



## Chapter One

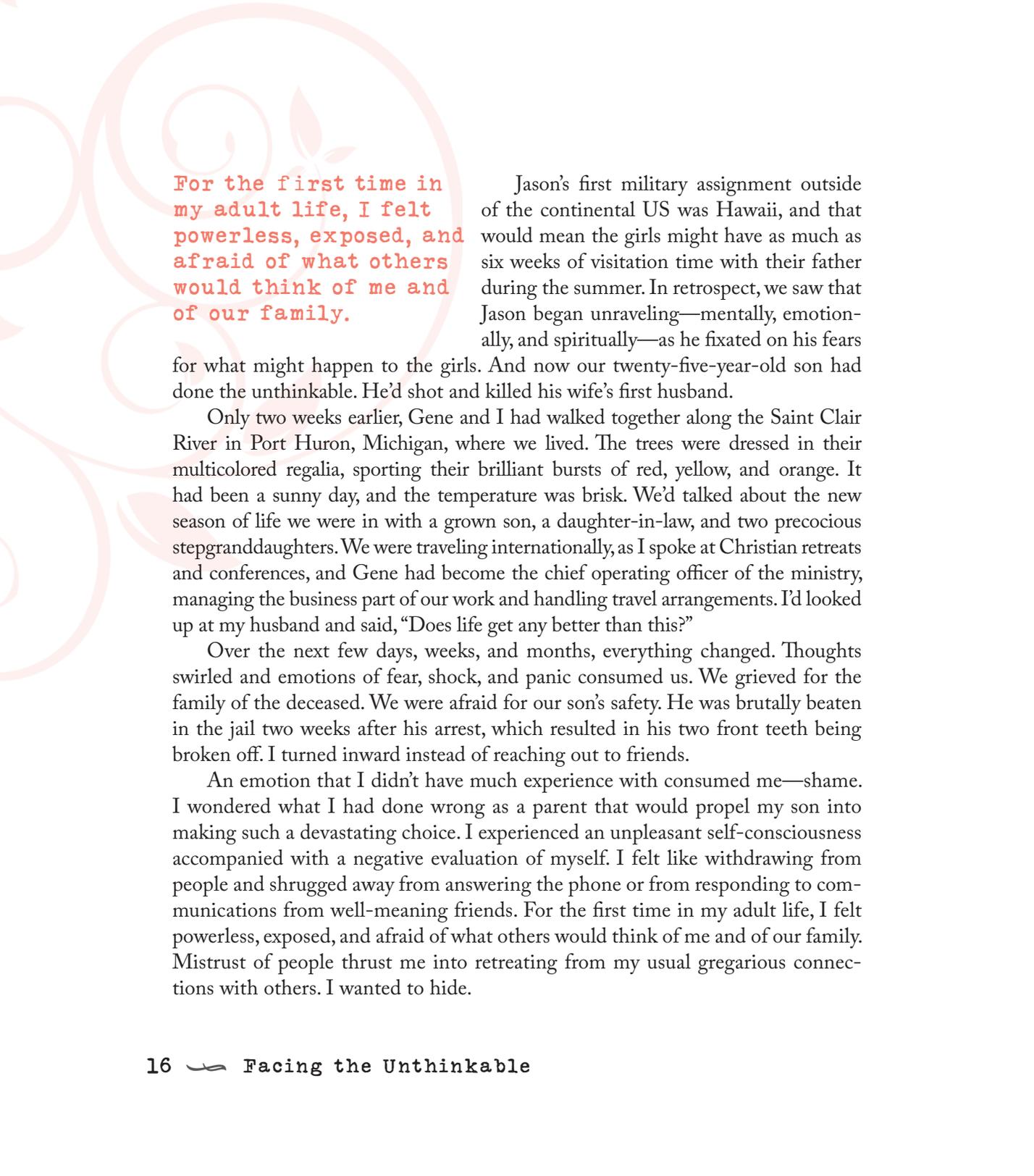
### *Facing the Unthinkable*

Carol Kent

**The phone rang in the middle of the night**, waking me from a deep sleep. Still dazed, I saw my husband pick up the receiver, then watched as a look of shock and disbelief covered his face. With tears spilling onto his cheeks, he looked at me and said, “Jason has just been arrested for the murder of his wife’s first husband. He’s in the jail in Orlando.”

