

## Episode 01: Jennifer caused a fatal accident

October 4, 2016. For Jennifer and her husband Chris, and their 4 children, it was just a regular Tuesday. Up until around 8 pm that evening. Jen was driving home and she had their two daughters in the car, ages 12 and 4.

Jen stopped at a stop sign, and then proceeded into the intersection without seeing the motorcycle that was approaching on her left. The motorcycle hit her car, and with that collision, the lives of two families were forever changed. David, the driver of the motorcycle, was taken to the hospital, where he died two days later.

In my conversation with Jen, we talk about a lot of different aspects of what happened. She told me a little of what life was like before the accident, and she described what happened from the moment of impact and the hours and days that followed. We discussed her feelings of guilt at being responsible for the death of a person, her overwhelming sadness that it happened, her fear of what was going to happen to her from a legal or criminal standpoint, and what happened when she had a chance encounter with one of David's friends. She also talked about what she's doing today to help others who have found themselves in similar situations.

There's actually an acronym for someone who has gone through this. That person is called a CADI. That's spelled CADI, and it stands for Caused Accidental Death or Injury. You'll hear Jen use that acronym during our conversation so I wanted to let you know what it is ahead of time.

For people that have caused the accidental death of a person, there are resources available and I'll have those listed in the show notes for this episode, at [whatwasthatlike.com/01](http://whatwasthatlike.com/01).

Also, a warning. Around 14 minutes into our conversation, you'll also hear the actual recording of the 911 call that Jen made at the time of the accident. In the beginning she's on the phone with the 911 operator, then

she hands the phone to a man who was also on the scene, and he talks to the operator briefly. Following that is a second brief 911 call from a female. Again, this is about 14 minutes into our conversation, so if you might find the intensity of that audio to be upsetting, you can fast forward about 4 minutes to skip past that.

One of the takeaways from this conversation is that it's good to see things from a different perspective. You know we hear about accidents like this almost every day, and it's really easy to assume that the person is just some selfish jerk who was talking on their phone, or texting, or just not paying attention, even though we really don't know what actually happened. Sometimes those assumptions are true, but not always. Today we get to hear the other side of that story.

If you'd like to contact Jen directly with questions or comments, you can email her at [beautifullybrokenblog16@gmail.com](mailto:beautifullybrokenblog16@gmail.com), and I'll have that link in the show notes as well.

So with that, please enjoy my conversation with Jennifer.

**Scott**

Jen, thanks for coming onto the show!

**Jennifer**

Hi, Scott. Thanks for having me!

**Scott**

Do you listen to podcasts?

**Jennifer**

I've only listened to a few if I happen to stumble upon an advertisement on Facebook or something that catches my eye. I'm not a faithful follower of podcasts.

**Scott**

Well, maybe someday.

**Jennifer**

Maybe this summer. I'm off during the summer so, maybe, I can get caught up in the world of podcasts.

**Scott**

You have been through a lot. Before we get into the event on that day in October, can you tell us a little bit about what was your life like before the accident? I know you've got some kids and your husband is a coach. Can you tell us a little bit about what was your life like before the accident?

**Jennifer**

Sure. I think about my life before the accident a lot. I'm the first-born daughter, so I have the first-born syndrome. I have one sister who's younger than me. I love my parents. They are just some of the kindest and most supportive people you'll ever meet. I grew up and lived in

Dallas, Texas my whole life. I'm married to my husband for almost 17 years now. We have four beautiful children. Yes, he is a coach. He coaches everything at a small private Christian school. I'm a teacher. Life was normal. I don't know if it was normal but I felt it was pretty normal. I'm a voter. I'm involved in our church, community, and all of those normal things. I studied special education. I worked in all kinds of different schools. We've been in ministry. We worked in a children's home for several years. Our life was always unique before the accident. I feel that we have adversity. I tell people that our marriage was kind of founded on the struggle. We got married young. Nobody wanted us to get married – we were just babies – but we were so in love and it worked out. So far, it worked out. Yeah, we were doing good!

### **Scott**

Not too long before the accident, you had some medical issues with one or two of your daughters – did I read that correctly?

### **Jennifer**

Yes. When our oldest daughter was three, she had neurosurgery to correct a tumor that had developed in the syrinx within her spine. Through that process – which was, like, 8-9 months – we got a diagnosis and found out that two of our daughters have cranial synostosis. It's a neurological deformity of the brain. You can't really tell it, sometimes, just by looking at them but it can create complications later to the syrinx in her spine. So, she had surgery at the age of 3 years old because she was trying to explain to me, "There are ants on my feet but there are no ants there." So she had brain surgery at the age of 3. Later, we went through some other things with her. The short version of that is, basically, for the 8 months leading up, my family kind of had extreme emotional stress, but that was nothing compared to the accident. No previous things that I've ever experienced prepared me fully for that. I believe my children's neurosurgery prepared me for that. My faith had been built up as I see things happen, so it helped in it.

**Scott**

I can see what you're saying. You were already a little stressed out from going through all that.

**Jennifer**

Right.

**Scott**

On the other hand, you're also kind of exercising and making your muscles stronger. If you're going through that kind of thing, it could make your mental outlook, maybe, stronger as well. Is that right?

**Jennifer**

Right. Well, my faith was certainly stronger because I had witnessed God answer prayers and perform miracles for us, so it kind of becomes so real that nothing can take it away from you. However, the accident, actually, almost did that. I almost lost hope and faith as I was working through my accident.

