

lauren scruggs

and the Scruggs family

WITH MARCUS BROTHERTON

still *lolo*

THE INSPIRING TRUE STORY

*A spinning propeller,
a horrific accident, and a
family's journey of hope*

FOREWORD BY
**Bethany
Hamilton,**
author of
Soul Surfer



I first got to know Lauren after hearing about her accident and discovering she was following me on Twitter. I sent her a tweet, and we have been in touch ever since. Now the tables have turned, and I am the one following Lauren in life . . . a life that is just getting started. Her story teaches us all that there are no accidents in life. Lauren reminds us that God has a master plan for each and every one of us, and hers is to use her voice and her remarkable story to inspire and help others. *Still LoLo* is a beautiful read that helps us remember that sometimes what feels like the end is really just the beginning.

Giuliana Rancic

Anchor, *E! News*

Lauren Scruggs's story is the most inspirational journey I've ever had the opportunity to witness firsthand, and *Still LoLo* truly depicts this young woman's perseverance and faith in the midst of tribulation. I have never seen a family stay so strong and committed to the Lord through such a life-changing event. Lauren's steadfast love of Jesus and her willingness to trust in him with all her heart have done more for her friends and family than she will ever know. Her attitude, joy, and faith are daily reminders of what I aspire to be. I feel blessed to know her.

Tony Romo

Quarterback, Dallas Cowboys

I've personally known the Scruggs family and Lo for ten years. Watching them endure the last year has been tremendous as their faith in Jesus and confidence in his plans for their lives have encouraged and edified my own walk. God often gives stories to strengthen and encourage the weary heart. I think you'll find this story to be one of those.

Matt Chandler

Lead pastor, The Village Church, Dallas

President, Acts 29 Church Planting Network

Our friends, Jeff and Cheryl Scruggs, have a powerful story of God's amazing grace in their broken marriage. But then in a moment their family

experienced a shocking calamity—and the story of his remarkable grace continues to be written daily in their lives.

Steve Farrar

Author of *Point Man: How a Man Can Lead His Family*

Mary Farrar

Author of *Choices: For Women Who Long to Discover Life's Best*

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Still LoLo: A Spinning Propeller, a Horrific Accident, and a Family's Journey of Hope

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Designed by Stephen Vosloo

This work is a memoir. Certain names and characteristics have been changed, and some dialogue has been recreated.

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Foreword by Bethany Hamilton

Lauren and I sat comfortably at the nail salon getting our toenails done. Chatting away, we joked about how we should get our fingernails done for half price since we each have only one hand! One of the girls doing our nails asked if we were best friends. We laughed and told her we had just met that day.

I was ecstatic to meet Lauren. We had talked on Skype a few months earlier during a call set up by my nonprofit organization, Friends of Bethany Hamilton, which reaches out to traumatic amputees and shark attack survivors. I made plans to meet up with Lauren during a visit I was making to Texas. Before our visit to the salon, Lauren and I sat over lunch with our moms and talked about our struggles, professional ventures, food, guys, and our faith in Jesus Christ. We talked about anything and everything. We were able to relate on so many levels—first, as fellow followers of Christ, then as sisters in tragedy. It was a blast just getting acquainted!

Having gone through similar experiences, Lauren and I (and our mothers) could really identify with each other. About eight years before, I had been bitten by a shark while surfing and lost my entire left arm. I nearly lost my life as well. Now, after experiencing for myself how God can turn a terrible situation into a great blessing, I sat with Lauren. Just six months earlier she had suffered the loss of her left hand and eye. Yet

the God-given joy and strength that comes from trusting him wholeheartedly emanated from her radiant smile.

Since the day we met, I've had a chance to read *Still LoLo*. It brought me through so many familiar emotions. I smiled, laughed, and cried as I read about what Lauren has encountered. Life often feels like a long, arduous climb, and I felt much of that pain as I read all that Lauren went through—from her parents' struggles during her early childhood, to her challenges as a young woman trying to find her way in this world, to the night she lost her arm and almost lost her life.

I read with compassion about the struggles Lauren faced through all of these life-changing events. Yet in the face of so many overwhelming obstacles, Lauren, her parents, and her twin sister, Brittany, found their source of strength and hope in Jesus Christ—in much the same way that my family and I did.

The members of Lauren's family each give their own perspective in *Still LoLo*, so they tell their story *together*. It's a beautiful way to share the many struggles and triumphs this family has experienced. You'll see how God mended and healed each of their hearts again and again. You'll discover how he brought about unity and restoration through each difficulty they faced.

