

# No Way Out

**DARKNESS WAS DESCENDING as I drove out of town and onto the long, straight road. Thoughts bombarded my mind: Your life is nothing.**

**What you could have had, you threw away.**

**I pressed hard on the accelerator.**

**The only way out is to end it all. I just had to slam into one of the trees bordering the highway, and it would all be over. I raced the engine.**

by Danny Hoell  
as told to  
Cora Lee Pless

## Facing Life's Challenges

I had faced many difficulties in my life. I was born without a left hand. My parents taught me how to do many things and to participate in activities as though I had two hands. However, by the time I was in elementary school, I became self-conscious and withdrawn.

When I was eight, I accepted Jesus as my Savior, and my mother prayed for God to help me become bolder. Gradually I became outgoing. I became more athletic as well. My older cousin taught me how to bat and catch with one hand. I learned to play football.

I went out for football in the

eighth grade. I told the coach I wanted to be a running back. He looked at my arm and then down at the table. He said, "Wouldn't you like to be a lineman?"

"No, sir! I want to be a running back," I replied.

"OK, kid," he replied in a patronizing manner. "You can try it."



I was devastated. He didn't think I could do it. I resolved to prove him wrong.

I drilled a hole through a section of fire hose and slid it on a set of barbells so I could lift weights with my left arm. I tied one end of a rope to a 385-pound weight and the other end around my waist and dragged the weight around the yard. I worked out daily.

That year I played running back on the junior varsity team. The following year I started as running back on the varsity team.

I was proud. Being on the varsity team put me in company with upperclassmen. I began to date juniors and seniors and go to nightclubs. By the time I was 15, I could enter a bar and order a beer without being questioned or asked for an ID.

My world focused on football and baseball. I had no time for God, no time for academics. I studied just enough to stay eligible to play sports. Sometimes I skipped school and spent the day drinking.

### A Missed Opportunity

The day a recruiter from North Carolina State University, in Raleigh, North Carolina, came to interview me, I had skipped school to drink. The recruiter never came back.

I lost my one chance to play for a major university. I had no one to blame but myself. I plummeted into depression.

I managed to finish high school and was accepted at a junior college. One night I went with a group of friends to North Carolina State University to watch a football game. I sat in the impressive stadium and watched the team hit the field. *I could have been out there with them*, I thought.

I was so devastated by this missed opportunity that I dropped out of college. I worked for a power company and then a trucking firm. I began drinking more and experimenting with drugs.

I moved back home. Several people tried to talk to me about God, but I thought church was boring. I needed excitement. I bought a boat and a car. Nothing relieved the emptiness inside.

### A Feeling of Hopelessness

One evening my mother and I were talking about the Lord when my dad came home for supper. We sat down to eat, and as Dad said the blessing, I started to cry. My parents knelt beside me and prayed for me. I struggled. I knew if I came back to God, I would have to give up my lifestyle.

I ran outside and jumped into my Trans Am. My thoughts tormented me: *You can't stand to live the way you're living now. But you can't*

*make it as a Christian.*

I reached the edge of town and accelerated the car. My heart was racing. My thoughts were racing. I could live my life in misery, or I could end it.

*It would be easier to end it*, I thought. My heart rose in my throat and pounded in my ears. *No way out. No way out.*

The speedometer edged upward.

### Discovering God's Hope

Then it seemed as if God were saying to me, "You have tried everything else. But you have not tried me. I can give you what you need—just give me a chance."

Tears streamed down my face. I was so tired. Could God make a difference? I edged off the accelerator and took a deep breath.

"God, please forgive me. Change my life," I prayed.

Suddenly the hurt, the emptiness, the confusion—all were gone. In their place were joy and hope. The past no longer haunted me. The future held promise.

I drove to the hospital where my girlfriend Judy was working. I told her what happened to me, but she didn't understand.

The next night I went to see Judy again, and on my way back home I drove past a pool hall, one of my

regular haunts. I sensed God directing me to go inside to tell my friends what happened to me. I stopped the car, started toward the pool hall, then turned around. But the feeling was persistent. I entered the pool hall.

Inside the jukebox was blaring and my friends were drinking beer.

I didn't know what to say.

God seemed to say, "I didn't send you in here to stand around. Just tell them what I've done for you." So I did. As soon as I started to talk, the guys put down their beer cans and listened. That was nearly 25 years ago, and I'm still telling everyone I meet what God has done for me.

Judy also came to know Jesus as her Savior. We married soon after. Eventually I went into the ministry and for the last 15 years I have worked in a Christian school.

My greatest struggle in life was not in overcoming a physical handicap, but in overcoming my self doubt and turning my life over to God. Since I gave my life to God, life has not been the same. It's greater than I ever could have imagined it to be. ■

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**'God, forgive me. Change my life.'**