

## PRAISE FOR *DYING TO LIVE*

“Bryn welcomes us into her life’s journey of brokenness, hopelessness, desperation, anger, despair, confusion, abuse, and many forms of pain to hope, healing, deliverance, and a complete metamorphosis.”

—**Kenneth Gill**, Apostolic Leader of Ripple Effect Ministries

“The perseverance, grace, courage, and beauty that radiates throughout Bryn’s story set me on my own journey deeper into the heart of God. I literally could not put the book down once I started reading it as it captivated my mind and heart! Although Bryn’s experiences were unique to her, universal themes were woven throughout the pages that will connect to teens and adults of all ages. Bryn imparts a treasure chest of practical truths, timeless wisdom, and powerful insights clearly depicting life with Jesus and the joyful hope and transformation God offers.”

—**Michele Okimura**, Executive Director of Explicit Movement

“It’s a crazy ride and more stimulating than the wildest theme park roller coaster! ...Allow God’s transforming grace to touch you through every page of this book. You will never be the same!”

—**Michael D. Pierce**, Cofounder of Christ For Your City

“Your heart will burn as you read Bryn’s heart-rending, authentic story of redemption... This book should be read by, and a resource on the shelf of, all those who want to see God’s powerful transformation.”

—**Chester and Betsy Kylstra**, Founders of Restoring The Foundation International, the Healing House Network, and Transforming Your Business.

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BRYN S. ELLIOTT

# DYING TO LIVE





*I want to dedicate this book to my sister, Abbe. I wouldn't have written this book if it wasn't for her. My heart breaks when I think about the fact that my sister never got to experience the fullness of what life with Jesus can be like. I also want to dedicate this book to a generation that my sister represents.*

*To the people like Abbe who feel hopeless and lost, to the people searching for more, for those who haven't had the chance to build an intimate relationship with Jesus... that is not life, don't be fooled.*



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## FOREWORD I

ED SILVOSO

I am deeply honored to have the privilege of writing the foreword to this incredible book by Bryn Elliott. It is a book that you cannot put down once you begin to read it because it speaks powerfully to wounds in your soul. It is indeed an oasis of liberating truth in the wilderness in which often we are driven to by the terrible things that happened to us, usually growing up.

This is material sorely needed all over the world by so many who have been abused, hurt, and crushed by evil leading them to believe that they can never accomplish anything relevant because of what they have gone through.

In the most elegant and well-articulated prose, Bryn brings us into the inner chamber of her young heart to share a story of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and how God turned those ugly, broken, disgusting pieces into wonderful and inspiring trophies of His grace.

This book brings hope to the hopeless and healing to the wounded. Every person is born with a divine destiny to make the world a

better place, to transform it. But transformation, to be sustainable and scalable, must begin with us. Once we experience redemption in our innermost being, there is no limit to what we can do for others. Bryn proves this. This is how she puts it:

“My past could be my weakness, and it was for a long time. I thought that I was a damaged and broken person, that no one would ever be able to love me or want me because of what I’ve been through.”

“I didn’t know I could make the choice to grow and let myself move past the lies I told myself about my life. I had created these thoughts in my head, and in the same way, I could choose to dismantle them by replacing them with the truth of who God says I am.”

And this is what she does in *Dying to Live*.

After telling her story, Bryn shares practical tools for the reader to overcome as she did, not as a self-help book but as a journey to discover God and access His power to turn evil into good as only the Creator can and wants to do.

It is definitely a must-read book. As you move from one page to the next, your life will be transformed, and at the end, you will be ready to make the world a better place.

Go for it. Your life will never be the same.

Dr. Ed Silvano

Founder and President of Transform Our World

Author of *Anointed for Business* and *Ekklesia*

## FOREWORD II

PATRICIA BOOTSMA

I've met numerous people from various nations, yet I don't recall ever knowing anyone who went through a greater personal transformation than Bryn Elliott. Her countenance portrayed pain, anger, bitterness, and perhaps simply *lostness* at her sister's funeral just a few years ago. She wasn't exactly someone who exuded a desire to know God.

Then, it happened. The love of a relentless Savior broke through. A hard heart melted. The eyes like daggers turned into ones that now shine the light of purity. Her outward physical transformation of becoming amazingly beautiful now reveals the inner metamorphosis of a heart touched by the Beautiful One.

Bryn Elliott is a messenger to her generation and all who will listen. She has lived in the 'pig's trough' of addiction, rebellion, and bad decisions -- and came out to find the embrace of a loving Father who held nothing back when He prepared a banqueting table in her honor. She is gifted. She is anointed. She is a prophetic messenger. And I'm glad she is now my friend.