**Scott**

Alright. Tell us about October 4, 2016.

## Jennifer

It was just a normal day. I want to tell you that I'm not OCD or particular about anything. I mean, I like to leave the toothpaste off the toothpaste thing and that drives my husband crazy. I leave cabinet doors open. I'm an artist and I do maths, so I'm kind of all over the place. But when it comes to driving, I'm kind of particular or, maybe, even arrogant before the accident. I could tease my husband like, "Well, someone has a ticket," because he had tickets and I've never had a ticket. He had four total car accidents and I've never had an accident. So, I would tease him pretty regularly – if I had the opportunity – before the accident.

It was a normal Tuesday in October. I taught in class. The kids were very busy. The boys had swimming practice. Katie had volleyball. We all had our own little haven. Because the boys were at swimming practice, I couldn't stay for volleyball, so I asked a friend of mine to take Katie and she's like, "Oh, yeah. I'll get her! We're actually going to eat as a team after the game." I was like, "Great! I'm going to be at the YMCA." She said, "Well, I'll just bring her to you after we're done eating." I was like, "Awesome! Great! Thank you!" I watched the sunset. There was a huge window where I was and I enjoyed watching the sunset. We were, kind of, on a downside, I think, and I was kind of de-stressing to school which had already turned into a routine. I felt like I could finally start getting back into the gym and making good use of that swimming practice. So, I felt it was a good and great day. About 8.00PM when I had just finished my workout, I got a text from my friend. She said that she is going home to drop off her daughter first and, then, she'll head to the gym to drop off my daughter. I just wrote back and said, "Well, that doesn't make sense. If you're home, stay home. I'll just come to get Katie instead." I didn't want her to come, drop Katie off, and get back out. So, I went to go get Katie and I said hi to my friend. It was just starting to get chilly – not like terribly cold, but chilly. So Katie ran to the car and we were just talking about the game: "How'd you do during that third match? Did you score any goals? How was your serve?"

**Scott**

So both girls were with you at this time.

**Jennifer**

Right. My 4 and 12-year-old kids were with me. I knew my friend's home. I've been there, mainly, during the day, but not as much during the night. It had just started getting dark by 8.00 PM. When I got to the road – I said “main road” but it's a country road – there isn't really anything past that subdivision or, at least, that's what I thought. I had never really turned right and explored there. On that country road, I've always just gone left. When I came to a stop sign, I was just talking to my daughter and, then, I started to turn. At the same time, there was a man coming on his motorcycle to my left up the hill. I didn't see him until I entered the lane. It just happened so fast. So much has happened during that fast time. I remember thinking, “Oh my gosh, that's a car!” I remember looking back over my shoulder and seeing my daughter and her face just lit up with light. My only thought was to accelerate and that was what I did. I just accelerated and I braced for impact. Literally, everything happened so fast. Yeah, I looked over at my daughter. All I can explain is that the whole car was just filled with light. There was no light and then, suddenly, there was so much light. I looked at her face, saw her jaw just drop, I braced for impact, but there was no impact.

I mean, there was just a little impact. I didn't understand what that meant at first. I had already accelerated. There were some skid marks on the street where I just accelerated. I kind of ended up in a ditch on the other side of this country road. I mean, we're in a country road and I ended up in a ditch in front of someone's property. I don't even completely know how to describe how life can change instantly for someone, not just for this sweet man that was there, but for us and his children. Basically, I had a collision with a motorcyclist and it took me a second to just think about what just happened. My brain was preparing to be crunched or something. Then, Katie said, “Mama, did someone just

hit us?” I had to say, “Yeah, I think they did.” Katie was already crying. Haven didn’t understand so she started crying. I looked in the rearview mirror and that’s when I saw him... There was light from his motorcycle and I realized what had happened.

So I looked over at my 12-year-old and I said, “Stay in the car and pray. Mommy got to go and help him.” I grabbed my phone and I shut the door. Both my girls were just crying in the car. I ran in the dark towards him because we didn’t have any light. The thing about this intersection is it’s really not a good spot from either side because there’s kind of a slight elevation from the right and a higher elevation from the left. So, it’s a spot where we were both in a very dangerous place especially because I had a black car. My black car was just in a ditch with my girls in it. I didn’t turn the hazard lights on. I didn’t think of doing any of those things. I just turned the car off and left them. I took the cell phone and I called 911. When I got there, he was not responsive. Suddenly, I lost all of my thoughts. I didn’t know the street name of where I was. I just did whatever the 911 operator told me to do. Suddenly, there was a neighbor. I mean, I was screaming, I was waving my hand, and I was trying to do what the operator to do. Some parts of me can’t even recreate this little space and time completely. There were some things I remember and some things I can’t even answer. I was shocked. Later, I kind of looked back to see how long was I on the 911 call and it was only less than 3 minutes. I can’t even process how did that all happened.

(1st Call)

**Jennifer**

Please help me! I need help!

**911 Operator**

Okay. Where are you at?

**Jennifer**

We got into an accident! We're in the middle of a road! Please, please...

**911 Operator**

Okay. What's going on, ma'am?

**Jennifer**

I hit a man on a motorcycle!

**911 Operator**

You hit a man on a motorcycle? Okay.

