



HURT

Mark Lee, Hurt Road
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ROAD

— THE MUSIC, THE MEMORIES, AND THE MILES BETWEEN

MARK LEE



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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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To Mom: thank you for raising me up in the way I should go. You helped me find the landmarks that would guide me through life: a love for God, a love for books, and a love for music.

To Jimmy: thank you for being the coolest big brother a guy could ever ask for. Without listening to your record collection, riding in your Trans Am, or your general awesomeness, I wouldn't be who I am today.

To Stephanie: it hasn't been happily ever after, but it's been pretty close! Thank you for all the times you believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. Thank you for encouraging me not just to write a book but to write *this* book. You are the best thing that's ever happened to me.

To Abbie: thank you for holding my hand and helping me figure out this daddy thing. You are my joy.

To Kitty: thank you for always reminding me to stop and capture the little moments of life like lightning bugs in a jar. You are my sweet girl.

Finally, I dedicate this book in memory of my dad, James Leonard Lee. Thank you for showing me what brave looks like.

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FOREWORD

I met Mark Lee way back in 1989. We were both juniors at McEachern High School in the little town of Powder Springs, Georgia, about thirty miles outside of Atlanta. I was starting my third high school in three years. We had moved quite a bit with my dad's job, and it wasn't very fun starting over every year of high school—having to say goodbye to old friends, hopefully meet new friends, and somehow try to learn to fit in. Mark had come over to my girlfriend's house to work on a Beta Club project with her and another one of their friends. I wasn't part of the Beta Club. I wasn't exactly Beta Club material. But Mark definitely was. It only takes a few minutes of conversation with Mark for someone to realize “This guy is pretty smart!”

I remember that he was on crutches. Now, you've got to realize that this was close to thirty years ago and I've never claimed to have the best memory, but I don't remember if at the time I asked him something like “Hey man, what happened to you?” or if I found out later about the circumstances that you will soon be reading about in his book. But I do

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remember thinking *This guy is kind of cool—I wonder if we'll be friends*. Little did I know at the time that God would use this high school kid to change my life and set us both on a course to allow us to not only chase our dreams but to dream even bigger than we could on our own.

So that was the first meeting. And, once again, being the new kid in town, I really didn't know a lot of people at my new school. I was in the marching band. That was life for me in high school. It gave me an opportunity to instantly meet new friends and have some sort of stability and purpose. If you weren't in the marching band, I probably didn't know you. Mark was not in the marching band that year (for other reasons you will soon read) and so it wasn't until he rejoined the band in our senior year of high school that we actually started getting to know each other.

I'm not going to go through the details of how we became lifelong friends and started down this amazing and blessed journey together. Mark can remember those details and fine points a whole lot better than I can. And he can most definitely write it in book form better than I ever would. I'm struggling writing this foreword to his book; I have no idea how I would write the whole thing. But I will tell you that I am so thankful for the friendship God gave us in those late high school years that are so delicate and important in a person's life. Mark's friendship was a gift to me that helped me walk along my own Hurt Road and grow in my faith and gave me the courage to try to chase after dreams I'm not sure I would have by myself.

They say that people never change. And I suppose there's some sort of truth in that. Mark Lee is still a lot like he was back in high school. A library book nerd *and* a cool kid that can rock the guitar. A class clown *and* a deep theological

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thinker. A regular, blue collar, down-home guy *and* a man with a great realization of what's going on in the world.

I've always said that Mark is everyone's best friend. I've never met a person who didn't like him. He has such a unique sense of humor and is a personality that is truly one-of-a-kind. There's hardly a time when he leaves the room and people aren't saying, "That Mark Lee dude—he's a character." I've seen him crack people up with a joke and the next minute have them in a deep discussion about the Bible, politics, or world affairs.

It's interesting to read a biography of someone you've known for most of your life. You think you know someone. You think you've heard every story and every joke and every thought that a person could possibly have—especially with the time and miles and experiences you've shared together. But there's something special about someone telling their story and writing it down. Something interesting in the way a person—especially a man, most of whom are usually unable to express to each other vocally the things they feel deep down in their "heart of hearts." And that's what I love so much about this book—that I've gotten to know, all over again, one of the closest friends I could ever possibly have in all of my life. Through his humor that is so unique and smart, his wisdom that only comes with pain and loss, and his heart that wants nothing more than to search and know God more—hopefully you can get a glimpse into a great friend with a great story that will inspire and encourage you through whatever Hurt Road you may be walking down.

