

# MORE THAN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



THE INSIDIOUS STORY

Michael Willbur

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VIOLENCE**

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**MICHAEL WILLBUR**

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# DEDICATION

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There is only one proper dedication that is meaningful to me. As I write this, my thoughts are of those five beautiful children.

The memory of them is that of innocence.

This book is dedicated:

To all the other victims of family violence whose experience ended in the untltimate loss...

To their futures, a chance for happiness and a full life...

To my supportive wife who has helped me stay grounded and focused in the truth.



## *Nolan Dao*

March 2, 1999 - April 24, 2011



Nolan was unique and special in so many ways. He was tall and had gorgeous hazel-colored eyes. Nolan was extremely respectful and thoughtful of his elders and always stopped what he was doing to greet guests at our home.

Nolan was shy and reserved, but was also very observant. Like his brothers, he was quite the jokester. Nolan was detail-oriented and very skillful at solving puzzles and building things without the need to review instruction manuals. He never refused an opportunity to demonstrate his ability to build things and on several occasions helped build household furniture and sheds. Nolan also enjoyed playing video games with his siblings and prided himself on his ability to quickly learn and complete games. He loved spending time with family, and especially enjoyed his time with his grandparents. Nolan loved camping and hiking with them and was not afraid to hike even the steepest of trails.



# FOREWORD

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*“I have learned two lessons in my life: First, there are no sufficient literary, psychological, or historical answers to human tragedy, only moral ones. Second, just as despair can come to one another only from other human beings, hope, too, can be given to one only by other human beings.” – Elie Wiesel*

Mr. Wiesel’s quote from his book “All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs” is a testament to this book. Mr. Wiesel describes the abhorrent and mind shattering events he endured as a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps. He speaks not only to his experiences, but also to those of his family, faith, and community. In Mr. Wiesel’s book, he describes the events leading up to his realization that although the most painful experiences can be inflicted on us by others, we have the ability to find hope in our personal lives and the world we live in. This takes a monumental amount of courage and the desire to benefit others from our own painful experiences. Mr. Willbur has done just that in this book.

As a Certified Trauma Services Specialist, I have worked with hundreds of trauma survivors who have suffered at the hands of others. The trauma may be due to combat, sexual, psychological or physical abuse, but however it is defined, it comes down to unexplainable behaviors that destroy the lives

of others; often, those closest to them as in the case of domestic or intimate violence.

The author has written a poignant and candid story of his personal first hand account of the pain and suffering inflicted not only on the victims of domestic violence, but the impact and destruction of families and in part their community. Lives are destroyed, family member's lives are changed forever, and the community is left to deal with the aftermath of said violence. The author has given the reader a broad and informative narrative of his personal experience.

What makes this book ultimately notable from other stories is the painstaking work done to explain to the reader how domestic violence impacts all of us, not only from a personal view point, but how the media and legal system play an intricate part in how it plays out in the community.

Mr. Willbur has earned an MS in Addictions Counseling and works as an Incarcerated Veterans Program Specialist. Mr. Willbur and I are colleagues working with trauma survivors in a similar arena. Mr. Willbur is uniquely qualified to write this book. He and his spouse Ki have experienced the ultimate pain in the loss of their five grandchildren to domestic violence. Mr. Willbur has taken his personal tragedy and completed a work accomplishing what we are all commissioned to do “make something good of what pain has been inflicted upon us”.

In doing so, Mr. Willbur has given us a guide book into the inexplicable behaviors and thought processing of a domestic violence perpetrator. He has also given us an invaluable overview of the cultural, legal and media induced

influences into these cases. In his generosity and keeping with the theme of healing, Mr. Willbur has spoken to the desperately needed help the perpetrator requires, so as to promote their healing, but also the desire to stop this cycle before the destruction of the abuse escalates.

The importance of this book is identified within the “*The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence*” (NCADV) 2007 startling statistics:

- One in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.
- An estimated 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year.
- 85% of domestic violence victims are women.
- Historically, females have been most often victimized by someone they knew.
- Females who are *20-24 years of age* are at the greatest risk of nonfatal intimate partner violence.
- Most cases of domestic violence are never reported to the police.

The NCADV makes a special note of “Why it Matters.”

*“Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior perpetrated by an intimate partner against another. It is an epidemic affecting individuals in every community, regardless of age, economic status, race, religion, nationality or educational background. Violence against women is often accompanied by emotionally abusive and controlling behavior, and thus is part of a systematic*



*pattern of dominance and control. Domestic violence results in physical injury, psychological trauma, and sometimes death. The consequences of domestic violence can cross generations and truly last a life time.”*

This book should be the one that is frayed and well used in all domestic violence centers and well read by law enforcement and those involved in the legal system. This book will also educate and benefit those family members whose loved ones are involved in an abusive relationship. The author has given those being victimized in a domestic violence or intimate partner relationship the opportunity to learn the signs of abuse to assist them in recognizing the uncertainty and capability of the perpetrator and the courage to take the steps to safety for the benefit of all.