Haggai 2:6-8 (NKJV) prophesies of a time when the heavens and the earth will be shaken, leading to those who will come to the “Desire of All Nations” (i.e., Jesus Christ). The shakings of this present hour are intensifying in frequency and severity like labor pangs upon a pregnant woman. The greatest question raised to every soul on the planet is *What will you do about the “Desire of All Nations”? Are you going to ignore Him, reject Him, or embrace Him?*

That scripture goes on to describe the glory of what is coming as much greater than what has passed. “And in this place, I will bring peace,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Haggai 2:9). This world is longing for peace. The statistics of Bryn’s generation are staggering. Depression, panic attacks, loneliness, and addiction are rampant. Social media has only heightened fears of missing out (FOMO), not feeling relevant, or looking “good enough.” Families are splintered, trust is shattered, and inner pain abounds.

Yet, the Lord is raising messengers like Bryn Elliott, proclaiming that true peace is only found in Jesus Christ. Come feast at the banqueting table of His goodness. Why remain in pain?

Lately, Bryn has spent time at the world base of YWAM (Youth With A Mission). For many years their motto has been, “To Know Him and Make Him Known.” That is what Bryn is doing now — giving her life to know this God of power, grace, and forgiveness — and to make Him known.

I cheer on this prophetic messenger. This book is her story. May the Lord use it to change you just as she has been transformed by the One who defines true love.

Patricia Bootsma

Catch the Fire Ministries

Author of *Convergence, Raising Burning Hearts, A Lifestyle of Divine Encounters*

# DYING TO LIVE



# PART I

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## INTRODUCTION

*We knew that if we actually wanted to get anywhere this time, we had to get away without anyone noticing. In a place like that with eyes everywhere, we had our work cut out for us.*

*We made a plan where I hung a blanket up during the day to cover the window beside my bed. I told the staff that too much light came into my room in the mornings, and it was bothering me. They didn't ask questions.*

*The next step was to cut a hole in the window screen. We weren't allowed any sharps—that meant no scissors, no tweezers, absolutely nothing with a sharp edge—because they thought people would hurt themselves. So, when I went to use the washroom during academics, I used a crochet hook to rip the screen of the window open big enough for us to jump out of it. With the blanket still hung up, no one could see the rip.*

*We also weren't allowed to have window cranks because the guys' dorms were underneath us. Girls used to open their windows and talk to guys when they were outside or sneak out when no one was looking. There was one shared window crank we could check out from a staff member as long as we turned it back in when we were done. The night we planned to sneak*

*out, we asked for the crank and then returned it 20 minutes later. We told them we had closed our window, and they believed us, the blanket still covering our evidence.*

*When we went to bed that night, it was cold and snowy outside. Usually, we left our coats and boots in the mudroom downstairs, but we made sure to hide them in our room earlier in the day. The walk would be long and cold.*

*We had also packed bags before we went to sleep so we'd be ready to go as soon as it was time. I set my alarm and slept with my watch next to my head, so I would hear it before anyone else. It went off around 3am. When it did, I woke Dani up.*

*"Are we still doing this?" I asked Dani.*

*"We got this far. Why not?" she replied.*

*Then we waited. Night checks were every 15 minutes, so we got back in bed and pretended to be asleep until the next check. As soon as the staff confirmed we were there and closed the door, we jumped out of bed to change our clothes. We got back in bed and waited for the next check, then jumped out again to get our stuff together. After the third check, we jumped out of bed one last time, made pillow bodies in our beds, put our boots on, threw all our stuff out the window, and then jumped. This was the most rushed and stressful 15 minutes of the whole process.*

*I jumped first.*

*The impact was so strong that I felt my whole spine crunch from bottom to top. My legs gave out on me after pushing myself off the thin ledge, and I fell right to my butt. The impact knocked the wind out of me, and both my legs throbbed. I lay on the ground for a minute to catch my breath while Dani looked down at me, worried.*

*"Is it that bad?" Dani asked.*

*"You'll be fine. Just jump. We don't have much time," I lied. I didn't jump out of that window for nothing. Now, it was time to run...*

*Running is a very natural human instinct. It is easy to run when things get hard. It is easier to turn your back on difficult circumstances or crippling pain than to face life head-on. I had been running for a long time... Nobody runs for no reason. To know why I was running, you have to go back to the beginning.*

---

I was born on August 3, 1999, at Markham Stouffville Hospital in Ontario, Canada, to my parents, Shanon and Bryan Elliott. They had been married for about five years by the time they had me. My big sister, Abbe, was already two years old and just as excited as my parents for my arrival. We lived in Uxbridge in a cute little house with vines growing all up the sides of the red brick walls. There was a pool in the backyard, as well as a little play set with swings and a slide.

I have been told that I was a really happy baby. I often woke my parents up in the morning by standing in my crib and singing. My dad was an entrepreneur and an engineer, and my mom stayed at home with my sister and me. Both of them went to university and graduated with degrees. It sounds like the start of a perfect story about a perfect family, don't you think? Sadly, that is not the case.