You'll cheer as you read how Lauren's determination and her family's love sustained her after her life-threatening accident. One of my favorite stories in the book tells about the time, just days after her accident, when Lauren deliberately took thirty steps after her physical therapist asked if she might be able to walk twenty. Because of Lauren's story, I have been freshly renewed, inspired, and motivated to take those extra "ten steps" in my own life. She is a beautiful ray of sunshine, and I am glad to have her as a friend.

As I read *Still LoLo*, I was brought back to that day I sat in the nail salon with Lauren. We looked like childhood friends as we shared our stories. I know I was encouraged by the hope that my new dear friend told me she was discovering on her journey through life.

As you venture into *Still LoLo* and learn more about Lauren's attitude toward life, I hope you will gain the strength and motivation, as I have,

to keep pressing on—no matter what struggles come your way. May you learn to live by Lauren’s definition of everyday courage: “Even when life hits you hard, keep on going.”

I look forward to watching LoLo succeed in life and hope to join her in some of her future endeavors.

Join this family on their journey, and be encouraged!

Aloha,

Bethany Hamilton

*Author of **Soul Surfer: A True Story of Faith, Family,
and Fighting to Get Back on the Board***

Overture

Lauren

The old man didn't look like an angel, but years later I wondered if he was one.

He was sitting on a bench outside a sporting goods store in Plano, Texas, with his legs crossed casually. As he leaned back and looked into the sky, I noticed that his pants were tattered. A stain from a pen blotched the bottom of his shirt pocket. Near his side lay a clear, plastic ziplock bag. I didn't want to be nosy and stare too long at the bag, but inside it I could see a pair of men's underwear, a toothbrush, and the folded corner of an extra shirt. It was a beautiful day in 2002, not too hot, with a denim-blue sky and feathery clouds. I was fifteen.

"It's . . . Joshua, isn't it?" asked my dad hesitantly as we walked toward the bench and paused. "Joshua—right? Is that you?"

"Yes. I recognize you as well, my friend. I was a visitor in your Sunday school class at church last week." The man's words sounded too crisp to originate from Texas. He spoke with a lilt, not a drawl, like maybe years ago he'd lived in Kenya or Uganda.

"Yeah, I thought I recognized you from church," said my dad. It was just the two of us on the way to the store. My twin sister, Brittany, and my mom were back at our house. "You waiting for somebody?" Dad's voice was friendly, not accusing.

"Oh. No, my friend. I am just enjoying the day."

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed my dad look closely at the man. “You live around here?”

“No, not here,” the man said slowly, as if choosing the right words. “I live over there. Down by the bridge.”

Dad winced. “Joshua, can I ask . . . have you eaten today?”

Joshua shook his head.

Dad nodded. “Then why don’t you come have dinner with us.”

I tucked a strand of blonde hair behind my ear and stayed quiet, letting Dad do all the talking. Several times Brittany and I had gone with Dad down to the projects in South Dallas to help out with an inner-city ministry, but inviting homeless people back to our house wasn’t anything we’d ever done before. We were the quintessential Texas suburban family. Two cars. Cowboys fans. There wasn’t an actual white picket fence around our yard, but there may as well have been. I thought it was cool for Dad to invite a homeless man to dinner, but I also felt a twinge of uneasiness. We were stepping into unknown territory, and I had no idea what would come next.

Joshua’s eyes brightened. “I would be very grateful for a meal. As long as it is okay with your wife.”

“Let me call Cheryl.” Dad flipped open his phone and hit speed dial. “I’m sure she won’t mind.”

I need to explain that it wasn’t out of the ordinary for Dad to talk to people he barely knew. He’s a real people person. But it *was* out of the ordinary for him to single out and remember a visitor from his Sunday school class. It wasn’t exactly a small gathering where you’d instantly notice someone new. This was a Dallas-sized Sunday school that several hundred people attended each week. It was more like a church-within-a-church, a large group where a lot of people came and went.

Joshua came home with us that night. We all just hung around the table in our kitchen, talking quickly and easily with Joshua like he was an old friend. He spoke easily, eloquently, almost regally.

But there was something strange about him too. He ate our salad, pot roast, and potatoes. He drank our sweet tea and said thanks. But he

asked extensive questions about the food we ate, how it was prepared and where it came from, and he was careful to not let his meat touch his vegetables, almost like he had a prescribed way of living, a habit tied to another culture. After dinner was over, he asked to use our shower. Mom fidgeted in her chair, but Dad said yes right away and got up to show him where it was. After Joshua was situated, Dad took some toothpaste and deodorant and extra clothes to him.