Sarah J. Getman MA, CTSS, LMHC, NCC  
Certified Trauma Services Specialist

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*There are many schools of thought surrounding Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence. Perspectives on causation are bountiful. This is Mike Willbur's perspective.*

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## Chapter 1

# THE REVEALING

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Sam\* and his girlfriend Cheryl\* had fallen asleep in their living room that Saturday night. A loud boom shook them out of their sleep at around 1:30 a.m. They raced outside. Cheryl's first impression was that the vacant house across the street from them was on fire. The glass windows of the house reflected the already roaring flames like a mirror. This impression quickly changed as the couple realized that the fire was raging two houses to the east of their home.

Other neighbors had also come out to see what was happening. Earlier that evening, Sharon\* had been watching TV in her family room at the back of the house. She heard sounds coming from the street and decided to check it out. She stepped out on her front porch, lit a cigarette and watched. Tuan Dao stepped out of the car and walked to the house. She saw him enter.

She returned to the family room. About 2 hours later, she also heard the explosion and came out to see what was happening. She placed a call to 911 at 1:39 a.m.

\*Throughout the book, names followed with an asterisk have been changed to offer some privacy.

George\* and Pamela\* were sleeping in their bedroom when a deep, low blast shook them awake. Recognizing that it wasn't thunder, George got up. He saw that the house just to the east of his was on fire. Pamela followed him taking several photos and video of the active fire.

Sarah\* was also among those watching the fire. She had arrived home at 12:30 a.m. An hour later, she was standing in her kitchen when she heard a very loud noise. The whole house shook around her. At first, she thought someone had crashed into her SUV in the driveway. She went outside to check and found that the house to her west was on fire. The flames engulfing the house were spreading toward the western wall of her home.

Diane\* and Steve\* were awakened by the same loud, deep base rumble. Steve jumped out of bed. As he looked out their upstairs bedroom window, he saw smoke and flames pouring from the east side of 15304 NE 13<sup>th</sup> Circle. Diane grabbed her camera and both went down to the street. Within minutes of the fire erupting, Diane was capturing video of the rapidly spreading fire.

At 3:05 a.m. Ki, my wife, answered a call from my daughter, Lori. Her speech suggested she was in a drunken state. Lori greeted Ki, then said, "I got a call from a neighbor who said the house was on fire, and I don't know if the kids are in the house! Can you go check?"

By now, I was coming out of sleep. I heard Ki ask, "Where are you at?"

Lori shot back with, "Beaverton"

I got up immediately. Even though I was rushing, I felt like I was in one of those slowmotion scenes you see in a movie. We lived only blocks from 13<sup>th</sup> Circle. By the time I arrived, the fire fighters had already brought the fire under control.

I dialed Tuan on my wife's cell phone. There was no answer. The phone recorded the time as 3:11 a.m. It felt more like 3:40 a.m. Time seemed to have expanded—moving in deliberate steps toward something I didn't want to imagine.

I saw devastation. There was window debris on all sides—some from the fire blowing the windows out, some from the firefighters seeking access to fight the fire. The east roof had collapsed. The garage door gaped open with ceiling hanging down where the firefighters had gained access to the attic. The house we had given Lori and Tuan lay in ruins.

I introduced myself and began talking to the neighbors and fire crew. I walked as close to the house as the crime scene tape would allow. One of the firemen asked if I was a family member. I answered, “Yes.” I’m sure I was visibly shaking as I asked, “Were any children found?”

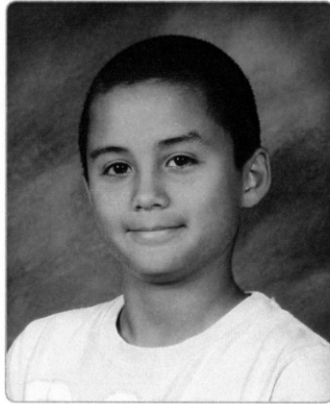
I learned that one body had been found in the house. They didn't tell me if the body was of an adult or a child.

Moments later, a fireman came out and told me they had found one child and what also appeared to be an adult body. It was 4:08 AM.

I paced back and forth, talking to my wife. Realizing there was nothing we could do, I walked her home, only to return by myself. It was apparent as the morning progressed that the remaining children would be found.