I had never been in shock before. First came extreme nausea. I slipped out of bed, but my legs wouldn’t hold my weight. Thoughts swirled in my head. *Our son is a graduate of the US Naval Academy. He’s a husband and a stepfather to two little girls. He’s never been in trouble before. I must be in the middle of a dreadful nightmare. I’ll soon wake up and find out that this is just a bad dream.*

But as night turned to morning, the facts were confirmed. Our son had pulled a trigger in a public parking lot, and a man had died. Gene and I reviewed our recollections of Jason’s phone calls during the past year. We noted that instead of talking about his work with the navy, global concerns, or recent news, he was obsessed with fear for the safety of his stepdaughters. There were multiple allegations of abuse against their biological father, and it appeared he would soon get unsupervised visits with them.



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Jason's first military assignment outside of the continental US was Hawaii, and that would mean the girls might have as much as six weeks of visitation time with their father during the summer. In retrospect, we saw that Jason began unraveling—mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—as he fixated on his fears for what might happen to the girls. And now our twenty-five-year-old son had done the unthinkable. He'd shot and killed his wife's first husband.

Only two weeks earlier, Gene and I had walked together along the Saint Clair River in Port Huron, Michigan, where we lived. The trees were dressed in their multicolored regalia, sporting their brilliant bursts of red, yellow, and orange. It had been a sunny day, and the temperature was brisk. We'd talked about the new season of life we were in with a grown son, a daughter-in-law, and two precocious stepgranddaughters. We were traveling internationally, as I spoke at Christian retreats and conferences, and Gene had become the chief operating officer of the ministry, managing the business part of our work and handling travel arrangements. I'd looked up at my husband and said, "Does life get any better than this?"

Over the next few days, weeks, and months, everything changed. Thoughts swirled and emotions of fear, shock, and panic consumed us. We grieved for the family of the deceased. We were afraid for our son's safety. He was brutally beaten in the jail two weeks after his arrest, which resulted in his two front teeth being broken off. I turned inward instead of reaching out to friends.

An emotion that I didn't have much experience with consumed me—shame. I wondered what I had done wrong as a parent that would propel my son into making such a devastating choice. I experienced an unpleasant self-consciousness accompanied with a negative evaluation of myself. I felt like withdrawing from people and shrugged away from answering the phone or from responding to communications from well-meaning friends. For the first time in my adult life, I felt powerless, exposed, and afraid of what others would think of me and of our family. Mistrust of people thrust me into retreating from my usual gregarious connections with others. I wanted to hide.

As the oldest of six preacher's kids, I was used to being in the public eye, and I had volunteered for leadership in a myriad of roles both in and out of my local church. After I married and eventually became a Christian speaker and author, my life was filled with interacting with large numbers of people.

But now I was the mother of a murderer.

*Would anyone want me to speak at their event? How would we pay for our son's legal expenses if we left the ministry? Would people assume poor parenting was the cause of our son's devastating choice?* My immediate assumption was that Gene and I would have a major loss of reputation, in addition to dealing with the extreme fears for our son's safety.

The lies of the Enemy were taunting me:

- *If you had been a more involved mother, this would not have happened.*
- *If you had read your Bible more often and prayed more fervently, your son wouldn't have committed this crime.*
- *If you had been less busy, you would have seen the danger signs and fixed this problem before a man was murdered.*

I blamed myself for what had happened, which triggered more shame. My son was already repentant for his sin and well aware of the fact that he had made an idol out of his own ability to protect his stepdaughters instead of trusting in God to be their protector and teaching them to run and scream for help. But the Enemy convinced me that I was the cause of my son's action.

