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Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680
Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

LaHaye, Tim F.

These will not be left behind : incredible stories of lives transformed after reading the Left
behind novels / Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins ; with Norman B. Rohrer.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-8423-6593-1 (sc)

1. LaHaye, Tim F. Left behind series. 2. Christian fiction, American—Appreciation.
3. Rapture (Christian eschatology) 4. End of the world in literature. 5. Eschatology in
literature. 6. Life change events. 7. Books and reading. I. Jenkins, Jerry B. II. Rohrer,
Norman B. III. Title.

PS3562.A315 T48 2003

813'.54—dc21

2003004054

Printed in the United States of America

07 06 05 04 03
5 4 3 2 1

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EVEN IF IT KILLS ME

EVEN BEFORE YOU BEGIN
YOUR ATTACK,
WHILE YOUR PLANS ARE
RIPENING LIKE GRAPES . . .

—ISAIAH 18:5

Darlene Snyder kissed her mother good-bye in Littleton, Colorado, climbed into her van, and started the engine. Ahead lay three hours of travel on Interstate 70 over the Front Range, past beautiful scenery like Mount Elbert's 14,431-foot peak (the state's highest), and then on to Glenwood Springs in time to prepare for work the next day cleaning

homes of the wealthy and famous in Aspen and Snowmass.

Her mother, widowed when Darlene was still a toddler, watched her daughter fondly from the doorway of her home, remembering better days—the days before Darlene ran away at sixteen; before her husband died of colon cancer at the age of thirty-three, at the peak of his ministry as a pastor; before the years of drug addiction and all that went with it, which Satan used to rob Darlene of her godly heritage.

In the glove box of the van was a set of four cassettes entitled *Left Behind*—the audio version of a book by the same title about events described in the last book of the Bible. “Darlene!” her mother called, “have you listened to the tapes yet?”

“Someday,” Darlene said. She threw her mother a kiss and sped away.

Weeks later, when she was returning home from a doctor’s appointment in Denver, Darlene popped the first cassette into her player and turned up the volume. As she listened, the Bible messages she’d heard as a youngster returned to her mind. She most certainly *would* be left behind when the Lord called her mother, her brother and sisters, and their families home to heaven. She thought of her father’s love for the Savior and how he had preached about him from the pulpit of Union Gospel Church in Waterloo, Iowa, where she was born. Before long, Darlene could hardly see the road through her tears. As she struggled with unhappy

memories, she considered where her years of rebellion had taken her. Somewhere in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, conviction shook her. She gripped the steering wheel with all her might, gasping with sobs as the narrator on the cassette tape continued. Two decades of rebellion were melting away like the snowpack in the spring. The love of the Savior had touched her at last.

Darlene's mother remembers Darlene as "a very loving and caring daughter." When she was five years old, she was to have her tonsils removed. On the morning of the operation, Darlene began to cry as she sat with her mother in the hospital's waiting room. While Fran held her daughter close, Darlene said, "Mommy, you will have to be here all by yourself while I'm gone."

At the age of fourteen, Darlene dedicated her life to Christ. But when she turned fifteen, she began to bristle at authority. Her mother placed her in a Christian home for troubled kids, but they could not get through to her either. There, Darlene met a rebel named Gary. He became her first love, and stole her innocence. Fran grieved again when a man raped Darlene, prompting Gary to break off his relationship with her. Broken-hearted, Darlene became callous and jaded.

"One day she was loving and caring, the next she became abusive, unkind, and hateful, with a terrible attitude," her mother said. "I'd lie in bed at night waiting for her to come in. Then I'd get up and tell her she was grounded, but then she wouldn't come home from school for days. I'd phone the school only to find out

she hadn't attended classes. I'd pray with her but she would mumble hateful things under her breath. Finally, her brother, Phil, talked to her. Darlene listened, then went right out and did her own thing. When she disappeared, I was frantic. I called the police, only to be told: 'Lady, there are thousands out there on the road. There's nothing we can do.'

