

# The Resilience of a Hero

Nothing could have prepared Bill for the chaos of March 7 that would bring months of hard recovery and the desperate need for resilience.

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For over 30 years, Bill ate breakfast with his friends at the same cafe in the modest town of Hurtsboro, Alabama. The town was so small that nearly everyone knew each other by name, and each day seemed a repeat of the last. That is, until the morning of March 7, 2018, when Bill's love for his quiet cafe became tainted with a violent memory. A shooter barged into the City Grill Cafe.

"Hughes!" the gunman shouted the cafe owner's name and opened fire less than five feet away from where Bill and his friends sat. As if by instinct, Bill lunged at the shooter, shielding the others and attempting to stop the assault. Gunshots. With two bullets to his stomach and one to his leg, Bill became a hero. Two lives were lost that early morning, but he saved many others. Bill demonstrated true resilience in the following months through his ability to recover, adapt, and remain strong after the assault of March 7.

Although he was threatened with three potentially fatal wounds, Bill remained spiritually faithful as he physically recovered from the attack. He kept his eyes on the Lord as his body recovered from the shock. He spent weeks in the hospital and rehabilitation center, an emotionally unsettling time for his close family and friends. Even in the uncertainty, Bill leaned into the Scriptures and understood that the Lord had His hand on him through the violence and through the healing. After six months, his health had greatly improved. Bill's faith in the Lord grounded his resilience in a stable hope that helped his body recover.

Not only did Bill demonstrate his resilience through his recovery, but he adapted to his weak state and unfamiliar atmosphere. In a matter of seconds, the gunman changed everything in Bill's typical routine. The independent entrepreneur had to modify the way he lived to follow the advice of his medical team and adjust to his new environment. He had to trust the internal healing process as well as the justice system. While Bill lay helpless in the hospital bed, investigators sought statements about the shooting. These new responsibilities were emotionally overwhelming for Bill. Even suffering through the pain of survivor's guilt, he accepted a new

perspective of his own abilities, adapting to physical needs and obligations. This is something only a truly resilient man could ever achieve.

In addition to adapting to difficult circumstances, resilience refers to the ability to persevere through hardships. Years passed, and the shooter sat, waiting in a county jail with no regrets. Bill remained patient as he, too, waited for the hearing. Despite Parkinson's disease and aging weakness, Bill remained optimistic. Today, he continues to demonstrate his mental and spiritual strength by his patience for God's perfect timing for justice from the attack.

The Hurtsboro shooting of March 7, 2018, was hard on my family. Hearing that my grandfather was shot in his small town frightened me as a mere ten-year-old. The trauma Papa endured left a significant impact on my heart, and his ability to recover after the event was an encouraging example of resilience to my sisters and me.

As he recovered, Papa leaned on the words of Scripture to guide him through the healing process. He believed in the words of Psalm 73:26, "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (*English Standard Version*). My grandfather learned how to adapt to his new circumstances, as the injuries left him weak and dependent. Even so, Papa stayed mentally strong after the assault, finding hope in the midst of his condition.

The injustice after the shooting was emotionally exhausting for Papa Bill and my grandmother, specifically with the long span of time between the shooting and hearing. After six years without closure, the hearing was held. Just last week, with the majority of the Hurtsboro community in the courtroom, the judge gave the shooter a life-long sentence in a maximum security, federal penitentiary, and justice was finally served.