

SURVIVING TRAGEDY:

In past Surviving Tragedy issues the *Evangel* has explored harrowing situations (visit tpe.ag.org to read previous issues). A young woman mauled by a mountain lion, a missionary attacked by an armed intruder, a pastor on an ill-fated flight in Alaska — these and other men and women have shared their stories with one goal in mind, to offer our readers assurance that God is ever-present and brings restoration.

But anyone in the midst of trauma will tell you divine presence and restoration can feel very distant. The people featured in this issue don't offer easy answers for why they encountered their bleakest challenges. In some ways, they are still on a journey of discovery. Perhaps their searching faith will bolster yours.

Shot and left for dead

By Kirk Noonan

Considering his injuries, Al David was extraordinarily calm. He eased the charter bus onto the Arizona interstate's shoulder, took time to turn on the hazard lights, and then pulled his cell phone from its belt clip. His blood-soaked hands were too slippery to dial so he opened the door and staggered out then alongside the mammoth vehicle. In one hand he clutched his phone; in the other he held the lower half of his face in place.

This wasn't how he envisioned spending the Fourth of July.

To earn extra cash, David, who retired from the insurance business in 1992, had taken a job driving buses shortly after he

and his wife, Shirley, moved to Phoenix in 2003. David loved the job as it allowed him opportunity to meet people, stay active and see the country.

Life was good for the Davids. They were active members at Church on the Green (Assemblies of God) in Sun City West; had time to enjoy their hobbies such as playing the piano; and were able to spend ample time with their four adult children, 12 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Inexplicably that good life was now in jeopardy.

"I didn't know if I was going to die," says David, 76, recalling July 4, 2006, the day of the attack. "But I was ready spiritually if I did."

Two motorists stopped to assist David, who was bleeding profusely from his face and neck. They led him to the curb, called for help and tried to ascertain what happened. David could hardly speak; his lower jaw had been severely damaged.

A few minutes earlier he had been en route to the bus yard where he was scheduled to park his bus. He'd spent the day driving to and from a summer camp where he picked up children and returned them to Phoenix. At the yard he would fuel the bus, check the oil level, fill out the necessary paperwork, then head home to cook out and enjoy the evening with Shirley.

Two of the five bullets met their mark. One of them entered David's chest; the other hit his face.



Al David stands in the bus yard he was headed to before being shot.

do with his broken body. Then he asked if he was going to die.

The answer, says David, came in a vivid memory. He remembered the day in 1954 when he told his mother he had signed on to be a Detroit police officer.

"My mother was beside herself," David recalls. "She said I might get shot or be forced to shoot someone. I told her God would watch over me, and He did. That sudden memory let me know God wasn't taking me home right then."

Assured he would live, David hung onto consciousness until he was in the emergency room. Six weeks later he gradually awoke from the coma doctors had induced because of the severe swelling in his head.

His injuries were extensive. One bullet fragment had lodged in the membrane of his carotid artery. A large bullet fragment had entered his airway and made its way into one of his lungs; his right lower jaw and all the teeth on that lower side of his mouth had disintegrated.

The 30-year-old shooter had driven to a convenience store and asked the manager to call police. He confessed to them that he had shot a bus driver. The Davids would later learn the man's 6-month-old daughter was in the backseat of the Malibu during the rampage. They would also learn the attacker had been trained at an urban guerrilla training camp. The most disturbing revelation was the man had shot and killed another motorist four years earlier.

When David awoke from the coma, his short-term memory

Just before 4 p.m. David had pulled onto the interchange connecting Interstates 51 and 10. Because of the holiday, traffic was light. The weather was perfect — hot and dry, as usual. Driving conditions were excellent, and David was thankful for that.

As he drove on the one-lane interchange his eyes were drawn to his driver's right side mirror. He saw a car behind him weaving from side to side, trying to pass.

As the vehicles merged onto Interstate 10 West, the light blue Malibu sideswiped the right front side of the bus. The jolt startled David. Within seconds the car was in front of the bus.

"The driver turned in his seat

as both vehicles were moving and fired through his driver's side window," recalls David. "As the bullets pierced my windshield it felt like a swarm of bees had attacked me."