In this book, I share the story of my life.

My story of overcoming isn't about anything that I was able to do in my own strength. Rather, it is about the strength of the One who brought me through. This isn't a sob story, and I don't want anyone feeling bad for me. I don't look at my life that way or think that way about my past. Every single thing the enemy intended for evil, the Lord used for His glory and as a part of His plan. I am so thankful to have gone through experiences that have shaped me into the person I am today. I wouldn't be who I am without the challenges and opportunities for growth that I have experienced.

This book is raw and about as real as you can get. I describe traumas and life hurts that may trigger some people, so if at any point you feel like you need to put the book down, please do. My goal is to help anyone who may be going through anything similar in their lives find the healing and freedom I've found. To do that, I share what actually changed my life. I'll tell you right now, it wasn't a certain amount of therapy, it wasn't drug counseling, it wasn't rehab... *it was a person.*

That person is Jesus Christ.

I tried to pull healing from the world, and I even tried to pull healing from myself or some "inner authority." The truth is, I tried everything there was to try... but nothing works without Jesus. Nothing sustains, nothing is renewed, nothing restores innocence and purity, nothing transforms people from the inside out like Jesus does. I owe everything to Jesus. He has my whole heart, He has my past, He has my present, and I give Him my future.

My hope is that through reading my story, you will see Jesus. I pray that my story raises questions and curiosity about a life walking with the Lord, that someone somewhere in the world will feel a little less alone in what they are going through. I hope that the truths, tools, and processes I share in this book bring those reading insight and new revelation about their own lives, and more importantly, about who God is.

If you can't relate to my story, that's okay. I admit it gets pretty wild. The tools in the second half are life tools that can help *anyone* in any walk of life. That's the thing about Jesus. If you are human, He relates to you and offers you the most extravagant gift that will ever be available to you.

If this book has an impact on just one person, that is enough for me.

I wrote this book for you.

I am so thankful to those who are taking the time to read my story, and it's a privilege for me to be able to speak into your lives in a way that will support your growth and bring you closer to Jesus. I hope this book is a seed planted in your life that will bear great fruit.

So, let's begin...

When I was just over a year old, my parents got divorced. I didn't know it at the time, but my life was about to turn upside down.



## THE YOUNGER YEARS

I don't have any memory of my parents being together or part of the same family unit, so I never really felt like I was missing out or that my family was broken. I still had a dad and a mom who loved and cared about me, just separately. At the time, I didn't understand the effects that divorce and a broken family actually had on my life. That's just always how life has been for me, and I didn't mind it.

My dad has great faith and trust in people. It is a wonderful quality, but if that trust becomes naiveté, bad things can happen. And for my sister and me, that is what happened.

When I was two years old, my dad introduced someone into our lives he trusted, but shouldn't have. Her name was Andi.<sup>1</sup> I will not go into the dark details of what Andi did to us, but it is important for me to briefly cover this part of my story because the abuse we suffered at her hands for over ten years set in motion events that colored our futures forever. I can share this with you knowing that we are safe from Andi now, and today I have chosen forgiveness rather than anger.

One day, Andi came over to the house while we were having a play-date with some other kids. My sister, Abbe, and I were very excited. We were all running around the main floor of our house, playing tag. I was the youngest and smallest of the kids and was the slowest by far. I was the last of the four of us running through the kitchen and dining room. Everyone else had already turned the corner by the time I got there. As I ran past Andi, she grabbed the back of my hoodie. I felt the hood of my sweatshirt quickly choke me as I fell to the ground. My eyes started watering as I tried to catch my breath looking up at Andi.

She kneeled down with a crazy look in her eyes and said, “No running!”

I was shocked and confused because I had never had a violent interaction like that with an adult before. Also, everyone had been running, and Andi didn’t stop anyone else. This was the first hint that there was something very wrong, but at that point, I was more confused than anything else.

Occasionally, Andi would watch us overnight if my dad was away. On one of these nights, Abbe and I went to the table for dinner, and I started to feel sick. I knew from the smell in the kitchen that we were having fish, which always made me nauseous. As I sat down, Andi gave me an angry look and told me I wasn’t allowed to leave the table until I finished my food. She said I had to sit there while everyone else went about their nights hanging out, getting ready for bed, and going to sleep. Which is exactly what happened.

When everyone went to bed, Andi came downstairs and told me that if I moved or even attempted going upstairs, I would really regret it. I was afraid, and so I never moved. With everyone asleep and the lights turned off, I sat in the dark, alone and scared. I tried to sleep sitting up in the chair with my head resting on the table.

