

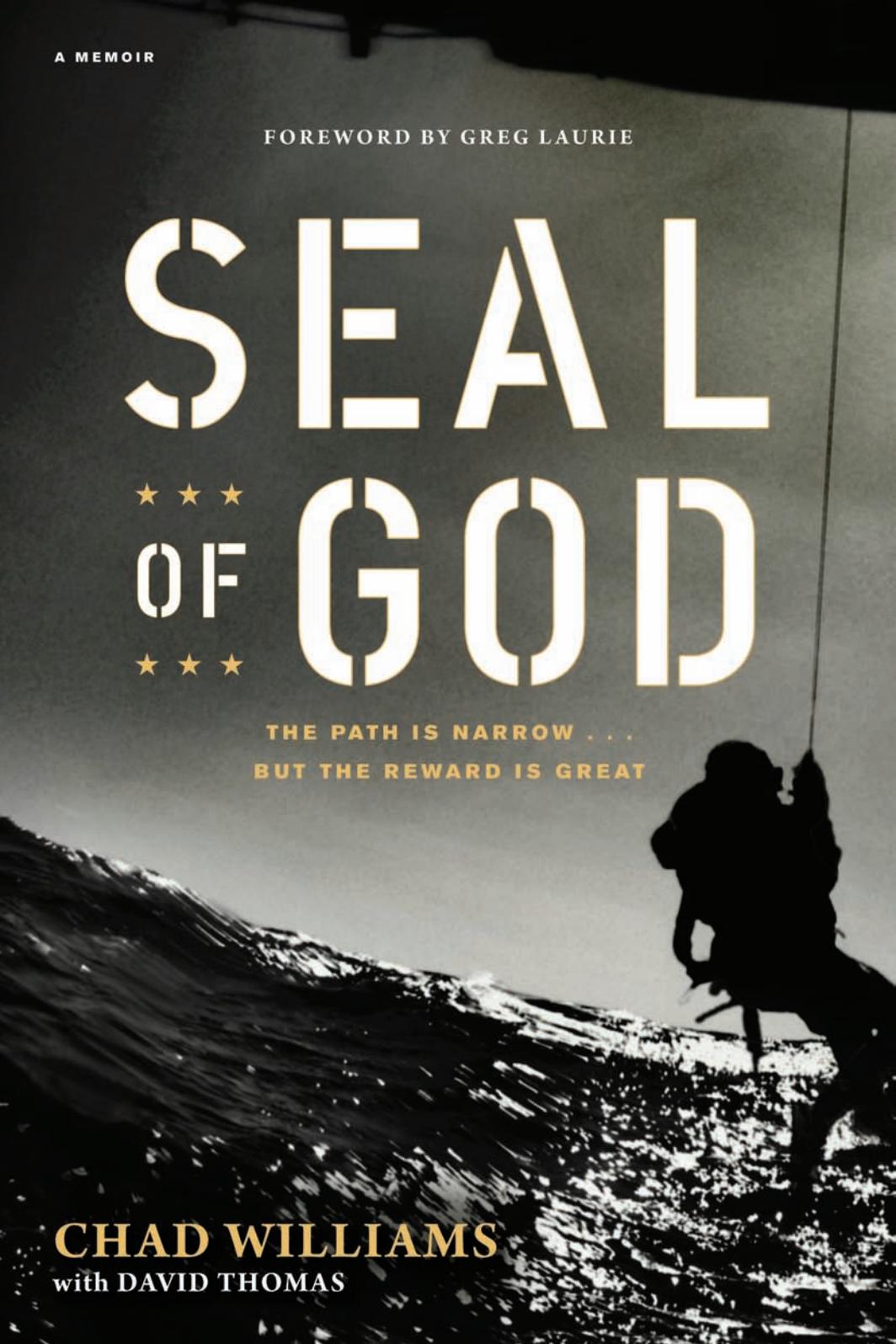
A MEMOIR

FOREWORD BY GREG LAURIE

# SEAL ★★★ OF GOD ★★★

THE PATH IS NARROW . . .  
BUT THE REWARD IS GREAT

**CHAD WILLIAMS**  
with DAVID THOMAS



SEAL OF GOD



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**Some of the names in this book have been changed out of respect for the privacy of the individuals mentioned.**

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*In loving memory of Scott Helvenston:  
hero, mentor, and close friend.*