**Jennifer**

Please come quickly! Please send some help!

**911 Operator**

Ma'am, do you know what street this is?

**Jennifer**

I know, honey– it's okay, it's okay. Stop crying. Oh my God–

(Silence)

**911 Operator**

I don't know where that is.

**Jennifer**

Does anybody know where this street?! Davis Road?

**911 Operator**

Davis Road?

**Jennifer**

David Road! Please bring an ambulance!

**911 Operator**

Ma'am, slow down for me. Is he breathing?

**Jennifer**

He's breathing.

**Man**

Ma'am, how are you doing?

**Jennifer**

Please help! (Inaudible)

**911 Operator**

Ma'am? Ma'am?!

**Man**

Okay, I'm here with you. Yes, sir?

**911 Operator**

Okay. Can you tell me what's going on up there?

**Man**

Yeah. There is a man wrecked on a motorcycle on Davis Road.

**911 Operator**

Okay. Is the motorcyclist awake?

**Man**

Hard to say. There's a head injury so I'm not sure. He said he was breathing but he's not responding.

**911 Operator**

Not responding?

**Man**

Okay, he's breathing a little bit. There's some movement happening.

**911 Operator**

There's some movement happening? Okay.

(2nd call)

**Woman**

Hi. There's an emergency.

**911 Operator**

Go ahead, ma'am.

**Woman**

Motorcycle accident on Davis road at Grand Harbor estates.

**911 Operator**

Okay. Are there any injuries?

**Woman**

Yes, there's a man in the middle of the road. They're doing CPR on him right now. Some people stopped and pulled over. We need an ambulance.

**911 Operator**

Okay. We do have another call. We've already gotten medics on the way out there. You said that he's on the road?

**Woman**

Yes, he is in the very middle.

**911 Operator**

Okay. And what was your name?

**Woman**

My name is—

**911 Operator**

Okay. You said that they are doing CPR. Are they—?

**Woman**

Yep.

**911 Operator**

Okay. The medics are on their way out there.

**Woman**

Okay, thank you.

**Jennifer**

So I did what they told me to do. I checked for breathing and he was still breathing. It was just really shallow.

**Scott**

Were your daughters still in the car?

**Jennifer**

Yeah. They were still in the car and I could hear them screaming “Mama!” but I couldn’t go to them because I didn’t want to let go of his hand. Suddenly, there was a neighbor. I consider this neighbor a hero. I think his name was Richard. I tried to send him a “Thank You” note. I don’t know if he ever got it. He took over what the operator was telling us to do because I was trying to do compressions but I wasn’t strong enough. So, he took over and he was above him. I don’t know how long he was there before. Miraculously, there was a trooper that was just, literally, a couple of blocks away when they got the call. She got there really quickly and start giving him oxygen with a little mask. At that point, my hearing kind of went out and I could no longer hear the operator talk to me – I just couldn’t – and I don’t even know how to explain that. So, I just gave my phone to someone. I just held his hand, I prayed, and they did all the work. I mean, I just kind of melted. I didn’t have anything left in me. So there I was, suddenly, in this accident, scared to death for this man. I was shaking and in complete shock. They’re resuscitating him. Then, CareFlite came and took him to a

hospital where he could get help. That was how that day ended. It was not how I would have ever thought that day would end.

**Scott**

How can you just go home from that and act like everything is normal anymore...

**Jennifer**

Nothing was normal and it's still not normal. Before and after the accident, there was life before and life after, there was Jennifer before and Jennifer after. I'm a different person not just emotionally but neurologically. I've had my brain scanned. I have trauma in my brain like, they can see the gray matter called "Low waves." This is one of the therapies that I tried and she could even see that my brainwaves have changed since my accident. So, that night, there were lots of miracles that happened. I was grateful that we could resuscitate him enough to where he got to a hospital and his children had 48 hours with him before he passed away, technically, on October 6. So I'm sure his family thinks of him on October 6 but, for me, it was always gonna be October 4. I mean, I don't know for sure. When we were still alone, I thought he was going to say something. I actually thought I got his attention. The operator had asked me to listen for breathing and see if his chest was moving. I thought he was going to speak to me and he just exhaled. I hold that that little moment very sacred.

**Scott**

And his name is David?

**Jennifer**

His name was David.

**Scott**

Do you know anything about his family?

**Jennifer**

I know very little. I mean, I've tried to be pretty respectful of the family. This is something that I feel that, maybe, the public should know because people were very shocked when I tell them this. Families who have experienced something like this would know this. We are advised immediately to not speak to the family. We are advised not to go to the hospital. We are advised to never try to initiate contact. We are not just advised but STRONGLY advised.

**Scott**

This is advised by friends or legal?

**Jennifer**

No. Legal – by lawyers, insurance, and state trooper. I still wrote them a letter. We lived in a small Texas town. I tried to do a little bit of research and, then, God would just provide little ways for me to learn something here and there. I know that he had three children. I know he had a deeply-involved brother. I know that he was a veteran. In fact, that's where he was headed. I didn't know that there was a VFW at just a

couple– not even half a mile away. So, he was half a mile away from his destination. Not even half a mile – maybe, more like a quarter of a mile from where he was going. They did tell me he was a donor and I'm grateful for that. I have been told that he was a Christian and I'm grateful for that.

## **Scott**

Can you talk about – in the days and weeks following the accident – the support of your family, friends, and your church family? How big of a factor was that?