Mac Powell

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I've read somewhere that it takes ten years to become a writer. I guess I'm a little slow on the uptake, because my journey has taken closer to fifteen years. And so many people have helped me along the way.

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Thanks to Mom for taking off your “mom” hat and donning your English teacher one. I know this story was hard for you to read in places, but the book is better because of it. Thanks also to you, Stephanie, David, Jimmy, and Tammy for helping me sort through a mountain of pictures.

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1

ON THE ROAD

All right, let's bring it home. If you was hit by a truck and you was lying out there in that gutter dying, and you had time to sing one song. Huh? One song that people would remember before you're dirt. One song that would let God know how you felt about your time here on Earth. One song that would sum you up. You tellin' me that's the song you'd sing?

Sam Phillips, *Walk the Line*

I've heard people say that sometimes your brain will shut down just before traumatic experiences and you won't remember anything that happened. That may be true, but it surely wasn't the case for me. I remember every detail.

I looked up and saw headlights. There was no time to react. The truck was moving too fast.

I remember my body's impact with the front of it. Swept and thrown upward, I bounced off the top of the truck like a

rag doll and spun up in the air. The streetlight above took over as the focus of my vision that the truck's headlights had been before. This light turned in circles in the morning darkness. For a moment I felt nothing. I was completely separated from earth.

Then I hit asphalt.

Adrenaline is a funny thing. I didn't feel myself making contact with the road so much as I was simply aware of it, like I wasn't living this myself but only watching it happen to somebody else. Because of that, I don't know exactly what part of me hit the road, but later the pain and lacerations on my face and right arm would let me know that these areas had absorbed the main force of the impact.

"Hey! Stop!" somebody yelled as the truck sailed through the intersection of Hurt Road and Powder Springs Road. The driver slammed his brakes, screeching the truck to a halt.

Wait a minute, I thought to myself. I'm still alive. Aren't you supposed to die if you get hit by a truck?

Emboldened by the adrenaline racing through me and numbed by the shock of the accident, I decided to attempt standing up. But my right leg refused to cooperate. I slumped back to the ground in the middle of the road.

I heard footsteps. A man from the nearby Quick Thrift gas station ventured into the middle of the intersection and knelt down beside me.

"Are you OK? Say something!"

"I'm OK. I think my leg is bleeding."

He looked down at my leg. "Yeah, your leg looks a little banged up. Help is on the way." He was trying to put a positive spin on the situation, but I could tell from his face that he was looking at something gruesome.

I began to shiver. Even though it still gets pretty warm in Georgia in October, the mornings can be pretty chilly.

I was supposed to be going to school for band practice. We were scheduled to perform in a big marching competition that night, and I had really looked forward to it. My plans for today had obviously changed.

I don't know how long it took—it seemed like a couple of minutes and an eternity at the same time—but paramedics were soon on the scene. Sirens filled the air, and the bright lights of an ambulance flickered and bounced off the side of the Quick Thrift. Two guys in uniform hopped out of the ambulance. One came running up to me, while his partner stayed behind to prepare a stretcher.

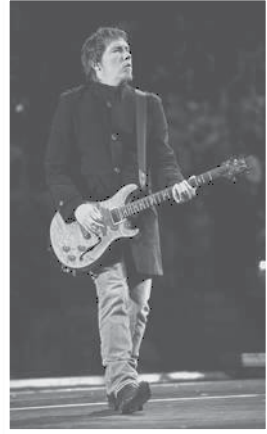
Even though I was still in shock, I figured an attempt at comedy might be in order. “You guys want to buy some doughnuts?”

The paramedic tending to me chuckled. Then it was all business. “Hey, buddy, are you OK? Can you tell me your name and where you are?” Routine questions in accident situations.

“My name is Mark,” I said. “And I'm on the road.”