# CONTENTS



Acknowledgments ix

Foreword xiii

- CHAPTER 1: Thinking Big 1
- CHAPTER 2: Decisions, Decisions 25
- CHAPTER 3: My Mentor 41
- CHAPTER 4: Clearing the Final Hurdle 63
- CHAPTER 5: Bring on BUD/S 79
- CHAPTER 6: Hell Week Begins 105
- CHAPTER 7: We Did It! 123
- CHAPTER 8: Answering the Bell 145
- CHAPTER 9: Finally—a SEAL! 161
- CHAPTER 10: The Night Everything Changed 175
- CHAPTER 11: Light and Dark 197
- CHAPTER 12: SEAL for Christ 223
- CHAPTER 13: Covered 245
- CHAPTER 14: A New Season 263

Notes 281

About the Authors 283



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*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down  
one's life for his friends.*

JOHN 15:13, NKJV

*Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person.  
The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17



## FOREWORD

**GOD SHAPES HIS MEN** with the hammer of adversity and the chisel of discipline.

Here's the story of a rowdy young man who, though raised with Christian values, failed to turn them into virtues until he found himself locked in the vise of God's love.

When Chad Williams realized his dream of becoming a Navy SEAL—one of the toughest accomplishments in the military—what he had thought would bring fulfillment offered only greater emptiness. Then one day he heard a message from the Bible about another military man, a man not unlike Chad, whose life was radically transformed by God. His story is now Chad's story, as both of them found that the greatest achievement in life is to discover what we were created for.

You will be riveted by Chad's amazing story, from his trouble-filled days as a competitive skateboarder in the beach city where he was raised to the front lines of combat as a US

**SEAL OF GOD**

Navy SEAL. It's my hope that this book will inspire readers to find God's purpose for their lives too!

*Greg Laurie, senior pastor  
Harvest Christian Fellowship  
Riverside, California*

CHAPTER I

# THINKING BIG

*We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps.*

PROVERBS 16:9



“I WANT TO become a Navy SEAL.”

Dad didn't say anything immediately, but his facial expression did.

*Are you really serious?*

This was the most important conversation I had ever had with my dad. We talked for forty-five minutes, perhaps an hour, with me sitting on my parents' bed and him sitting at his desk next to me. It felt like we talked forever.

The more we talked, the more Dad could see how serious I was.

Dad is the studious type. He considers all the options, then makes well-thought-out, informed decisions.

I definitely didn't inherit that trait from him.

Dad wanted me to spend another year in college and take more time to think about what I wanted to be when I grew up. He pointed out the reasons why he believed I was rushing into my decision:

"You didn't stick with baseball."

"You didn't stick with skateboarding."

"You didn't stick with sport fishing."

"You're not good with authority—and you want to go into the military?"

I didn't tell Dad that I had known I wanted to become a SEAL for all of a few days now. Or that I had reached my decision while spinning my truck in 360s across an empty parking lot at my college, where I had started the morning by drinking and smoking marijuana. Or that after I decided that morning to become a SEAL, I had skipped all my classes. Again.

That conversation with Dad ended like most conversations with my parents—on my terms. I marched out of the bedroom and down the hallway, dismayed once more that I wasn't being trusted. That my judgment was being doubted. That *I* was being doubted.

I didn't need anyone else to doubt me, because I was already doubting myself.

I was beginning to feel like a loser. The money I had made from sport fishing and filming skateboard commercials was running out. I was making bad grades, and I was sick of college. I was quickly becoming just another guy fresh out

of high school who drank, smoked weed, and went surfing. Once the popular, thrill-seeking life of every party, I now feared I wouldn't amount to anything.

I needed to do something big. And nothing sounded bigger than becoming a Navy SEAL.

I'd considered becoming an Alaskan crab fisherman or a coal miner because I had heard those were two of the world's most dangerous occupations. But the SEALs sounded far more interesting. They shot exotic weapons; they were demolitions experts. They jumped out of airplanes into combat, and they conducted covert underwater operations.

Sea, Air, and Land. That's why they were called SEALs. They did it all, and they did it everywhere.

My mind was made up. And all my life, when I had set a goal in my mind, nothing and no one could stop me.

I had, however, developed a habit of stopping myself.