## **Jennifer**

It was everything. I think I was in complete shock. I feel like I was kind of floating, especially while he was still in ICU. I was continuously praying that he would survive and that there would just be some kind of miracle. I was doing that and that was it. For me, I just wanted him to live. I was in complete shock in the first few days. No one we knew really has a precedent or any kind of prior knowledge on how to deal with this – except my pastor who had been through something similar, actually, the year before. So, they were the ones that came to me. My husband came and got the girls. They had to block off the street at both sides. He had to come and get the girls from me and, later, our pastor and his wife came to the scene to pick me up. It took several hours to process the scene. I just sat there and they came to help me. What's crazy about that is that my pastor had a man throw himself into oncoming traffic the year before. The man was very intoxicated and trying to commit suicide. So, when my pastor hit him, our church family rallied around him. Our pastor who is good friends with us had to go through the loss of sleep and loss of appetite.

**Scott**

So he had a point of reference. He knew what you were going to go through.

**Jennifer**

Right, in some ways, he kind of knew. It was deemed to be not his fault. He did not have other things that had led up to that. We had already been through some stress and we were still going through other stressors. Then, he was told, "It's not your fault." In my case, I take responsibility. It was my fault. I did cause this accident. I did not yield the right of way. I did not see him. I yielded to the stop sign but I didn't see him. I don't know why and I'll never know why. I've asked my brain, "Why?!" I think that's part of why I struggle now – because our bodies are like little machines. Like, our brains are still running in the background asking, "Why did that happen? Why didn't you see him? If you don't know why you didn't see him, could it happen again?" That little voice and that little program are going on in the back of your head forever until you kind of have a concrete understanding. So yeah, our Pastor Jason and his wife, Susan, were amazing to us. They met me there. They drove my car home for me. They counseled Chris to watch over me, which I didn't know at the time.

**Scott**

So they told your husband to kind of keep an eye on you?

**Jennifer**

Right. I was not eating and sleeping. I called my parents. The only people that I called were my husband and my parents while I was at the scene. I

don't think I really lost all appetite. Food had no taste. I literally had zero taste. I mean, I just drink water. I literally just floated around, kind of, dazed. I would hear people and I would interact. I mainly spent the next few weeks crying and weeping continuously. I just couldn't sleep. Even when I laid my head down, I never went into REM sleep.

**Scott**

It's a pretty big thing to not have REM sleep.

**Jennifer**

Right.

**Scott**

That's a big thing. So, you were consciously processing the fact that he had passed away and you had to also be considering what's going to happen to you?

**Jennifer**

Yes. I actually asked my trooper in the car when he called me into his patrol car. I finally got the courage to say, "What's gonna happen to me? I'm a first-born. I want you to, like, shoot me straight. Whatever it is, tell me what it's gonna be, and then we're going to face this. I'm a good girl. I don't like to get in trouble. I struggle with pleasing people." He had to think for a second and, then, he had to say, "Well, if he makes it, you'll hear from a lawyer. His lawyer will probably get in touch with your insurance." I was like, "Okay." He said, "If he doesn't make it, you'll be

hearing more from me and his family will probably get a lawyer.” I said, “Okay.” He said, “Every fatality in our county goes to the grand jury.”

## **Scott**

For people who aren't familiar with the grand jury, they are a group of people that listen to all the facts and decide if charges are to be brought.

## **Jennifer**

Right. They do that to protect the city from being sued and to make sure that every investigation was thorough. It's a scary thing because there are 12 people that would decide in the case and I would have met people who could go either way. We had to wait for three months. I hired the best criminal defense attorney in town. It was just weird to be told that you need a criminal defense attorney.

## **Scott**

Especially for someone like you who described yourself as a first-born and a rule follower, all of a sudden, you've broken the worst rule of all. How would your brain process that?

## **Jennifer**

Right. It's an unforgivable worst thing. I mean, I was just in a complete shock. My therapist and our pastor said, “Hey, these were the facts. You were not speeding. You were not on your phone. You were not drinking and driving. You stopped at the stop sign. This is closed. This is done. I think it's going to be in your favor.” My therapist kept saying, “I really

feel like this is going to be in your favor.” But no one can give you absolutes. Of course, I feel like, “Maybe I should be punished. Maybe I deserve whatever they need to do. Do I need to die? Do I deserve this because I caused this? Do I deserve jail time? Am I a killer? Am I a monster?” These are all the thoughts I had to suddenly process. I couldn’t even wrap my brain around all the things that happened in a split second. It was extremely hard.

**Scott**

How long did you have to wait to find out if charges were going to be brought?

**Jennifer**

At about three months. We actually got the decision right before Christmas and that’s another miracle.

**Scott**

Before we get to the grand jury decision, can you tell me about the one time you were having a cell meeting and you met a neighbor?

**Jennifer**

Right. So, I had a couple of big prayer requests. My prayer every day was for his kids to have a support system. I had a great support system because I had people around me, loving me, and walking me through it. I just prayed that they had that stability through their grief. So, that was one prayer. Another prayer I had was that I could somehow meet

someone that knew him, but I was also kind of terrified that anybody I knew would know him. So, it's funny. I wanted to meet someone that knew him to, maybe, kind of, know a little bit more about this man that I suddenly truly cared for, that I only knew for two minutes, but I feel like it was just the most important two minutes of his life.

