

Famous Singer Who Survived Horrific School Fire Honors Victims With Special Song

A famous singer who survived one of the worst school fires in American history remembers the horrific event 60 years later with a very personal song.

Jonathan Cain, keyboardist for the rock band Journey and husband to Pastor Paula White Cain, was 8 years old when a fire at Our Lady of the Angels School in Chicago killed 92 of his schoolmates and three nuns on Dec. 1, 1958. He attended a special memorial Mass earlier this month to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the tragedy. At the Mass, Cain performed "The Day They Became Angels," which he wrote 10 years ago to honor those who lost their lives in the fire. You can listen to the song [here](#).

Cain still remembers the horrible event—and the dread he felt when he started to realize it wasn't a fire drill. He heard screaming upstairs and then saw the roof at the back of the school cave in. He watched in horror as the Mother Superior climbed a ladder and rescued as many children as she could until the fire department finally showed up.

"It was terrifying," Cain says. "It was heartbreaking. And I guess we all grew up that day."

Everyone involved in the fire was traumatized, he says, especially the children. After the horrific event, the town almost dissolved into disarray. And although an investigation confirmed the fire was arson, no one was ever tried for the crime. Two years later, the town rebuilt the school, but the unspoken pain still hung in the air.

"I went [to the new school] in fifth grade," Cain says. "We

were all a mess. We weren't allowed to talk about the fire. We didn't have counseling."

But Cain says God spoke to him through his father the day of the fire.

"My father, when I came home [after the fire], had prophesied that I was saved for greatness," Cain says. "He said, 'The Lord has a reason He saved you. Your birthday saved you.' I was a February baby, and had I been a January baby, I would've been upstairs. But God saved me."

Because Cain was in third grade instead of fourth, his was one of the first classes to be rushed out of the burning building to safety.

"[My father] said, 'It's music for you, John—I'm going to take you to music school,'" Cain says. "So he shifted me and gave me a suddenly. And suddenly, I had a different kind of fire, a different seed. ... And I realized, once I started playing, that I could heal myself. It became my redemption."

But that journey of healing was a difficult one for Cain. Before the fire, he had wanted to be a priest, but afterward, he wrestled with feeling abandoned by God and confused as to why innocent children had died for no discernible purpose. But one day, during a conversation with his former pastor, Cain realized that God used those poor children's deaths to make a much-needed change in America. Because of that fire, schools had to update their fire codes, and as a result, I don't think there has been a single death from a school fire since 1958. As time passed, Cain learned to stop asking why and instead see how God used the tragedy and covered Cain with His grace.

"I have to look back on my life and think, *Wow, He has covered me all these years,*" Cain says. "And He's blessed me with favor. I play in Journey and wrote the song 'Don't Stop Believing' with my mates, and I never stopped believing, even though these things come along. I think in the Bible it says,

'Out of pain something new is born.' And I think something new grew in all of us that day [of the fire]."

I hope you take a moment to listen to Cain's song and remember those who died in the fire. And be sure to listen to Cain share what God has taught him through this tragedy in my podcast below.