In the morning, I wasn't allowed to have breakfast. Andi said that because I hadn't finished my fish, which was still on the table in front of me from the night before, I would go to school without eating. This was fine by me because it meant I could get out of that house. Also, I knew when I got home, the fish wouldn't be there anymore.

When I was at my mom's, I felt loved and secure... for the most part. Strange men often came in and out. Sometimes, she had parties while we slept, but I still felt secure there. Many times, she stumbled into my bed and passed out. But at her house, I felt safer than at my dad's, where I never knew when Andi would show up.

I remember Andi barging into my room when I was in kindergarten. She had just come from Abbe's room where I could hear her yelling cruel things even where I stood outside. After hearing her talk to my sister like that, something deep inside me blurted out how much I hated Andi. In response, Andi grabbed me by the hair and threw me to the floor. I sat on the ground crying and looked up in shock, not knowing what to do or say. She grabbed me by the wrist, picking me up into the air just high enough so my feet couldn't touch the ground. Andi kept yelling and screaming at me to walk, but I wasn't quite tall enough for my feet to reach the floor.

When I went to my father crying, he assumed I had misbehaved and was unhappy about getting in trouble. I never told him what had happened. I didn't know how to. He sent me to my room, and that was the end of it. The hair pulling and dragging when Andi had us alone continued. Today, I have no feeling in my head if my hair is pulled. I guess my body somehow just adapted to this pain.

I remember one terrible day when Andi had been invited to a family birthday party. Andi held the knife that had been used to cut the cake and started chasing us all around the house. At first, it seemed like a game. Then I split up from everyone and went to the base-

ment. I ran down the stairs, turned the corner, and got halfway down the hall before I realized no one was running with me.

I stood there for a moment. Andi rounded the corner, holding the knife. Something in Andi's eyes changed—like a light switch flicked on. Andi started running at me full speed with the knife. I ran down the hall until I got to the bathroom, where I slammed the door shut, locked it, and hid in the bathtub behind the shower curtain. Andi pounded at the door for a while but then, after what seemed like an eternity, went back upstairs.

Tears streamed down my face as my body shook. I was terrified and couldn't move.

Then there was a knock at the door; I felt like I couldn't breathe. I heard my dad's voice call out, looking for me. I crawled to the door and asked if he was alone. He laughed and answered, "Yes." I opened the door and peeked through the crack to see only my dad standing there.

"What happened? Why were you locked in the bathroom?" my dad asked, picking me up from the floor.

"I was just scared," I replied.

He laughed and brought me back upstairs.

I couldn't imagine the abuse getting worse... but it did. Much worse.

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THE SAME YEAR Andi started pulling my hair and chased me with a knife, Abbe started showing alarming signs that something was wrong. Abbe struggled with anxiety and depression throughout her life. Maybe it was a chemical imbalance but, today, I suspect it may have been at least partly due to the trauma Andi inflicted on us at the early stages of our lives. Her behavior at school changed, and she

was becoming very emotional around other people. Breakdowns were more frequent. One day, she told her teacher she wanted to die, which is not a normal thing for a fourth grader to say. The school called Child Protective Services.

When CPS got to the school, I was called to the office. I didn't know what was going on, but it wasn't unusual for me to be in the office, so I wasn't worried.

Throughout elementary school, I was in the office probably three times a week, on average. I loved drama, and I think it distracted me from what was going on in my own life. Even if I wasn't involved in an argument or a fight, I took it upon myself to get involved. Things became so bad that at one point, I was required to eat lunch with the principal in her office to avoid causing more issues. The truth was I really did like stirring things up. Plus, I liked eating lunch with the principal, who was actually a very nice person.

I walked into the principal's office, and I saw Abbe sitting in a room by herself. The door was partly closed. The secretary walked me to another room and closed the door. I was in there for what seemed like forever. Eventually, I started doing headstands against the wall just to keep myself occupied.

After the CPS workers talked with my sister, they came to talk with me. They asked me questions about my family, which confused me. I told them I loved being with my mom; that's where I was happiest and safest. They asked me about what happened at my dad's house. I told them my dad was always good, even though he was strict and scary sometimes. I knew he always had the best intentions. I didn't want to say anything that would make them think he was a bad father, but I also didn't like being at his house because Andi might show up. I had never told anyone about what was really going on, but I did tell them I hated Andi. I didn't explain why.

When CPS was done questioning me, I went back to class.

My dad was furious when CPS contacted him and assumed we had been dishonest because he saw no evidence of abuse. Andi's access to Abbe and me was not removed. The next five years felt like torture. What started as physical abuse soon turned into sexual abuse. No child, no human should endure the kind of torment we experienced.

I could share many, many stories with you about the ten years of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse my sister and I endured, but I will avoid going into graphic detail as I think you probably get the point. Even as a child, I knew what Andi did to us was not normal. However, I didn't know that it would have such devastating ramifications for our futures.