Young and angry, Darlene hitchhiked to the Florida Keys, where she cut off ties with her family. By this time, Fran had moved to Denver. In 1968, the family put down roots in Littleton, Colorado. Proud of her exploits, Darlene occasionally shared bits and pieces of news with one or another of her loved ones. She used LSD, mescaline, and marijuana. She took hallucinogenic mushrooms, barbiturates, quaaludes, methedrine, and cocaine—whatever gave her a buzz in her reckless pursuit of pleasure. Her family looked on helplessly as she became addicted to heroin. Without warning, Darlene would pop into her mother's home in Littleton. The shock would nearly destroy Fran, and then she would try to clean her up, buy her some new clothes, and get her to eat some good food.

As time went by, the family began to see Darlene more. When they could arrange a reunion, the family had fun—but the language out of her mouth “would curl your hair,” her mother said. Diane would tell her sister to watch her mouth, but it was pointless. Fran kept praying, holding on to the biblical promise, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he

will not depart from it." Darlene's mother prayed for thirty years. When Diane would ask, "Mom, what are we going to do about her mouth?" Fran would reply, "Honey, let's be patient. She's been talking that way for most of her adult life. We can't expect too much."

At some point Darlene began to reap the blessings of her mother's faithful prayers. Her life began to stabilize a bit, and she married a man named Mike and moved with him to Glenwood Springs. In 1986, Diane moved back to Colorado and discovered that her sister had organized the M & D Cleaning Service, a specialty housecleaning service that took care of private homes nestled among the ski resorts of Western Colorado. Living closer allowed the sisters to visit more often.

Then in 1996, Darlene was injured so badly in an automobile accident that she was forced to drive to Denver a couple of times a month to see physicians. "Our relationship grew into something much more precious," Diane recalls. "Mom and I enjoyed spending quality time with Darlene. Always the conversations would turn to the spiritual." When Diane suggested that God might be "trying to get your attention but maybe you haven't been listening," Darlene did not disagree. "Sometimes God has to tear a person down in order to finally start building them back up again and make them whole," Diane said.

From then until October 2000 their dialogue progressed until Darlene listened to the Left Behind tapes and surrendered her heart to God. Back home in

Glenwood Springs, Darlene called her mother and sister and, through her tears, gave a full account of her return to God.

“She came to see us on December 2, alone without Mike,” Diane recalled, “and my—*what a difference!* No cussing, no drinking. . . . We went to two Christmas concerts and to church on Sunday morning. Darlene cried through the worship service and both concerts. Darlene is our Christmas miracle.” At first, Mike was furious about her conversion, but he later acknowledged that she had done the right thing.

Darlene had been baptized as a child, but when she told her mother, “I would like to be baptized again as a testimony to my new life,” her mother said, “Honey, go for it!” Her brother and sisters and uncles and aunts were all present to witness the miracle.

After her conversion, Darlene asked her mother not to bother getting her the rest of the Left Behind cassettes. She’d already gone out and bought them all.

Diane read all the books in the Left Behind series, too. Now that her sister is back in the fold, “He can return at any time,” she says.

Darlene agrees. It’s hard to attend church without her husband, but on Mother’s Day 2002 he gave her a card and a plant. “It was a prayer answered,” Darlene told her family. This prayer expresses her gratitude:

God my Father, Lord my Savior, I thank You for all
Your love that You have given me, not only now

Even If It Kills Me

but also in the past. I had asked You into my life when I was young, then turned my back on You for so many years. But during those years You were always by my side, especially in my darkest hour. I didn't know it then, but I do now as You hold me in Your arms and keep me alive. I owe all that I have to Jesus, who died for me. Thank You for bringing me home again, that I may worship You. The love, joy, peace, and calm I have could come only from You. I love You with all my heart and soul. They shall be Yours forever. In Your most precious name, amen.