A special meeting was being held at our church that night. I think it was a missions report. Mom and Dad took Joshua with them to the meeting while Brittany and I stayed home and did homework. When they came back, it was time for bed. Mom glanced at Dad, and Dad shrugged, got a blanket and clean sheets out of the closet, and showed Joshua to the guest room.

I didn't know what to think of this homeless man sleeping in our house. He wasn't tall or broad-shouldered, like Dad is, and he hadn't showed any sign of being violent or anything. Secretly I wondered if he carried a knife, but even if he did, I knew Dad would protect us. In the morning Dad was leaving on a business trip for two days, and I didn't know what would happen to the homeless man then. The whole night, things felt unpredictable.

The next morning, Joshua ate breakfast with us. He asked a lot of questions about the fruit and pancakes, and he drank orange juice, not coffee. Dad was going to take him to a hotel, and when Dad got back from his business trip he promised to drive him over to the neighboring town of McKinney. There was a homeless shelter there called The Samaritan Inn that I knew helped people get back on their feet.

We hugged Joshua and said our good-byes. Dad drove him to the hotel and headed out on his trip, and it was just Mom, Brittany, and me in the house alone. I think I was brushing my teeth, getting ready for school, when I heard Brittany call from the guest room where she'd been taking the sheets off the bed. "Mom! I think you're going to want to see this." There was a tremor in her voice. I heard Mom's footsteps pound down the hallway. I was right behind her. Brittany's eyes were round. She passed the envelope to Mom.

Inside was a handwritten letter from Joshua. Tiny, perfect, single-spaced writing. I counted seven pages. After Mom read each page, she handed it to me. I gasped. Joshua had described our family to a tee, then written beyond what could be seen at the present time. That was the shocking part. His writing was laced with Scripture, and it was like he was seeing a clear image of us in a mirror where we could see only the reflection dimly. I'd compare his letter to a lengthy inscription in a high school yearbook, a prediction about our next years, about things still to come. Maybe he had experienced a feeling he hadn't felt in a while, the warmth and closeness of a family, and he simply needed to express what he felt on paper.

"Your two daughters were angels to me in action and words," he began, and there was a lot of kind description after that of every member of our family. For page after page, this homeless man wrote with the confident authority of a biblical prophet. I imagined him wearing camel skins for clothes and eating locusts and wild honey.

Specific to my sister, he wrote, "Brittany is the salt of the family. She will live a life of kindness with attainment of a man who will bring her to the top of the goal. Journey will be an avenue of success. And there will be an abundance of good luck in the family she will build."

About me, he wrote, "Her sister will be a warrior. She will always win battles and bring good news and things of highest qualities. She will be aligned with VIPs. Her aptitude, love of family, and nature will be graced by the eminent people of the world. She will be a great traveler. Her words will penetrate the hearts of great men and women. She will bathe in the company of good friends. She is an inventor . . . and she will swim into this arena in another form of leadership."

I didn't know what to make of it. I didn't know any eminent people. And I certainly didn't feel like a warrior.

How could this mysterious homeless man know anything about me? It didn't make sense. But the gist of what he wrote burrowed into my soul and lodged there. He was predicting that life was going to hold out something vast to me, that God had something big planned for my future. It would involve innovation and travel and writing and celebrities and a battle larger than I could have ever expected.

I felt excited but also apprehensive. I didn't know if any of the homeless man's predictions would come true. But if they did, it sounded like whatever was coming—good or bad—would soon arrive with unstoppable force.

An Unmistakable Premonition

Lauren

Dad looked like a ghost.

Not one of those screechy phantoms you see in a horror movie, but like a pale version of his usually cheery self—white as a sheet, except for the dark circles under his eyes.

“Cheryl.” His voice was thin. He coughed, then said, “I don’t know if I can do this tonight after all.”

“You want us to take you home?” Mom said. “We’re not very far.”

Dad was behind the wheel, but he nodded at Mom’s offer, coughed again, and turned the car toward home. Beads of sweat lay across his forehead.

It was Saturday, December 3, 2011, about 4 p.m.

From our house in West Plano, we were on our way to another suburb of Dallas called Flower Mound. We were heading to The Village Church, where we normally attend, for a regular weekend service. Advent season was upon us, and it felt like Christmas was in the air. From the backseat, I reached over and gave my dad a warm pat on his

shoulder. “Have some chicken soup,” I said. “Maybe a little oil of oregano mixed with orange juice. Fights infections, you know. I think there’s some in the kitchen pantry.”

Dad coughed again and grinned weakly.

