

A Gut-Wrenching Life Story of Pain and Heartache Turned to Joy

Our world is in desperate need of heroes and heroines who choose to live well in spite of overwhelming circumstances and enormous disappointment. How we choose to live during the most difficult moments of our lives will actually write the story of our legacy.

This is Barbara Johnson's incredible story of pain, disappointment and joy.

Barbara Johnson lived an extraordinary life filled with the stuff of which most women only dream. Born in 1927, Barbara, as a young woman, married the man of her dreams, had four lively sons in succession, and by the early 1950s was living, literally, the great American dream. The Johnsons were active in their community and especially in their church as youth leaders.

The entire Johnson family was preparing to go with their church on the annual youth retreat in 1966 in the mountains of California. Barbara's husband, Bill, was driving alone while Barbara had the two youngest sons in the car with her. Their two teenage boys were riding with the youth group in the church van. About 10 miles from the resort site, Barbara's headlights beamed on the figure of a large man lying in the middle of the mountain road covered in his own blood. Although he was unidentifiable due to his horrific head injuries, Barbara knew who he was because she had ironed the shirt he was wearing only hours ago. It was her beloved husband and best friend, Bill.

The prognosis was not good, but Bill lived through the unending night. The doctors gently told Barbara there was

extensive brain damage and although he might live, the old Bill would be gone. After a week of vigilant prayers, the doctors informed Barbara that Bill was permanently and completely disabled.

There was a possibility that he would be a blind vegetable for the rest of his life, never to leave the hospital. Barbara knew she served a God who delights in touching broken people and making them whole again, and so began Barbara's journey into deepening her faith.

Barbara and her family adopted Mark 10:27 as their life verse: *"With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."*

One year later, after days of faith and failure, tears and laughter, therapy both mental and physical, and a relentless belief in a healing God, Bill returned to work as a full-time mechanical engineer. He had been healed in spirit and in body!

For one short year, the Johnson family settled back into a normal, but much more thankful routine. Then in 1968, Barbara and Bill's oldest son, Steve, joined the U.S. Marines and was sent to Vietnam. Steve loved the Lord with his whole heart and although the parting was painful, it was also peaceful. On July 28, 1968, the Johnson family learned that their eldest son was safe in the arms of Jesus.

In the summer of 1973, Tim, their second son, took off in a Volkswagen with two friends to "find himself." They spent the summer wandering through Alaska and not only did Tim find himself, he also found Jesus Christ. Tim joined a church fellowship in Alaska and was baptized there. Tim was a changed young man who was now filled with the Holy Spirit, and with purpose and direction.

The desire of Tim's heart was to come home at the end of the summer and to rebuild some bridges he had unfortunately burned. The new Tim wanted to spend time with his parents and

with his two younger brothers.

On the night of Aug. 1, 1973, Tim's blue VW was in a head-on collision with a drunk driver who was on the wrong side of the road. Tim was instantly ushered into the arms of his Savior.

In June of 1975, Barbara and Bill discovered that David, their third son, had embraced a gay lifestyle and he then disappeared into the gay community for 11 years with no contact at all with his family.

How does a woman, a mother, go through such horrendous circumstances and not lose her mind? If your name is Barbara Johnson, you start a joy box. Barbara's joy box was just a little shoebox that she began to fill with things that brought her joy. When a note from a friend arrived in the mail, she would put it in her joy box. When she found a Scripture verse that was particularly comforting, she would write it on a card and put it in her joy box. She found a book of jokes from when the boys were little and stuffed that in her, by now, overflowing box. The spring flowers from the yard went in along with a favorite recipe or two.

When her pieces of joy outgrew the shoebox, Barbara bought a plastic tub and began filling the tub with little pieces of life that stirred up joy. When her joy memorabilia no longer fit in her dozens of bins, she emptied their guest bedroom and it became her joy room. When the guest bedroom could no longer hold it all, Bill built an addition onto their California ranch home to fit all of the notes, the poems, the music, the pictures, the Scriptures and the mementos that reminded Barbara and Bill that they served a God of joy.

When a car accident nearly took Barbara Johnson's husband's life, she filled his hospital room with Scriptures, quoted the Word of God over him, and had her sons memorize Scriptures to pray over their beloved dad.

When her first son was killed in Vietnam, she reached out to

other mothers who had lost sons and had a cassette tape made with Steve's life story on it. She sent this recording to other grieving mothers and ended Steve's story with the comfort of the hymn, "Safe in the Arms of Jesus."

When her second son, Tim, was killed, she spoke in church that very Sunday morning and the altar was filled with Tim's friends who gave their lives to Jesus.

When her son, David, disappeared for 11 years into the gay community, Barbara began Spatula Ministries to peel parents off the ceiling when their children break their hearts.

Barbara's books have sold millions of copies and she changed hundreds of thousands of people's lives because of her testimony and her refusal to give into depression and hopelessness. Her commitment to embrace joy at the very worst moments of her life took supreme diligence but Barbara managed to do it because of God's power that had been gloriously given to her and because she knew her Father intimately. {eo}

Carol McLeod is an author and popular speaker at women's conferences and retreats, where she teaches the Word of God with great joy and enthusiasm. Carol encourages and empowers women with passionate and practical biblical messages mixed with her own special brand of hope and humor. She has written five books, including *No More Ordinary*, *Holy Estrogen!*, *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart* and *Defiant Joy!* Her most recent book, *Refined: Finding Joy in the Midst of the Fire*, was released last August. Her teaching DVD, *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart*, won the Telly Award, a prestigious industry award for excellence in religious programming. You can also listen to Carol's "A Jolt of Joy" program daily on the Charisma Podcast Network. Connect with Carol or inquire about her speaking to your group at .