

My Brother, My Hero

Over 50 years ago, on a darkened road in northeast Texas, a car accident occurred which would severely cripple and forever change the life of a young baby, now a grown man, who, without intending to do so, has been an encouragement to many who know him. I have never told him until now, but he is also my hero.

Heroes come in different sizes and from different places. Some people look for heroes in far away, exotic places, failing to realize that heroes may live next door. Some look for heroes among the rich and famous, not realizing that heroes may be unknown, obscure, and unsung. Many admirable people are overlooked because they are so close that they are taken for granted.

I am lucky enough to have a hero in my family, and to realize it. Billy Joe is my brother and, at the same time, the person I admire most in all the world. The fact that he is my brother is unimportant to his value as a person. Billy is not well known, has never accomplished feats of valor, amassed a fortune, or invented anything. He is important to me because, in his own unassuming way, he exemplifies what faith can do under adversity. Surely, there are many like the Christians of Hebrews 11 who "time failed to tell," unknown to any but to God. Yet their faith under fire becomes the example and pattern for all of us and their personal triumph over tremendous odds sets the standard for others when difficulties arise in our own lives.

It is a wonder that Billy Joe is even alive. He was but 18 months of age when injured in that dreadful wreck near Tyler, Texas that damaged him and other family members so severely. Perfectly normal before the accident, he would never be the same again. Suffering spinal damage and massive brain concussion, his small body was packed entirely in ice for hours to reduce the swelling, prevent brain damage, and reduce the dangerously high body temperature that followed the immediate wreck. Given up for dead by one of the ambulance attendants, he nevertheless survived, being tenderly cared for by our mother during the long months of recuperation. Mother never left the house during that first year of grave convalescence. Billy had to be carried on pillows and carefully watched during every moment lest complications put his life in imminent danger. After many months of care, Billy Joe gained strength, became healthy, and was out of danger. But his life was forever changed.

Because of his injuries, Billy suffered permanent and irreparable damage to his nervous system and muscular control. He was fortunate to escape brain damage, retaining full use of his mental faculties, but his body was severely handicapped. Lacking proper muscle coordination, his speech was blurred and indistinct, his feet unsteady and stumbling, and his hands unable to hold objects without dropping them. It is in this strange dichotomy of full mental acuity but limited physical abilities that Billy has been tested, tried, and triumphant through faith. Having all the desires and aspirations of anyone else with full mental capacity, he was unable to achieve many of the normal activities that we take for granted. It has been my sorrow to have witnessed the years of

frustration that ensued to this man, now 57 years of age, as he came to realize his limitations while fighting to attain a normal and reasonable measure of life.

While in grade school, he suffered the taunts and teasing of cruel and unthinking children because of his clumsiness and thickness of speech. Unable to participate in sports, to be a part of the crowd, to mix and mingle with others of his age, he nevertheless persevered, graduated from high school, and made it his determination not to be a burden on his family or society. Through sheer persistence, he first got a job in a nursing home where his understanding of physical limitations made him a friend to every patient. Later, he worked in the janitorial department of a university, earning accolades for the attention to detail with which he performed his duties.

Finally, forced to retire because his age intensified his disabilities, Billy lives with his mother (now 86 years of age) and assists in keeping the home.

Had Billy Joe been able to talk clearly, he would have preached the gospel. In fact, while worshipping at the East Side church in Denton during the time that Jesse Jenkins labored there, he "filled in" while Jesse was away in meetings. Those in the audience had to listen carefully to understand Billy, but brother Jenkins relates that the sermons were well crafted, faithful to the truth, and spoken from the heart. Billy prays a beautiful prayer. His speech is difficult to comprehend to the human ear, but it is evident that Billy speaks to God who is able to read his heart. Singing tunefully escapes him since his hearing is nearly gone, but he "makes melody in the heart" (Ephesians 5:19) and sings with grace to the Lord (Colossians 3:16). No longer able to serve the communion because of his unsteady hands, Billy can have no part in the public worship service. Locked into near silence due to his advanced deafness (a legacy from the accident), unable to write legibly, and no longer able to work outside the home, Billy yet visits the sick, reads the scriptures, and worships with the saints regularly.

Becoming a Christian early in life, Billy Joe has shown the true meaning of faith under fire. Not a day of his life has been free from adversity and hardship. No achievement has come easily, being reached only through sheer will power and stubborn determination not to give in or give up. He has borne the barbs and darts of insensitive people with grace and dignity, though in his earlier years, in tears. His great love has been the Lord and His church. Constant through all his years of affliction has been that shining faith that has given him the courage to bear up under his burden. Job had great afflictions but his latter years were better than at first. Billy has had hardship more years than Job and will never find release from his burden in this life. His name is not found in Hebrews 11, but it deserves to be. I am sure that God recognizes, even more than me, the triumph that Billy has brought to a life of difficulty. I have learned much about patience, forbearance, and tolerance during the decades of his life. I am proud to be his brother. He is my hero. May God grant to me the ability to face the problems of life with the faith and dignity that Billy Joe has brought to his. Few deserve more than him the promise of Christ of that glorious body of the resurrection: "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power" (1 Corinthians 15:42-43). Freed from physical restraints

and limitations at last, Billy will be able to fully participate in all the “joy of the Lord” (Matthew 25:21). May God grant to him a full measure of this reward.

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Note: Billy has now passed from this life to his eternal reward. He is now released from all infirmities and able to “fly with the angels.” I learned so much from Billy and am eager to see him again in our eternal home.

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