## **ALL OR NOTHING**

My dad was right that I hadn't stuck with baseball, skateboarding, or sport fishing. In my mind, though, I hadn't quit or given up on any of those. Instead, I reasoned with myself, I had simply grown tired of them and had moved on to the next thrill.

I was always a competitive kid, and baseball was my first sport. I started playing in T-ball leagues and made the all-star teams as I progressed through the different age levels. I pitched and played shortstop, and every day after my dad got off work, he and I would jump the fence to a schoolyard

behind our house. Until the sun went down, I would pitch to Dad, and he would hit me ground balls. Or he would pitch to me so I could practice my batting.

When my brother, Todd, became old enough, he joined us too. It's a good thing Todd was two years younger than me, because he turned out to be extremely talented. Despite the age difference, he was right behind me talentwise, pushing me. Except being the best wasn't as important to Todd as it was to me. Winning or losing didn't make or break his day. The best way to describe the difference between us in sports is that Todd loved to win and I hated to lose.

I tried out for our high school baseball team as a freshman. I did well during the tryouts but didn't make the roster. "You're just not big enough for the team," the coach told me. I weighed only ninety-nine pounds at the time.

The next year the coach remembered my tryout and offered me a spot on the team. I declined. By that point I had moved full bore into skateboarding.

For a while, I had been torn between baseball and skateboarding and had a difficult time deciding which I wanted to spend more time doing. An unexpected meeting helped make my decision.

One day I was doing some skateboarding tricks at Seal Beach, less than ten miles up the Pacific Coast Highway from our home in Huntington Beach, California. Beetle Rosecrans, a big name in skateboarding, was in the area for a professional competition. He saw some of my tricks and came over to introduce himself. That meeting and my skill

level eventually led to a sponsorship from the sports equipment company Vans that kept me in free shoes, clothes, and skateboard equipment for the next few years.

Baseball was officially in the rearview mirror and fading.

The Vans sponsorship boosted my popularity. I had their newest shoes before anyone else at school could purchase them in stores, and mine came free. I wasn't just a part of the in-crowd. The in-crowd hung out around *me*.

As my skateboarding progressed, I became a professional amateur of sorts. In addition to the goodies from Vans, I got to take a couple of all-expenses-paid, out-of-state trips with an extreme sports team, performing choreographed routines with in-line skaters and bikers. That was a blast. We would show off our tricks on half-pipe ramps and tabletop launch ramps while music pulsed in the background.

I remember one really cool stunt. One of the bikers would tow me up a ramp. I would launch into the air. Then another biker would be launched over me while he performed a backflip.

The crowds ate up our shows, and I ate up their attention. I was the team's only teenager—not yet old enough to own a driver's license, but traveling across the country with a group of high-level extreme athletes in their twenties and thirties. It was exciting to be the young gun on the team.

Skateboarding also led me into television commercials. I made eight different commercials, performing with a skateboard in all of them.

One was a SONIC commercial in which I skateboarded

past an elderly man and startled him. “Hey, you little hotdogger!” he yelled at me, and then a carhop delivered a SONIC hot dog to him.

I even had lines in a couple of commercials—like the one for Go-GURT, a yogurt product from Yoplait that squeezed out of a tube. For that shoot, I did a few tricks while a young boy watched in awe. He was eating yogurt from a cup, and I was skateboarding with my tube of Go-GURT. I grabbed an extra tube, tossed it to him, and said my line. “Hey,” I told the boy, “lose the spoon.”

Another speaking commercial pushed Nestlé’s new Itzakadoozie frozen treats. I was about fifteen or sixteen at the time, but I was small for my age and looked younger. So I played someone about eleven or twelve alongside a girl about that age. Through trick photography, we looked like we were skating on the frozen snacks. “What is it?” we both asked as a close-up of the treats was shown. “Itzakadoozie!”

I handled those easy lines well enough, but it was my skateboarding skills that had brought the opportunity to be in the commercials. I made good money, too, which was put aside for me until I turned eighteen. Then it helped me buy a brand-new black 2002 Toyota Tundra pickup with big wheels, aftermarket rims, and a suspension lift. That certainly didn’t diminish my popularity.

The ability to do the commercials was a definite perk in those days, but it was the skateboarding itself that I lived for. Competitive skateboarding is the proper name for the sport because it’s as much about one-upmanship as anything else.

