking at the carpentry bench where he made furniture, trying to imagine the feelings of desperation as he tried to sort out his feelings and the heartache of losing his family. (Later I learned that the Swedish Lutheran Church was harsh in its treatment of those who chose to worship outside the church. If a family was part of the "free" church and celebrated communion apart from the state church, often, with the collusion of the police, the father would be sent off either to prison or the "insane asylum.") But whatever the reason, in our past remains the tragic story of a young family who started out on the journey of life in brokenness.

As I flew home across the north Atlantic, I thought of Grandma Hanna, struck first by her parents' divorce - unimaginable in that day - and then living in the confines of a single room, all the while caught in the fatigue of grinding poverty. Eventually Grandma Hanna married and had a son. But not long after the child's birth both her husband and son died. With widespread famine and now the loss of her husband and son, she left her Scandinavian home land and sailed for Canada. In the western Canadian prairie city of Winnipeg, in the Swedish Covenant Church on Logan Ave, she met August Stiller, who had emigrated from Sweden more than a decade earlier. From that marriage came two sons, my father Carl Hilmer Stiller and his brother August Henning Stiller, and their now forty-nine children, grand- and great-grand children.

As I write, Murray our son calls from Vancouver to tell us the good news: his wife Catherine gave birth to their first child (our first grandchild), Pearson Carl David Stiller. Hearing of the birth of one's first grandchild is a moment like none other. After the call I wondered, if I could ask Grandma Stiller for her counsel on where the life of this healthy young child may lead, what might she say? Would she want that this great-great-grandson of hers to be spared the hardships and sorrows of her life? I'm sure she'd say yes. She would want better medical care, good education and greater opportunities for achieving his goals than she had.

This story has been opened to our family only by recent research. The pain and struggle of her early life was unknown to her sons. Even though set back with childhood and adult pain, Hanna Stiller set in motion a family now strong in faith, surrounded with nurturing sibling love and tradition. By her hope, faith and love, our entire family is now rich beyond what she could have imagined.

Les Tarr was, in my view, possibly the most outstanding Christian journalist in Canada in the last half of the twentieth century. Early in his church ministry in Winnipeg he contracted tubercular meningitis. The wheelchair became his means of transportation. Eventually he ended up bedridden, plagued by phantom pain. Though he had no feeling below his arms, his back and legs hurt to the extent that morphine was the only way to circumvent the debilitating pain. No longer able to serve as a church minister he turned to writing.

From his bed, hardly able to scratch out a sentence even with a writing apparatus strapped to his arm, Les dictated his articles and editorials. His analytic mind was both tough on the Christian community (when it deserved it) and unrelenting on the arrogance of the secular media when they made no attempt to understand the nature of faith.

I watched as he and his wife Catherine continued to read, research, publish and boldly write, even as pain wracked his body. The pain and sheer inconvenience could have ended his sense of vision and purpose. It could have discontinued his enormous output of critical thinking. But it didn't. Life continued, and even with the unrelenting hurt, his life continued in a direction defined and nurtured by his understanding of God's purpose.

Many who walk the path of suffering find a way out. Dave and Ev didn't get their Jilli back. Bernice was never freed from being trapped in a deteriorating body. Grandma Stiller was not able to undo her childhood and Les Tarr didn't find a day without pain. They all found hope and rose to find a new way of living out life, discovering the enormous power in life beyond themselves.

As you search for this path of healing, it's important that this book not be viewed as a manual on pain. Neither is it to replace the important work of a therapist. This is not a substitute for professional care. For those in trauma caused by abuse, family dysfunction and other experiences beyond one's ability to cope, the role of a caregiver in providing balanced and insightful emotional and psychological help should not be replaced by this or any other writing. We have been given the gift of help by way of therapists and medical science, and when properly used these will provide insights into the causes and possibly lead to a prescribed means of healing. This book is to assist you on your personal journey, encouraging you to see how faith can bring healing and life, day by day.

The three-fold path of hope, faith and love is progressive. It begins where you are. It recognizes that in the trauma of hurt, the progression out of your suffering takes time. The beginning is to see that life is not only that which you feel now. Have you noticed how often people, when wanting your opinion, will ask, "And how do you feel about this?" They may really be asking, "What do you think about it?" We've become used to referring to our feeling center as if that is where we make our decisions. However in learning to walk the path out from the malaise of sadness and grief, we make conscious choices so that our feelings are called into line with what we willfully decide is best.

This path is not easy but it is worth the walk. To continue in emotional pain is not the intention of creation. This path is for you to take. Begin today this venturesome and rewarding path towards healing.

ISBN: Herald Press, 2000 00033452