I had been praying to meet someone, "Lord, I just want them to know that I'm not a monster and that I'm sorry." So I was having this garage sale and I had a friend and my mom helping me there. Our neighbor came over and said, "Hey, how much do you want for this elliptical?" I was, like, "I'll make you a good and great deal! I will make you a 'neighbor special!'" He was just the sweetest man. I mean, I've seen him a lot. I knew that his wife was a gardener. He's retired and coming and going. That's pretty much all I knew about him. He said, "Oh, my wife would be so thrilled if I surprised her with this elliptical." I was like, "Awesome!" Then, he paused for a second and he said, "Well, let me go run some veterans over to the VFW because I help people who can't get around anymore. I am going to go drive them around a little bit and I'll be back. If it's still here, I want to buy it." I said, "Well, I'll hold it for you." Then, my brain stopped. I knew what he was talking about and my heart just started pounding.

My mom and my friend were just sitting on their chair and I was sweating. I immediately felt anxious. I looked at him and reached out my hand to him, which is really kind of weird, like "What is she doing?" I grabbed his hand, I said, "Did you know David?" This was probably within a month to six weeks. I get really foggy on time. Time is difficult for me. He looked at me – I mean, I didn't even say his last name, I just said, 'David' – and he said "Yes." Then, I had to tell him, "It was me." I think he had to kind of process that for a second. Then he was like, "I would have never thought that it was you." When you hear about these accidents, you immediately think about these irresponsible, drunk, and selfish drivers. We all are guilty of this. I have eaten my own words – and I can tell you about that in a minute if you want to – in situations like this. So I said, "It was me," and I began to shake and quiver. My mom

started crying. Then, I said, “I’m so sorry that you lost a buddy. Please tell anyone at the VFW that I’m so very sorry for their loss.” He said, “Thank you. I will make sure I pass this on because they thought the person who did this was the worst. I’ll make sure I tell people,” because he kind of knew me before – just friendly neighbor-ish type stuff – and realize that I am broken. I mean, I just literally broke down. I mean, I almost felt like kneeling and letting him just, like, hit me or something. I mean, that’s kind of how I feel. I feel as if you need to be just – I don’t know.

## Scott

Just extreme guilt?

## Jennifer

Extreme guilt. It’s extreme guilt. But there’s nothing that can make this better. There’s no amount of money, there are no words that I could ever say, there’s nothing that I can truly do to make this better for anyone who loved this man. He was an innocent man but he lost his life very tragically. Yeah, I have to live with that. It’s kind of a daily thing. He did buy that elliptical and he was very sweet. I found out later that he did talk to his children or, at least, a family member on my behalf – which I didn’t know until later. I didn’t ask him to do that. He mentioned, “Hey, if you ever want to come and talk to the officers, we can invite you into the meeting and you can address the officers,” and I eventually did do that. That’s what happened. It was an answered prayer. It was very scary but it was also kind of relieving that I got to say “Sorry” to at least someone, pass on my condolences, share my heart, and it felt really good. I felt very, very grateful that the Lord would provide that. It was just amazing. I feel like that was a true miracle that he just happened to say that. Otherwise, I would have never known. If he just said, “Hey, I gotta go drive a buddy to run an errand,” I would have never known. He just happened to say “VFW” and I happen to now know that. We were down the road. The accident happened within a mile from my home.

**Scott**

Okay. You said that you got the news a few days before Christmas. How did that happen?

**Jennifer**

We didn't think it was going to happen. We were all praying that I would be seen by this grand jury. My attorney said that grand juries get seasoned. They have a term of 6 months. When they first get on their first session, they're very sensitive and they don't want to make anything wrong decisions because they don't want to carry that burden either. I mean, can you imagine if you really had to put yourself in someone else's shoes, like, "If this had been my husband?" On the day of the grand jury, I did prepare. My parents came into town. We had people who were praying and ready to be with us. I shipped out all the kids – they each had a friend to go to. It was the middle of the week but they got to go spend the night on a school night with friends. Our friends who knew what was happening were going to distract them. They had activities planned. Everything was fished out to make sure that Chris could just focus on me if I was indicted. They assured me, "If that happens, we're gonna put you in a safe place. You'll do what's called a walk-through." Chris, my husband, didn't really have kind of an emotional – he was emotional but it only became real the night before.

**Scott**

Probably, as a man, he wanted to help but this was out of his control.

**Jennifer**

Right. Before the accident, I was kind of that person who handle everything when Haven or Katie needed an MRI or a scan or a neurologist appointment. I kind of handled the insurance and the doctor's appointments. I would take care of all those things for us. At one point, I kind of took care of finances. When I went to graduate school, he took over finances. He was always the leader of my home but I feel like – I don't know how to describe it – I was that go-to person. Like, if it needed to be done, I could do those things and I could be reliable. I could juggle family, work, graduate school, and ministry but, now, I couldn't do that. He knew that, at that moment, he had to kind of take on things that he never had to do in our 15 years of marriage, and he did it so wonderfully and so amazingly. He played out our vows. I mean, vows are no joke, whether it was just making sure that I ate or slept, or let me cry and just hold me. At that point, since the accident, he had really taken care of groceries and lunches for the kids for school. I mean, I literally could hardly do any of those things besides just breathing.