When a competitor broke out a new trick, I felt like I not only had to learn his trick and perform it better, but also come up with an original trick of my own that topped his.

It takes countless hours on a board to develop the high level of muscle memory needed to perform the best tricks, and I had the will to consistently put in the hours. I would practice in the morning before school, then as soon as I returned home from school I would grab my board and practice until nine or ten o'clock, continuing under the streetlights after the sun went down.

There is a reason I didn't include homework in that schedule: I didn't do my homework.

### **TOO COOL FOR SCHOOL**

My disdain for losing a skateboarding competition definitely contributed to my poor performance in school, but it wasn't the main reason. Truth was, I strongly disliked academic work and did everything I could to avoid it.

I prided myself on being able to write a complete book report without actually reading the book. I would skim the first sentence of each paragraph because I hated reading. When I didn't feel like skimming, I would cheat. I googled my way through my share of book reports.

Somehow I passed most of my classes—barely. I made mostly Cs and Ds, and that was good enough for me.

One time on a placement exam—one of those Scantron tests where you pencil in the answer bubbles for multiple-choice questions—I went through and randomly filled in

circles. I didn't read a single question on the test. I don't know what my score was on that one, but it was poor enough to have me placed into a special development class for students who needed extra help learning how to read. Of course, I could read just fine and didn't belong in that class, but I didn't care.

Part of the learning process was for class members to read aloud. We did it "popcorn style." One student would read aloud until the teacher said, "Enough. Popcorn someone else." That student would point to another student, who would pick up the reading at that point. When the assigned reading was completed, we were given free time for the rest of class.

I was a popular popcorn target because I was good at reading aloud. A student would popcorn me, and I would read as fast as I could until the teacher stopped me, then I'd popcorn someone else. He or she would read for a while, then when our teacher said to stop, I'd get picked to read again. To add some life into the boring texts, I read my parts in different voices. The other students cracked up every time.

Finally, after about a month or so, I was moved out of the special development class. But it was a fun month, and it provided me an opportunity to become popular with a different crowd. And in those days I really craved being the center of attention—no matter what it took.

I'm sure the kids who weren't in my circle of friends didn't think too much of me, though. I could be mean to kids in what I considered a "lesser" group. For instance, I thought

nothing of throwing a slice of pizza at someone in the school cafeteria. It was an effective way to draw laughs.

I never started fights or anything like that. Remember, I was small for my age. But I had big friends, and I was a big talker. I knew that, if need be, my buddies could finish with their size what I could start with my mouth. We never wound up in anything more than a harmless high school tiff, but I look back now and wonder how I could have been such a jerk.

Most of the problems I caused in school were what you might call disruptive behavior. I knew well the routes from my classrooms to the principal's office. Mostly, I would get sent there for cutting up in class too much.

My junior year at Marina High School in Huntington Beach, the principal warned my parents that I was down to my last chance. One more foul-up, he said, and I would be booted from the school.

Maybe my parents were fed up. Or maybe they didn't think I could keep a clean record the rest of the school year. Whatever the reason, they decided to take me out of Marina and put me into a Christian school—Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa. My parents were Christians, and I guess they hoped that a Christian school would help straighten me out.

It didn't.

I was a poor fit at Calvary Chapel High School because I felt different from the rest of the students. I did like the fact that they had a surfing team. I enjoyed surfing, although skateboarding was still my main sport. Skateboarding, with

the commercials and freebies from Vans, is what made me popular and gave me my identity.

Most of my time at Calvary Chapel was spent trying to get kicked out so I could rejoin my friends at Marina. I acted up in class, disrespected my teachers, and didn't do my homework. I constantly hounded my parents, too, telling them I didn't want to attend that school.

"You guys shouldn't have taken me out of Marina. That's where my friends are," I would say, trying to put a guilt trip on them. "How could you do this to me?"

The final semester of my senior year, my parents relented and said they would take me out of the Christian school.

*Yes!* I thought when they told me. *I pulled that one off.* (Calvary Chapel teachers probably celebrated as much as I did.)

My grand plan hit a snag, though. My old high school wouldn't take me back. So my parents enrolled me in Huntington Beach High, and I finished out my final semester there. I didn't get to graduate with my friends, but at least I was out of Calvary Chapel.