I've spent most of my adult life on the road. With my bandmates in Third Day, a rock group we started in high school that is still making music twenty-five years later, I have traveled pretty much everywhere—basically anywhere people will have us—and put on shows. Our lead singer and I used to be flat-out amazed whenever we traveled somewhere



My name is Mark. And I'm on the road.

new. We would announce it to each other. “Dude—we’re in Illinois!” “Dude—we’re in New Mexico!” I think we stopped doing that after about the third lap around the country.

As I write this the road has taken us to Iowa, where we are getting ready to do a little rock show. Later we’ll do a soundcheck and an autograph session. Much later we’ll perform. But for now I’m sitting on the bus watching a documentary about Genesis—the band, not the book. When I’m home I’m not much of a TV watcher. Between shuttling kids to activities and errands and home responsibilities I just don’t have the time. But when we’re out doing shows it’s a great way to fill these huge swaths of time we find ourselves with.

Being a musician, I find some of my favorite shows are these rock documentaries where they give you all the nitty gritty behind-the-scenes details of a band’s career. The series *Behind the Music* is a perennial favorite, but these shows have been made in some form or fashion for decades.

When I first discovered *Behind the Music*, I was mesmerized. I watched one on Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers and was amazed at how they started out happy-go-lucky, a group of friends making music together. Then they got successful and had to deal with some internal conflicts and some drug problems. But now the band is in the best place they’ve ever been.

Then I watched the Fleetwood Mac episode. It was even better. The band started out happy-go-lucky. Just a group of friends making music together. Then they got successful and had to deal with some internal conflicts and some drug problems. But now the band is in the best place they’ve ever been.

Or take the Aerosmith episode. A few friends got together and made some music, and then they got famous and it got really hard to handle the success. They got into drugs and they started fighting.



Living the dream

But then they learned to appreciate each other and the life that the band gave them. Now they're in a better place than ever.

Wait a minute. All these stories are exactly the same.

As much as I love *Behind the Music*, the stories all run together after a while because the show follows a formula. As with so many other things, we want to watch music documentaries and see a reflection of ourselves. These kinds of shows are doing what we all do every day of our lives.

How many times, when asked how we're doing, do we reply by framing our life like the end of a *Behind the Music* episode? Life is the best it's ever been. We had a rough patch, but now we're better than ever. Or at the very least, no matter what's going on, we tell people we're OK.

Inside us, something else is going on. "OK" is a form of wishful thinking. Even if we don't really feel fine, we want to. There's always a plan and a hope. *If I can get through this rough patch then I'm going to hit smooth sailing, and everything is going to be OK.* But it just doesn't work that way. All of us are trying to get to a place where everything's worked out and everything's easy. We're on the road to happily ever after, aren't we?

In *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck says the core problem faced by modern-day humans is that we expect life to be easy. And like my bandmates and me being blown away

the first time we went to Nebraska, we are flat-out amazed when life's not easy. But we don't chalk it up to the fact that maybe life is harder than we thought. Instead of learning from it, we look for someone or something to blame.

When I look back on my life, I can see that it didn't work like an episode of *Behind the Music*—and still doesn't. Try as I might, it's definitely not happily ever after. Good things happen and bad things happen. Sometimes they're happening at the same time.

It has never been easy. I have been dealt some rough blows. Accidents, injuries, losing a parent to cancer. While your road hasn't been the same, I'm sure it's had tough stretches as well. The road we're on includes sickness, job loss, tragedy, and death.

Even when we get where we're trying to go, it's rarely what we thought it would be. Surprisingly, success can be a trial in itself. The whirlwind created when we get busy doing something we love can make for a rocky journey that's tough to navigate. But while the terrain might be unfamiliar, the tools we use to navigate life are the same.

Each of us has a unique story, but together we're all on Hurt Road. We make our plans for how our lives are going to go forward, and the next thing we know we're landing in a ditch we didn't see coming. But we get up and we keep moving. The beauty comes because we're not walking alone. We can help each other and we can support each other. And, coming or going, God's got us. I have to keep learning this truth over and over, each time I start thinking again that I can walk my own road with my own plans. These are the landmarks that help me live freely, knowing that there is no right road or wrong road in life. We don't really get to choose that anyway—we just get to trust God, coming and going.