When we got to the grand jury, I did set up who was going to go where. I almost felt like I was back to my old self just for a brief little bit because I wrote out a piece of paper that said, "Okay, this is the contact information for so-and-so and they have so-and-so for one of our kids." I laid it out for him in case I wasn't there. That's crazy. I don't know if it was just a glimmer of how I used to be as I laid out all of these for him, like, "Here's the doctor appointment. This is the time. This is where we're going to be. This is the address." Then, suddenly he broke down and I was strong again. But thankfully, the next day, everybody was ready. My lawyer said, "If you get a call from me, that means I need you to come down to the courthouse in case the grand jury wanted to ask you questions." They told me that arraignment and things like that wouldn't happen until after 5.00 PM. They kind of, I guess, see all the cases and then all the decisions are given out all at one time – that's what they said the procedure is. So, we had expected to not know 'yes' or 'no' until 5.00 PM because they want to make sure that the grand jury has been dismissed and no one is aggressive or upset about their decision. So, we had all kind of taken the day off. Many people were surrounding us and everything had been figured out. My mom had just got there.

Then, my attorney's office was calling my phone. I remembered just thinking, "Okay. He didn't really prepare me for what they might say. He just told me to go through whatever they ask and just be as honest as you can." So, I saw that call come in and, I think, I wanted to vomit. My mom looked at me and said, "Why don't you go upstairs to take that call?" When I answered the phone, it wasn't my lawyer so I was really confused. He said, "Jennifer, I'm the district attorney. The grand jury asked for me to call you personally and tell you that they've given you a no-bill, and they want you to have a Merry Christmas with your family." I was just in shock because I wasn't supposed to know until 5.00 PM, but it was probably 10.00 AM -ish – I don't know. So, I received my no-bill. This was literally the week before Christmas and we hadn't put up a tree. My mom hadn't put up a tree. Basically, anyone who loved me has, kind of, like, paused thanksgiving. There was no normal family celebration when we got together – it was different.

**Scott**

Like clout?

**Jennifer**

Like clout. It wasn't just clout just because I was facing something, I was also constantly feeling, like, "How should I get to celebrate when there is an empty chair that will not be filled at another family's get-together? How dare I celebrate and enjoy myself with my loved ones when there are people missing him somewhere." So it wasn't just that because we did begin to celebrate. I was so grateful that that part could be behind me. That was certainly – I can't even describe. I've been through brain surgery, signing a waiver, saying, "Your daughter might not make this," or "She may be paralyzed," and then I did it again. I mean, nothing can compare to that 90 days or 3 months of waiting to decide if I was going to

jail. Now, I've met people who had complete freak accidents but were indicted – some are still found to be guilty – and they're so amazing. I literally thought that my life and my marriage would be over. How could I even ask my husband to wait for me if I had to go serve time and jail? I just could not completely wrap my brain around it. Now that I've met other people, they are just so brave. I mean, I'm awed by the stories that I've now heard and people that I've met that have been through experiences like this which I thought, "Well, I just couldn't have survived through this." Now, I've met other people, heard their stories, and I'm in awe of them.

## **Scott**

Let's talk about that a little bit. You have a blog and there's a Facebook group. So, you are contacted regularly by other people who have gone through similar situations. What do you say to them? How do you tell them to get through it?

## **Jennifer**

You're not alone. When I was in the weeks of this happening, I was searching for "grief", "loss of a child", "loss of a spouse", "loss of a dog", "loss of a friend", "loss of job", "grieving marriage" but I couldn't find something that helps me if I accidentally killed someone. There's a movie called "Manchester by the Sea" and it's about what happens to this man who accidentally killed his children. Once I found out what the movie was about, it took me months before I had the courage to watch the movie. I identified with this man in this character, amazingly. What's even more interesting is Matthew Broderick, the actor, had an accident, causing fatality. He was in the movie. I would suspect that he was able to help that fellow actor who played the dad. We have a lot of things in common. I can't speak for everyone. We grieve in different ways. Grief is a beast. You can't put grief in a box. It's all going to be a little bit different for different people but there are little boxes that you can check. I went through all the emotions of grief. I

experienced PTSD, anxiety, sudden panic attacks, hallucinations – you name it, I went through it – and I always felt alone, which is crazy. I became stronger.

My parents and I were always close. I had an amazing childhood. My parents were very involved. My dad is also a teacher. So, they were always involved with the Parent-Teacher Council and my dad sponsored our cheer squad at one time. I mean, he and my mom were always involved. We were close family but now is different. As an adult, I was suddenly talking to her more regularly, hugging her more, and saying “I love you” more. That was something good, but I still felt alone because there’s no self-help.

I was told by two different therapists, “I don’t know how to treat you. There’s no protocol. I don’t really know which kind of therapy to use with you.” I had to seek out help. It wasn’t just brought to me. Victim services did not come to help me. In fact, I would not even be considered as that. My trooper told me, “Hey, normally when this happens, I’m making an arrest.” That’s what he told me in the car and I just had to look at him. He said, “We don’t really know what to do with you. I mean, when these things happen, we don’t have a– you’re that odd man out, that one-off.” So, when you’re told by therapists that they don’t know how to help you and you don’t know how to help yourself, I tried to do some research but I was coming up empty. I felt so alone. That can’t be very rational because accidents happen every single day. I never really stopped to think about the other driver. I actually kind of touched base on this a minute ago. I had to eat my own words. God is so good. I am sorry. I know I’m not here to preach or anything but he even convicts and teaches us through these moments.