I did make one decision during my final semester of high school that turned out for good, though. On a trip to Disneyland with a couple of friends, we snuck into the park for free through a secret location. Once we were in the park, my friends and I took a seat on a ledge to begin planning out the time we had left. At that moment I noticed a girl who caught my eye like no one else ever had. I watched intently as she got in line with a friend to ride Space Mountain.

Without saying anything to my two buddies, I jumped to my feet and ran as fast as I could to get in line immediately behind her. The wait for the ride was about an hour. I figured that would give me plenty of time to work up the courage to talk to this girl, who I was basically stalking.

Her name was Aubrey. She was three years younger than I was. And let me tell you, it was love at first sight! As it turned out, she lived in Huntington Beach too. We spent the rest of the evening together at the park, and I still remember the spot where I made my first move to hold her hand. After exchanging phone numbers, we parted ways, but I knew it wouldn't be the last time I saw her. There was something special about this girl.

I was right. The next thing I knew, I was asking her something I had never asked anyone before: "Will you be my girlfriend?"

## **GONE FISHING**

Periodically throughout my high school years, I worked as a deckhand on sport-fishing boats and continued to do so into my first year of college. I would go out on multiple-day trips, fishing for albacore, bluefin, and yellowfin tuna. My parents would drop me off at the boat on Friday night, our crew would head out onto the Pacific Ocean, we'd fish all weekend, and my parents would pick me up Monday morning back at the harbor. Our boat would dock around five in the morning, and I would be on my way to school by seven

thirty. Sometimes I still smelled like fish when I walked into school.

To spend three nights out on a fishing boat at that age was exciting. It wasn't anything near as challenging as what you might see today on the Discovery Channel show *Deadliest Catch*, which chronicles the lives of Alaskan crab fishermen, but there were definitely some similarities. For instance, we would sleep only two or three hours per night. Looking back, I can see that learning to deal with sleep deprivation on those fishing boats helped me in my SEAL training later.

During summertime, when I wasn't in school, I spent even more time on the fishing boats. Sometimes we would take fifteen-day trips, come home for a day off, then set out for another fifteen days of fishing.

There was certainly no slacking off on a boat. I was expected to give 110 percent for an entire trip. As a deckhand, if I didn't keep up with the veteran fishermen's tempo, they'd let me know about it in some pretty salty terms. It had to be that way because some boats had a two-ton fish hole to fill. There was no room on a boat for someone who worked at less than maximum effort.

The work was hard, the hours were long—again, good training for the SEALs—and the pay was great, which may not have been a good thing. I could make five hundred dollars or more in a twenty-four-hour period. Some trips, I came home with two thousand dollars in cash. That's a ton of spending money for a teenager, and it would later cause me problems.

**RAISING CAIN**

I cannot imagine what my parents must have thought as they read or heard Proverbs 22:6:

*Direct your children onto the right path,  
and when they are older, they will not leave it.*

Mom and Dad directed me onto the right path, but I didn't follow it. They must have wondered if I would ever find my way back onto that path before making a major mistake from which I couldn't recover.

As the wild and rebellious child of our family, I put my parents through more stress and worry than they should have experienced.

My dad, Mark, grew up near Compton in southern Los Angeles County. It was a rough neighborhood. He has told me about how at his school the students had to run to the buses while teachers stood outside to protect them from neighborhood gangs. Because of the violence, Dad's parents moved their family down the coast a little to Huntington Beach, where he attended Marina High and met my mom, Gina. They married soon after graduating from high school.

Dad has been an appraiser for all my life, and his job often allowed him to work from home. That made it easier to get an early start on our baseball practices at the school behind our house. Dad was a good athlete, and my brother and I picked up our love of sports and our athletic abilities from him.

Dad stayed in good shape, and I learned what it meant to work out by watching him. When he pitched to us for batting practice, we would go through a bucket of about fifty baseballs. After we had hit the balls all over the schoolyard, Dad would run around picking up the balls as part of his workout.

There was one particular time when Dad considered becoming a fireman and was trying to get in shape for that. My brother and I would tag along with him, and with a son's wonder I would watch him execute something like twenty-five pull-ups. Even as a lightweight kid, I could only do about ten. I wanted to be able to do pull-ups like Dad. We would go for runs, and it seemed like Dad could run forever. He could also swim fifty laps in our swimming pool.