I wasn’t in the habit of babying my parents, especially not my dad. But there were definitely days I felt like a grown-up around them, a colleague more than a kid. At age twenty-three, I wasn’t a child anymore. True enough, I had recently moved back home to start my online fashion journal, *LOLO Magazine*. But living at home was just temporary. I’d graduated from college with academic honors. I’d successfully completed two internships in New York City, where I’d lived on my own. I’d traveled to Paris, Montreal, and New York to report on their Fashion Weeks, the intensive seven-day stretch where all the next season’s new designs are showcased. I’d done numerous video-reporting segments where I’d interviewed actors, celebrities, and fashion industry insiders. Nearly nine years had passed since the homeless man’s prediction of a big life and a big battle for me. Life felt big some days, but nothing that could be considered huge. At least, not yet.

The only reason I had moved home was that Mom and Dad were being gracious, giving me free room and board for a season or two until my magazine began to pay for itself. I spent every waking minute on *LOLO Magazine*. Most days I’d start at eight in the morning and go hard until midnight. The staff consisted of me and Shannon Yoachum, another young, entrepreneurial journalist who lived just a few hours away in Austin. We were throwing our hearts into the project. Our personal tagline was “Live Out Loud,” and that’s how we approached our work—with the volume turned all the way up. Shannon and I had been close friends since kindergarten, and these days we were writing and editing columns, contacting press agents for photographs, interviewing designers, connecting with industry insiders, and soliciting articles from freelancers. The magazine had been going only a few months, but already we were getting many thousands of hits per month, and at least that many on a separate fashion blog that I wrote.

We dropped Dad back at home so he could lie down and fight his cold, and Mom and I headed to church by ourselves. I love hanging out with just my mom. She's one of the most intelligent, caring women I know. She and my dad both work as marriage counselors. They travel all over the country sharing their story, and they've written a book that helps a lot of couples have better, stronger relationships.

We got to church early and saved seats for friends of my parents, Mike and Shannon, along with three friends of theirs. The plan was for all of us to head over to Mike and Shannon's house after church for a chili feast. I've babysat Mike and Shannon's daughter plenty of times and tutored her with her homework, and I house-sit for them when they're out of town. I'm like one of the family over there.

Everybody arrived at church, and the band cranked up. We all stood for a time of worship and sang along. Then Paul David Tripp, a guest speaker that night, took the stage.

"I don't know if you've thought about this or not," he began, "but you're hardwired for hope. You don't live by instinct. Every decision you make, every choice you make, every response you have to the situations and relationships of your life is fueled by and motivated by hope. Your story, the story of your life, is a hope story. Your happiest moments are hope moments. Your saddest moments are about hope dashed, hope destroyed. You're always looking for hope. You're always attaching the hope of your heart to something."¹

I had no inkling yet of the journey of hope I would soon embark on, but I could relate to what Paul said. Already I hoped for a lot. I wanted my magazine to be a huge success. But it wasn't just about numbers. I hoped my magazine would help people live better lives. Sure, it's about fashion, about looking good and feeling good. But it's also about being confident, expressing who you truly are. It's about going places and doing things that matter.

I also hoped for that special someone. I guess everybody my age does. Only a month before, I'd broken up with my boyfriend, James. It felt like the right decision at the time. James is six feet tall and has dark brown hair. He's in good shape, and plenty of girls would line up

to date him. He's one of those sincere, solid guys who's always there for you, always says the right thing.

But . . . ah, what was it exactly? In the back of my mind roamed an image of another guy. He was only a figment of my imagination, an ideal whose existence I pondered. I could picture him—the ultimate boyfriend—tall; beachy good looks; laid-back yet driven personality; tender and caring; funny and genuine; a heart for God; and a clear direction in life. But I needed to be honest with myself. This was real life, and James was everything a girl could ever ask for. Almost, anyway. But this other guy—this idealized image of the perfect mate—well, maybe he was worth holding out for, at least a little while longer. Or maybe he was just a dangerous fantasy, like a glossy picture in a magazine.

James handled the breakup in a totally good way. We reassured each other we'd stay friends. We always did. We'd actually broken up once before and then gotten back together. "Promise me you'll be really careful, Lo," he said when he dropped me off at my house the night we broke up. "I can't quite explain it, but I have this feeling like something bad is coming your way."

I nodded, and we hugged, even as I shivered a little. James had always been there for me. He saw God's purpose in things, even difficult things. What more could a girl ever want?