Shame is often brought about by our own wrong choices that result in ungodly behavior or because of a sinful act committed against us. For instance, a victim of sexual assault sometimes feels more shame than the perpetrator. Remember the biblical story of Tamar, who was raped by her brother Amnon? He expelled her and said he wanted nothing to do with her. She walked away mourning, enveloped in shame. Second Samuel describes her exit: "And Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe that she wore. And she laid her hand on her head and went away, crying aloud as she went" (2 Samuel 13:19 ESV). Not only are we capable of feeling shame for what we've done, we often experience false shame over what's been done

to us. This results in unwarranted and sometimes irrational feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness, and self-doubt.

When I was able to think clearly, I knew I had been a good mother. I recognized that I had led my son to a personal faith relationship with Christ and that my husband and I had provided a positive, Christ-centered home environment—but there were still days when I had trouble believing that truth.

Shame has plagued us since Adam and Eve bit into the fruit and saw their nakedness. Their first instinct was to hide—from each other and from God (Genesis 3:7–11). No surprise there! They now stood guilty before God and were vulnerable to each other and to Satan. Today we live in a sinful world and have the same instinct to hide ourselves. The kind of shame we often experience is a combination of failure and pride. We fail morally (sin), we fail due to our limitations (weakness), and we fail because the whole creation doesn't work right (Romans 8:20). When we know we don't live up to the expectations of others, because of our pride we're ashamed of our failures and weaknesses.

Often we'll go to any length to hide from others. For a while I hid in my home—not wanting to face the people in my church or in my community who had now read about my son's arrest for murder in our local paper. Sometimes we hide in perfectionism and workaholism. We hide on the internet by filling our minds with videos, movies, and music to drown out the emotional pain of our shame. It's possible to hide behind humor and through extroversion and introversion—through anything that allows us to keep conversation on the surface rather than by being vulnerable and real with the people around us.

The key to breaking shame's power is in the refuge of Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection provide the only remedy for the shame we feel over our sin failures (Hebrews 9:26). My son has discovered this truth. The key to breaking the power of my own pride-fueled shame was through fully embracing the power of the humility-fueled faith in the work of Christ and His promises. Shame says, "You're guilty! You failed! You're lacking!" But Jesus pronounces us "Guiltless!" He promises that His grace will be sufficient for us in all our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

Consider the woman at the well. Her life was in shambles. After five failed marriages, she wanted to hide from the comments, the whispers, and the stares

from those who looked at her with judgmental eyes. She went to the well when the sun was blazing so she could draw water alone (John 4). That day her life changed because she listened to Jesus and believed in Him. Her life was redeemed and her shame destroyed. He can do that for you, too. Tell Him what has triggered your shame. Believe that “God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19 *ESV*).

**I'm fixing my heart  
on following Jesus  
and living in the  
victory He won for  
me on the cross.**

### *Resilient Truth*

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1–2 *ESV*)

### *Resilient Prayer*

*Father in heaven*, You are my Savior, my hope, my strength, and my safe place. You are the God to whom nothing is impossible. In the middle of my difficult situation, I'm tempted to take on all of the responsibility for the wrong choices of those closest to me. My natural inclination is to run from people and places where I might find judgmental eyes or hear critical remarks. Help me to confess any known sin, and then declare that the false accusations of others and those I place upon myself are not from You. I reject them and give them no place in my heart. I know I have been forgiven. Help me to reject shameful feelings because they are not from You. I'm fixing my heart on following Jesus and living in the victory He won for me on the cross.

## Resilient Action

In what area of your life do you feel shame? Is there a sin to confess, or are you allowing yourself to be judged because of the wrongdoing of a family member? Talk to God, using the prayer above, and then make a list of who God says you are. (I'll help you start your list.)

- I'm made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:27)
- I am fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:14)
- I am forgiven. (1 John 1:9)
- I am not condemned by God. (Romans 8:1–2)
- I am loved with an everlasting love. (Jeremiah 31:3)

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Carol Kent is a bestselling author and an international speaker. She's the executive director of the Speak Up Conference, a ministry committed to helping Christians develop their speaking and writing skills. She and her husband founded the nonprofit organization Speak Up for Hope, which benefits inmates and their families. She's the author of over twenty-five books, including *When I Lay My Isaac Down*, *Becoming a Woman of Influence*, and *He Holds My Hand*. Visit Carol at [www.carolkent.org](http://www.carolkent.org).