My dad amazed me with his athletic ability. He's still in great shape, and when I introduce him to my friends, they say he looks way too young to be my dad.

"Yeah, he's my dad," I proudly tell them.

My mom, bless her heart, sure suffered a lot of undue stress when I was growing up. Mom has always been a sweet-heart. She modeled for me how to show compassion toward others and how to forgive without holding a grudge. In my younger days, I didn't put into practice much of what I observed from her. But when I became a Christian at age twenty-three and experienced a dramatic and complete turn-around in my life, those traits began to shine through. I know exactly who I picked them up from.

I have a sister named Melissa who is three-and-a-half years

older than me. She always made straight As—she started reading at age two—and competed in beauty pageants at a young age. The trophies she amassed are still in my parents' garage. I've already talked about Todd, who is two years younger than I am. The baby of the family is my sister Allison, who is four years younger than me.

As the two boys of the family, Todd and I grew up doing just about everything together. As the older brother, I could almost always persuade Todd to take part in mischief with me. But Todd had one dangerous weakness: he had a conscience.

I had no problem with not telling my parents the things we were doing. Todd, on the other hand, thought they needed to know everything, even things he knew they would disapprove of.

Such as the time we tied dog bones to Allison.

Our little sister was always really quiet and would follow Todd and me around and watch everything we did. She really looked up to us, and we took full advantage. We could convince her to do anything.

Our family had a German shepherd named Haas that Todd and I liked to pretend was our police dog. One day Allison, who was about six at the time, was wearing a pair of overalls that had a lot of pockets. That gave me an idea I shared with Todd: "Let's stuff as many dog bones as we can into Allison's pockets and sic Haas on her."

"I don't think that's such a good idea," said the Williams boy with the conscience.

"Shut up," I ordered him. "We're gonna do it."

Of course, sweet little Allison let us load her up with bones. Then we told her to run around the yard, and we turned our police dog loose. Haas kept chasing her and going after every bone he could. In the process, Haas bit Allison's arm. She had to go to the emergency room to get a couple of staples to close the bite mark.

That time, I actually was able to convince Todd to suppress his good conscience. Our parents didn't find out we were to blame for the dog's behavior until months later.

Another time, Todd was pitching baseballs to me, and I hit him in the stomach with a line drive on purpose. Todd wanted to run home to tell Mom and Dad, but I wouldn't let him. I grabbed him and decided I would hold him down on the ground until his stomach quit hurting and there wouldn't be any reason to tell. Todd did everything he could to get out from under me, but I was stronger. I didn't let him get up until he was pain free and no longer inclined to tell.

Todd and I did a lot of things that could potentially get us into trouble at home. When I was with my friends, though, we did things that could have gotten us into trouble with the law. Some of them were pretty stupid. Unfortunately, most of them were my ideas.

We liked to hide and throw rocks at cars, for instance. If the driver stopped to chase us, that made it more fun. Or we would take two trash cans and tie them together with a long rope. We would lay the rope across a street and keep the trash cans on opposite sides of the street. Just as a car drove by, we would tighten the rope so that it caught onto

the bumper, and the car would drag the trash cans down the street. We would take off running, laughing hard. When we finally stopped, we would laugh some more as we described for each other what we saw of the driver's reaction.

Another stunt we would pull off was to climb to the roof of the school behind our house. We even found a way to get into the school from the roof. We especially got a kick out of hauling old bicycles onto the roof. We would ride the bike full speed, jump off just as we got to the edge of the roof, and watch the bike fall twenty feet to the ground.

Occasionally someone in the neighborhood would see us on the roof and call the police. But we had spent so much time up there that we had escape routes mapped out in our minds. We knew where to hide and how to get down before the police caught us.

I brought Todd along for some of these shenanigans. When he was with us, I was more concerned about his telling Mom or Dad than I was about getting caught by the cops.

"I don't think we should be doing this," Todd would say.  
"You better not tell Mom and Dad, or else . . ."

Then we would do it.

## **PLAYING WITH FIRE**

Me and Todd—I know that "Todd and I" is proper grammar, but I really should put my name first because I was the one dragging him into these situations—were especially fascinated with fires and explosions. We would gather cardboard and papers, take them over to the schoolyard, and set

them ablaze. I don't know why, but watching things burn entertained us.

