

New book tells story of loss, redemption

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(ABP)-A new book self-described as "one part worst-case scenario and three parts God's creative redemption," about a church-bus tragedy that turned into a grassroots movement for doing good, cracked the Amazon Top 50 Christian Living Hot New Releases during its first week of publication.



"Maggie Lee for Good" is a testimony that God is at work even in life's worst-case scenarios.

Three years ago this July 12, John and Jinny Henson of Shreveport, La., sent their 12-year-old daughter, Maggie Lee, to church camp. When a tire failed and the bus flipped on a Mississippi interstate, she and another student were ejected and pinned underneath.

Summoned to a hospital in Jackson, Miss., the Hensons were told not to expect their daughter to live through the night. Miraculously, her condition

stabilized, and she lingered three weeks before being declared brain dead on Aug. 2, 2009.

Taking turns at Maggie Lee's bedside, the couple shared their roller-coaster experience through a website for posting medical updates about critical patients called CaringBridge.org. For reasons they did not fully understand, surmising that perhaps with so many parents sending kids off to summer camp that their story struck a particular nerve, the site logged more than 250,000 visits during the three-week period. The response was significant enough for Snopes.com to include an entry about whether or not Maggie Lee is an urban legend.

At her memorial service, Maggie Lee's voice teacher sang a song from the girl's favorite Broadway musical, "Wicked." Struck by the line "because I knew you I have changed for the better, I have been changed for good," a family friend had rubber wrist bracelets made with the message "Maggie Lee ... for Good."

Not wanting to let grief get the last word, a woman in Texas who did not know the Hensons, but had followed the online prayer requests following the accident, suggested turning what would have been Maggie Lee's upcoming birthday into a public-service project in her honor.

Not really expecting anything good to come out of her loss but lacking a better idea for how to cope with the difficulty of getting through Maggie Lee's first birthday after her death, Jinny Henson went along. She set up a Facebook page asking what seemed at the time like an ambitious goal of 1,300 people to pledge to do one good deed on Oct. 29, the day Maggie Lee would have turned 13.

The 1,300 number was surpassed the first day, and they decided to set their sights on 13,000 people taking part in Maggie Lee for Good on Oct. 29, 2009. Before it was over more than 18,000 people had joined the effort

labeled "One Day, One Deed, One Difference."

Realizing that people have short memories, Jinny Henson expected Maggie Lee for Good to be a one-shot experience. Participants wanted to do it again, however, so a second annual event was held Oct. 29, 2010. The third year it got a special boost, when Shreveport's mayor proclaimed Oct. 29, 2011, "Maggie Lee for Good Day," turning it into a citywide project.

Now the Hensons tell their story in a book, [*Maggie Lee for Good*](#), released June 7 by Smyth & Helwys Publishing. A press release describes it as a "heartbreaking story of a parent's loss and the unbelievable good which has come from thousands of friends and strangers alike wanting good to have the final say."



The cover of "Maggie Lee for Good" features Eric Sorenson's photo of Maggie Lee and her beloved Chihuahua Ellie.

"The theme of the book is that God can bring something beautiful even out of our most tragic circumstances," says John Henson. "It has been

incredible to watch and we are so thankful to have the chance to continue Maggie Lee's work of sharing God's goodness with the world."

Interspersed with their experience, the Hensons include a section about the theological challenges presented by suffering and loss, including the inadequacy of explanations like "it must be God's will" offered by well-meaning people intending to give comfort, and about how much help they received from books by others with similar experiences like John Claypool and Carlyle Marney.

The end of the book includes discussion questions for group study and John's Aug. 23, 2009, sermon at First Baptist Church in Shreveport titled "Jairus Revisited."

"The life and death of Maggie Lee Henson began a movement of kindness that is still reverberating," says an afterword. "More than just a feel-good story, her story is proof that the human spirit will triumph even when the body fails, that people do want good to win, and that God is very much at work redeeming the world and even our worst-case scenarios."

Readers wanting to join Maggie Lee for Good are invited to go to the Facebook page [facebook.com/MaggieLeeForGood](https://www.facebook.com/MaggieLeeForGood). Click the "Like" button and you will be in the group. Those wanting to present Maggie Lee for Good to their school or service organization can find free resources, graphics and printables at <http://maggieleeforgood.org/>.