For whatever reason, at some point, I had a memory of my mom telling me about someone who we had known had gotten into an accident and her husband was suddenly gone. The wife was now a widow to four

children. This was before my accident. I remember us sitting and my mom said something like, “I hope that person wasn’t texting, probably speeding.” I said to her, “I cannot imagine how she must feel to suddenly lose her husband like that. I would pursue that person to the ends of the law.” God gave me that memory. I said that and I had to eat those words. Months later, when I remember this, I was like, “Oh, my gosh! Please forgive me for ever judging that person.” I mean, maybe they were texting, maybe they were being negligent. I didn’t know the facts of that case but I was saying, “Oh, I’m angry for that family. I would pursue them to the ends of the law.” Then, here I am, on the flip side, saying, “God, please show mercy and grace.” I’m grateful for that lesson. I’m grateful for that memory.

When I received the hate mail, I received not just threats but also anger, frustration, and judgment. People sought me out. I had to turn off my Facebook. I did not retaliate. In fact, I understood their hurt and anger. What I hope was that our group does not only offers “Hey, fellow CADI, you’re not alone, you are not a monster, you are grieving, you’re not crazy. Here are suicide hotlines. Here are therapies that we found have helped other people. We want to become like a resource.”

Another CADI, my sweet friend, that I met through this tragedy – I haven’t actually met or talked to her – she and I were interviewed and we kind of came together in this amazing way. She created a website that was the only resource I have ever found to be relatable. I remembered searching for months and months. I would even search about what was going to happen to me. I would search for things like “accident”, “fatality, and “my fault.” I would just try to find something but I would find either nothing or things like a man in Austin who was indicted. He was eating a shrimp taco. As the shrimp fell out of his lap while he was driving – he was in Austin – he glanced down to pick up that shrimp out of his lap. Lots of people bike in Austin. So, he hit a cyclist, the cyclist passed away, and he was indicted. I think that’s a whole other conversation. There’s also the aspect of educating the public about what is distracted driving. I think it’s phenomenal that we’re trying to

improve upon texting and driving. This could happen to anyone. When I gave my interview for the New Yorker, the journalist said, “Your story scares the hell out of me because you are just an everyday Joe. I was guilty of driving while tired. I remember when I was younger, I would check my makeup while still driving.”

## Scott

We feel like we can do that but not get distracted. But we think that other people shouldn't do that.

## Jennifer

Right. Like, “I’m okay because I’ve got control” or “Well, I have this open road. I’m not doing anything crazy.” When I was under investigation, I was asked, “Did you have an argument with your husband that day or the day before? How much sleep did you get? What was happening with the kids?” I mean, the reason why this trooper had these questions for me is that this is their protocol. These are considered distractions. How loud was your radio going? Were you dancing to the songs? I am so grateful that, at that moment, I could honestly say, ‘No.’ I stopped at that stop sign and asked Katie, ‘Did you score? Did you serve over the net?’ I didn’t even have the radio on because we were talking. Haven was just chilling in her car seat.” However, I kept thinking that I’m guilty of all those things. When you’re driving, how many times were you like, “Oh, you’re in a new place. Oh, that was a stop sign. Oh, that light turned red. Oh, you need to get into this lane. When you come back this lane, were you, like, ‘Whoa, thank goodness. I didn’t see that man in my blind spot.’” We all have these moments that we can take into our thoughts.

Apparently – and I don't know if this is true – he had already been at the VFW, left, and was coming back. He had just bought that motorcycle that day. I mean, there are just some parts where I hope that there will be a ripple of compassion within your audience as they start to notice that these accidents really do happen every day. If you have ever seen news floating around Facebook about “Oh, there's been a fatality at some highway,” you'll immediately think about that family who just lost a loved one. There is also a whole other aspect – not just that family. A ripple of people's lives just changed – my children's lives, his children's lives, all these people who are innocent in this. It broke my heart that I broke my children's hearts. It broke my heart that I broke my husband's heart. It broke my heart that I broke my mother's heart.

**Scott**

Seeing things from a different perspective makes me think of people that are friends or family members of someone who has gone through what you've gone through. What is the right thing to say to them? I know some people who just don't say anything or interact with you anymore. For people who really want to help, what can they do?

**Jennifer**

Well, please don't say, “I ran over a dog. Oh my gosh, I felt horrible.”

**Scott**

Oh, so they're trying to identify with you by saying that they hit an animal?

## Jennifer

Yeah. I know their heart was in the right place but I just thought, “Oh my gosh, I would have to look at three children who lost their daddy in an accident.” I know how close my children are to their daddy and how much I value family or veterans. I put high esteem in people who’ve served our country so that was kind of a sting. Also, saying, “Jennifer, this wasn’t your fault. This was just an accident.” is not always received well, either, because it doesn’t matter if it was an accident. Somehow, it’s my fault. I was involved. I think what can help is just saying, “This is hard but I’m going to walk with you through it. I don’t know how you feel but I’m here for you. It’s okay to be broken. If you are angry at God right now, if you are angry at yourself or whatever, I’m just here if you need to scream, if you need to cry, if you need a little help because little things like laundry or brushing your teeth become overwhelming. It’s so awful to say that but that’s where I was. I mean, getting a happy face on took so much energy out of me. When I got back home, I immediately got into pajamas and got in my bed. My poor family didn’t have me for a good 4-6 months. I had to decide if I wanted to live. I mean, I would kind of be there but I had to decide to fight for my health, my mental health by going to the doctor, getting medicine, and finding a nighttime routine that would help me get some kind of sleep. I remembered getting to fall asleep by midnight and waking up around 5.00 AM and being like, “Okay, that’s a start.”