On the few occasions when we heard a police helicopter approaching, the game was on. We would run to hide under a tree, then watch the helicopter until we were in a blind spot. Then we would run undetected to another tree. We would run from tree to tree like that until we were safely away from the school.

One of the ways Todd and I made money as kids was to buy candy from a man who sold it on the local streets, then take it to school and sell it. We didn't make much profit off each sale, but we were good at saving what we did make. When we had saved up enough, we would go to a store and buy model-rocket engines, telling the store owner that our dad had a model rocket and the equipment.

We would take the engines home and gut them with a screwdriver to get the black powder from inside. Then we'd wrap the powder up tight in a toilet paper roll, light the roll, and run. The toilet paper roll would blow up into small pieces.

Naturally, being the competitive person that I am, I reached the point of needing to make a larger and louder explosion. I was around twelve or thirteen by then, and I enlisted my friend Matt for the experiment.

We saved up for fifteen model-rocket engines. We were going to go big this time! Instead of using a toilet paper roll, we used the cardboard tube from a paper towel roll. We stuffed the tube with powder and capped each end with

surfboard wax. Then we took a needle and thread and ran the thread through the tube, in one end and out the other. We did this several times, running multiple threads through the tube. Then we took a can of spray-on deodorant and sprayed the thread to make it more flammable. That was our wick.

We took our homemade explosive over to the school behind my house and lit it. The wick was working great, burning down, burning down, burning down . . .

We knew this explosion was going to be so big and blow so much debris that we didn't even plan to watch. Content merely to *hear* this one, we found a safe spot around a corner of the school building and waited for the big boom.

We waited ten seconds. Fifteen seconds. But no boom. Nothing was happening.

Matt and I looked at each other as if to ask which of us was going to check on the wick. Naturally, I was the one.

I walked up to the tube and leaned my head over to take an up close look. I saw a tiny red ember. I had just enough time to raise one arm in front of my face.

*Boom!*

Unfortunately, it was as big an explosion as we had hoped for.

My right forearm, my right hand, and parts of my face were burning. I couldn't hear anything but continual ringing in my ears. I could tell Matt was yelling something, but I didn't know what. He was looking at me as though he saw a ghost.

We immediately ran to a drinking fountain and splashed

whatever water we could onto my burns. I was in pain by that point. We ran to Matt's house, where I jumped into his shower, clothes still on, and turned on cold water.

Matt was freaking out. "What are we gonna do? What are we gonna do?" he kept saying when he wasn't asking if I was okay.

We knew we weren't going to be able to get away with this one.

"Can you please say you were by yourself when this happened?" Matt asked. "What are you going to tell your parents?"

I hadn't figured that out yet, so we both started praying.

*Please, God, make everything be okay. If you help us this time, if you get us out of this one, we'll never do anything like this again.*

I went home. My mom wasn't home, and my dad was busy at one end of the house, so I was able to sneak in. I grabbed my pillow, jumped into the shower with it, and got the pillow wet with cold water to try to stop, or at least ease, the burning. I felt horrible.

"Oh, God, please help me, please help me," I kept praying.

My brother overheard me. Being the kid with a conscience, he told my dad something was wrong with me.

I was on my bed, lying facedown on my wet pillow, when Dad knocked on the door.

*I'm not going to be able to hide this,* I told myself.

"Chad?" Dad said. "You okay?"

"I'm all right."

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.”

“Can I come in?”

“No.”

Dad came into my room anyway.

*I'm done with this*, I thought.

When we had first reached Matt's house, I had looked like a chimney sweep at the end of a long job—covered with so much black powder that my burns weren't visible. But now my face was cleaned up and bright red like a shiny apple.

“A rocket went off, and I got a little burned,” I told Dad, though obviously that was a wild understatement.

Dad took me to the emergency room. I had suffered second-degree burns.

It took awhile for my mom to get the message that I had gotten hurt. By the time she made it to the emergency room, Dad and I were back in the car and preparing to leave. I'll never forget seeing my mom's face as she looked at me from her vehicle next to ours. I knew it looked bad. It *was* bad. Her Chevrolet Astro minivan was weaving in the lane behind us as we drove home. I was worried about her.

My parents got into an argument that night.

“You were supposed to be watching him!” Mom accused my dad.

“He told me he was just going skateboarding,” Dad countered.