XO

When church was over, we headed to Mike and Shannon's house in McKinney, which is about twenty minutes from our house. Sometimes it's hard for someone who's not from Texas to understand the size of things in this state. For instance, if you go to a restaurant and order a soft drink, they don't have small, medium, and large. They have small, medium, and "Texas-size." People just do things in a big way around here.

Mike and Shannon are no exceptions. Everything Mike does, he does in a Texas-size way. Mike buys and sells companies, in addition to being a real estate developer. Their home is one of about 130 houses built around a private airstrip. One of Mike's hobbies is flying, and he owns three planes.

We all ate chili and salad around the long wooden table in Mike

and Shannon's dining room. Some other friends came over. There were maybe a dozen people total. Christmas music floated in from the sound system. Everybody was just talking and laughing. Nobody was drinking that I remember. It wasn't that type of party.

"Hey, Mike, you mind if I borrow your plane?" one of Mike's friends asked.

"Help yourself," Mike said. "You know what to do." Mike and his friend, I knew, both had their pilot's licenses.

"Who wants to go flying?" the friend asked. "The Christmas lights are going to be great tonight." A bunch of people waved their hands.

I don't know how or why I got to go for a ride first. Everyone else must have been feeling generous. So I followed Mike's friend out through the backyard and into the hangar that's directly behind Mike's house. Another friend, also a licensed pilot, came along to help me board the plane. On the far end of the hangar is a huge garage door for the planes, and beyond that lies a tarmac area. Then there's a taxiway, and beyond that a runway. It's like a house built around a golf course, except Mike's house is built around an airstrip.

With the guys' help, I climbed over the plane's stabilizer bar and slid into the seat behind the pilot. It was a small plane with only two seats. We put on headphones so we could talk to each other once we were in the air. The pilot went through his checklist, started the plane and warmed it up, and we taxied out.

The night was dark and rainy. Shadowy clouds were thick above us in a starless sky. For some reason I began to feel cold. The heater was on in the tiny plane, but what I felt wasn't that type of cold. It was more of a tingle. A shiver. I took a deep breath and looked out the window.

"Nice lights," the pilot said.

"Uh-huh."

The feeling shot up my spine again. Unmistakable fear. *This is stupid*, I thought. *Completely stupid*. Not the experience of flying but this definite feeling of dread coursing through my body. Mike had vouched for his friend as a strong pilot who was qualified on several levels and owned his own plane. *Get a grip, Lo*, I told myself. *You need to relax*.

Up in the air, the atmosphere grew calmer. The rain let up and turned into a slight mist. It might have even stopped. There was no thunder or lightning. No strong winds. All I heard was the friendly drone of the plane's engine and the occasional crackle over the microphone's earpiece. But I still couldn't shake this crazy fear.

I couldn't shake it at all.

My body grew tense, and my breathing became shallow. My heart thumped in my chest. It wasn't like me to be afraid. Certainly not in situations like this. I'm the type of girl who loves an adventure, particularly a tame adventure like we were having tonight. I like to ride bikes and go snow skiing and slalom waterskiing. In my bedroom is a very cool street longboard with a Hawaiian sunset motif that I've ridden for years. Even when Brittany and I were five-year-old kids and Dad took us skiing at Vail, my sister would ease down the bunny slopes while I'd bounce through black diamond moguls. So why was I so afraid of this flight? I gripped both sides of the plane's seat even tighter. And then it hit me. *We're going to crash.* I thought my heart was going to explode. *Jesus, I prayed. This plane's going down, and we're both going to die. I just know it. Oh Lord, my parents and sister. Please watch over them. Jesus, Jesus. Whatever happens, God, my life is in your hands.*

I'm sure the Christmas lights were pretty that night, but I was too nervous to really concentrate on them. I don't remember anything in particular. No landmarks. No huge display at a shopping center. Just darkness and lights and the fields and streets around McKinney. The plane flew in a big circle.

And then we landed.

The air went out of me like a rush from a leaky tire. My fear went along with it. We were safe. Completely safe. The plane taxied back to Mike's house and pulled up facing into the wind and parked on the tarmac, all set for whoever was going to fly next. *Hmmm, maybe I'm cracking up,* I thought. *I wonder what that was all about?*

I don't remember the pilot saying anything directly to me. I don't remember anything he said at all. He might have said something. I just

don't remember. It was hard to hear him without my speaker on. It's still pretty loud with the plane's engine running, sitting on the tarmac.

I remember sliding out of the plane.

I remember my feet touching the tarmac.

I remember the sky was black; I was on the dark side of the plane.

Those three memories took place in a split second, about the time it takes to walk two steps.

It was December 3, 2011, and after that split second, I remember absolutely nothing.