Most of the time now, I still have pretty good days, but there are some nights when nothing’s going to help. The melatonin is not going to help. The Tylenol PM is not going to help. Nothing’s going to help. Reading my Bible is not going to help. I’m just not going to sleep at night for whatever reason. I’ve learned that this is a lifelong thing. I’ve met people who had their accident 40 years ago like Maryann. She is the founder of [accidentalimpacts.org](http://accidentalimpacts.org) and she was the only resource available anywhere in the world. She termed the term “CADI” which is Causing Accidental Death and Injury. It’s what she preferred to call herself. She’s still practicing counseling. Her story is available and she’s very open. She’s a fighter. She’s an advocate for us to be recognized by the counseling community. I feel that she’s in her 70s. It’s not that I ever wanted this

torch. I mean, I would have much rather fought for Chiari malformation research. I would have, rather, advocated for special education or even working with at-risk youth like what we've done before. Never in a million years would I have wanted this cause.

## **Scott**

Sometimes you don't get to choose your cause because it chooses you.

## **Jennifer**

Right. So I was crying on my therapist's couch. My doctor was amazing – bless his heart – and I'm forever grateful to him. He took me on because he had special knowledge. He actually is a chaplain and he works a lot with police officers and PTSD. So, for anyone who is a CADI, we highly recommend a therapist that specializes in PTSD because they can relate closely to that battle – survivor's guilt and things like that, which all of us have experienced. It's cross-cultural. We've been contacted from several countries by both the wives and mothers of other people of all age groups and ethnicities. They are reporting back the same things that we all have. When I found the first couple of them, I started a blog. At first, I wanted to keep it private because I was so afraid of the backlash and the people who say, "You should be in jail. You should rot in hell." But then I thought, if I keep this all to myself, we're never going to make a change. So, I had to be willing to take that on. So, I finally did that. When other CADIs find me, we feel like we can finish each other's sentences, we can finish each other's thoughts, and we were like, "Oh my gosh, you were in my head." I'm like, "Okay, it's good if you think that. Maybe I'm not crazy." You want the validation that you're not crazy although you feel crazy. Anytime I find someone who can relate to that, it helps me to feel like, "Okay, this is normal." If you and I feel this way then we can at least go, "Okay, we're not crazy. How do we keep moving forward? Well, this is what works for me. I used art therapy. I did this thing called neurofeedback and it was amazing. I wish I could do more of it." There is somebody else who said that he did a memorial kind of thing

for the victim and that gave me an idea of something that I wanted to do for David. So, we can kind of keep the people that we've hurt in a very special place in our hearts. I mean, that is something that's consistent. Even if we knew them or not, we hold them in spite of this delicate relationship place that we can't even describe. It's weird and we don't know a name for it.

**Scott**

Maybe you need to create a name for it. Well, if people want to contact you, ask you questions, or find resources on how to get through something like this, how can they do that?

**Jennifer**

Okay. The first website I'll give you is [accidentalimpacts.org](http://accidentalimpacts.org). That is Maryann's. She is a social psychologist and educator. So you can find it at [accidentalimpacts.org](http://accidentalimpacts.org).

**Scott**

You can send that information to me and I'll put it in the show notes for this episode.

**Jennifer**

Sure, absolutely. She's kind of the trailblazer. She is a CADI herself. Her accident was over 40 years ago. She has blog posts about what to do and it really helped me. She helped me to feel like I wasn't alone. She has, like, a forum-type thing where people can post. That's how I found out

about the New Yorker article and connected with another CADI. Then, we also have accidentalcasualties.com. That was created by my friend and fellow CADI. We don't really know where it's gonna go but it's a resource for people to not feel alone. There is a forum. There's information on how to contact us through there. We tried to just be a place for people to find, so anyone is welcome. Resources on suicide, PTSD, and any treatment that is recommended to someone – we try to get information on the blog about that treatment so that you could get that information. You can also email me if you want to share your story. I have several people who don't want to be involved in any kind of support group, but who have sent me their stories so that someone can hear it. Sometimes, just releasing that helps. I certainly found it therapeutic to finally openly and publicly share my story. So, I appreciate you with this as well. My email is beautifullybrokenblog16@gmail.com. You're certainly welcome to email me. I can try to pray for you or listen to whatever. I'm certainly not a doctor or counselor, but just someone who is a friendly ear.

**Scott**

You're familiar with the resources that are available. Maybe, you can direct people to write whatever is appropriate.

**Jennifer**

Right. If they have every source that we don't know about, I'd love to know. I'm still a person that is deeply affected and I now live with anxiety. So, I love to learn about other resources.

**Scott**

Jen, I'm sorry that your family and that David's has gone through this. I'm certainly grateful for you coming here and sharing your story. I'm sure it's going to help a lot of people.

## **Jennifer**

Well, thank you. I appreciate you, Scott. Thanks for reaching out!

## **Scott**

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