I *had* told Dad that. And I felt awful about what I had done and what I had caused. I knew it was all my fault.

I ended up having to visit a plastic surgeon, and he said my burns would require skin grafting. That's when I realized just how serious the situation was.

*I might not ever look the same again,* I feared.

One thing I still clearly remember is how often my parents prayed for me during that time. I would wake up in the middle of the night, walk through the house, and hear them saying my name in prayer. It actually frightened me a little that they were praying for me so much.

Our church was praying too—the entire church—Mom and Dad told me.

We went back to the plastic surgeon several days later.

“Wait a minute,” the surgeon said. “How long has this been? This is the same kid that was here the other day?”

The surgeon told my parents that it looked like I had already made several weeks of progress and I might not need a skin graft after all.

I did totally lose pigment in some areas of my skin, and I had to avoid overexposure to sunlight for a few months. But I never had to have that skin graft, and today you would have to look very, very closely at my arm to see the reminders of that paper towel roll with the slow fuse.

### **WRONG PERSPECTIVE**

The rocket incident perfectly represents my growing-up years: make a stupid decision, get myself into trouble, say a quick prayer, then watch everything somehow turn out just fine.

Our family started going to church when I was six or

seven. We weren't regular attendees at first, but we did go. Over the next few years, I noticed my parents' faith increasing. So did our attendance at church—much to my annoyance.

I didn't like church. It felt like school to me, and I didn't want to go.

A few times, when the six of us were getting ready to leave for church, I sneaked out of the house and hid down the block. I knew my parents had to leave by a certain time to get to church on time and that they couldn't spend too long looking for me. After they left, I had the morning to myself.

Even when my parents did get me to church, I found ways to get out of Sunday school class—like asking the teacher if I could go to the bathroom. Then I would sneak out to the parking lot, get my skateboard out of the back of our Suburban—which I had made sure was unlocked when everyone stepped out—and ride around until Sunday school was over.

It wasn't that I didn't believe in God. But I thought he was just someone to pray to when I was in trouble and couldn't fix things by myself. I knew Jesus was important, but I didn't understand the Cross. I had no knowledge of the basics of Christianity. I couldn't even quote John 3:16 like everyone else seemingly could. (Ditching Sunday school didn't help with my spiritual ignorance, of course.)

I knew I was living in a way that was displeasing to God, but I saw no real need to change. I actually believed that knowing I wasn't living like he wanted me to made me better off than everyone else like me. *Hey*, I would reason, *at least*

**SEAL OF GOD**

*I know I'm not doing right. That has to count for something with God.*

Basically, I believed that all I had to do was say “sorry” right before I died, and I would be on my way to heaven.

Looking back on those days, all I can do is shake my head.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**DAYS BEFORE CHAD WILLIAMS** was to report to military duty at Great Lakes naval base, he turned on the television and was greeted with the horrifying image of his mentor and training partner, US Navy SEAL Scott Helvenston, being brutally murdered in a premeditated ambush on the roads of Fallujah, Iraq.

The footage was forever imprinted in his mind: his hero, set ablaze and then hung upside down from the Euphrates River bridge while an Iraqi mob rejoiced on live television.

Steeled in his resolve, Chad followed in Scott's footsteps and completed the US military's most difficult training to become a Navy SEAL. One of only thirteen out of a class of 173 to make it through to graduation, Chad served his country on SEAL Teams 1 and 7 for five years, completing tours of duty in the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and finally Iraq.

In 2007, after attending a Greg Laurie event at his parents' church, Chad accepted Christ and was radically transformed.

Since finishing his military career in May of 2010, Chad has used the experiences and discipline he learned while operating as a SEAL to communicate the gospel in many places, from the streets of Huntington Beach, California, to the Holy Land of Israel.

Chad is married to his high school sweetheart, Aubrey, and the two currently reside in Huntington Beach.

**DAVID THOMAS** is a former sports columnist whose work has been honored nationally by the Associated Press Sports Editors and has garnered him the McClatchy Company President's Award for excellence in journalism. He is the author of *Remember Why You Play: Faith, Football, and a Season to Believe* and the cowriter of *All In: What It Takes to Be the Best* by Gene Chizik. A lifelong Texan and a graduate of the University of Texas at Arlington, he lives near Fort Worth, Texas, with his wife, Sally, and their two children, Ashlin and Tyson.