Two of the five bullets met their mark. One of them entered David's chest; the other hit his face. His blood spattered around him. David would later learn his attacker used a 10 mm semiautomatic handgun with hollow-point bullets. Such bullets leave the gun's barrel white hot when fired. Even worse, on contact they explode, causing even more damage.

On the curb David prayed. He asked God what He was going to

SURVIVING TRAGEDY:

How to overcome distrust of society

How do you regain a basic sense of trust after you have been severely hurt at the hand of another?

Very slowly. Our faith must remain our foundation. Our sense of security gets altered from trauma, and we will struggle to reconcile our beliefs with these new and painful experiences. *OK, God loves me and says He'll always be with me and He's my defender and my protector. Yet I got shot?*

In the face of trauma, underlying beliefs or assumptions we have used to bring order to our lives are shaken. Order creates a sense of security. Trauma can bring dissonance between belief and reality to the surface. Recognizing the dissonance, allowing the grief to surface, and moving towards adjustment, we make decisions as to how we are going to live in light of the loss(es) we have experienced.

This entails developing a renewed relationship with the promised presence of the Lord in our lives. God never promised us a life of ease. If you look at Paul's life in Scripture, he was not protected from trauma. He experienced many incidents of trauma, including shipwrecks and beatings. Paul continually returned to the foundation of God's presence, grace, mercy and the reality of spending eternity with Him.

BRENDA SPINA, M.S., LMFT, LPC, is a family therapist and co-director of the Center for Family Healing in Appleton, Wis.

was poor, his fine motor skills were lacking, and he still could hardly talk. Doctors said he had brain damage and playing his beloved piano was entirely out of



Al David surveys the stretch of interstate where he was shot.

the question. He was fortunate to be alive, they said.

As he healed and went through months of occupational, speech and physical rehabilitation, David never became discouraged, angry or bitter. Instead, he did what he had always done; he thanked God for his life. And each week he saw improvements. His motor skills, speech and memory slowly returned.

But things would get worse on several fronts before they got better. Because of his severe head trauma the state revoked David's commercial driver's license. He lost his job and learned he would need more surgeries on his jaw. A judge freed David's attacker on \$100,000 bail. Even so David remained resilient — even joyful — in the face of adversity.

"The incident changed my life and rearranged everything," he says. "God showed me He has control over everything."

A little more than a year after being attacked, David has long scars stretching from his ear to

his throat and a few scars on his face. He says he has prayed for the attacker many times.

"Redemption is for everyone; God can deal with him," says David matter-of-factly. "I don't have any animosity toward him."

Having faith in God and a positive outlook during a tragic situation, says David, has its rewards. Because he was working when injured all of his medical bills — totaling more than \$1 million — have been covered by workmen's compensation.

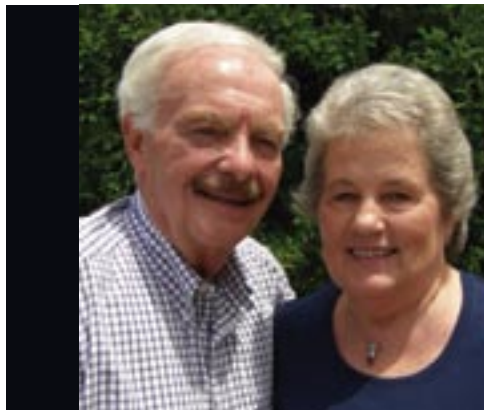
It will be some time before his body is completely healed. But David

is satisfied with his progress, and rejoiced a few months ago when he took the bench and played the piano at his church during worship.

Doing so, he says, was another reminder that God is in control of everything. **tpe**

KIRK NOONAN is managing editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.



Al and Shirley David attend Church on the Green in Sun City West, Ariz.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

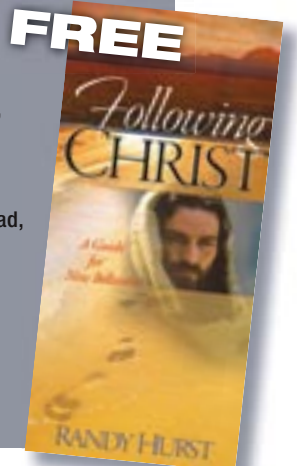
C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

1-800-4PRAYER

Assemblies of God National Prayer Center

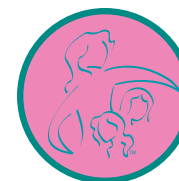


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