# Noah Dao

May 30, 2001 - April 24, 2011



Noah, Jacob's older twin brother, was handsome, strong and loved the outdoors. At age 9, he was adept at understanding the feelings of others and keeping the peace. He constantly strived to make sure everyone was happy.

Noah always had a smile that would warm the hearts of others. He was friendly and was adored by those who got to know him. Noah enjoyed making people laugh by making up his own jokes and performing magic tricks. He was always protective of his twin brother.

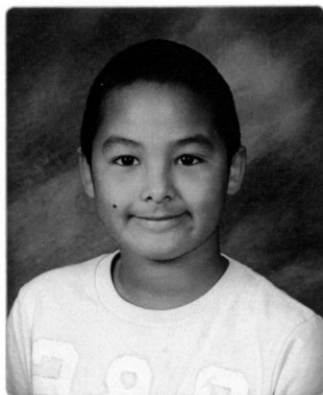
Noah had a natural gift when it came to sports. He was very athletic and quickly learned to play soccer and basketball well. He also enjoyed watching football and wanted to play it someday. He sometimes played rough and got hurt in the process, but always brushed off his injuries and was never afraid to go back and do things again. Noah strived to be the best at everything he did.



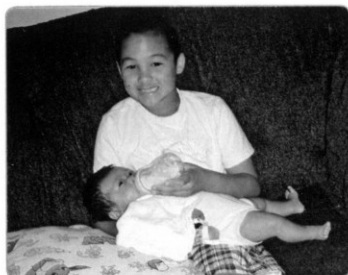


## *Jacob Dao*

May 30, 2001 - April 24, 2011



Jacob, Noah's younger twin brother (by a mere 16 minutes), was cute, sensitive and artistic. As babies, it was hard to identify between the two, but what made Jacob distinguishable was the beauty mark on his face. The twins were inseparable. Jacob, being the younger, admired and wanted to be like his older twin. Although he wasn't the most athletic person, he joined "just because" and always tried his best. Jacob was extremely artistic. He had a fantastic imagination and loved reading, drawing and creating comics. His writing ability surpassed those in his age group. He loved listening to music and wanted to play the piano and violin, just like his older sister. It was not uncommon to find Jacob singing while listening to his iPod. He also danced comically when he got excited and it was easy to laugh along with him. Jacob, like his twin, had a sensitive side and a soft spot for babies and loved caring for them.





# *Samantha Dao*

November 1, 2002 - April 24, 2011



Samantha was our little princess (and she knew it). She had a shining personality and was well liked by all. Calling Samantha beautiful, adorable, sweet, and precious don't do her justice. She was a very special girl who had a knack for turning frowns upside down.

Samantha loved dressing up and modeling for her family. At a very early age, she developed her own style and was not shy about picking out her own clothes and accessories. She loved coordinating her outfits with lovely jewelry. While "modeling" was a hobby of hers, Samantha aspired to be a teacher. She loved learning and had developed a strong desire to read and write, much like her big sister. Her penmanship could not be matched by anyone in the family.

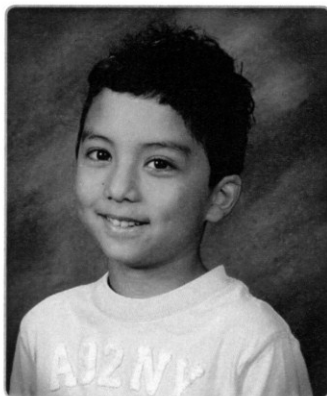
Samantha had quite a sweet tooth and was known for keeping a secret stash of candy. Even though she hid her candy, Samantha was always willing to share. Samantha always knew how to get what she wanted and would often soften up her mother by doing lots of chores and helping with cooking. Samantha had an infectious laugh that no one could forget. She was also her twin brothers' biggest cheerleader at their soccer games and would never miss a game.





## *Nathan Dao*

May 19, 2004 - April 24, 2011



Nathan was the baby of the family, but his personality was bigger than life. He had beautiful long lashes and gorgeous curly brown hair. Nathan always had a smile on his face, which made it hard for anyone to not like him. As the baby of the family, he had a way of getting away with trouble because he knew he could. You couldn't stay mad at him; he was so sweet and had those beautiful eyes and heart-warming smile. Nathan was mischievous in a very cute and innocent way. He was a prankster. He loved to joke around and play with his older siblings, especially his eldest brother, Nolan. Nathan had a zest for life and a playful heart and would play for hours on end. He was very smart and energetic. He was always very active and was a good student of Tae Kwon Do.



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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Michael Willbur is a grandfather who lost five grandchildren in one night — to an irrational, unexplainable act of familicide — a father murdering all but one of his children and himself.

Willbur, like any grandfather who has suffered a catastrophic loss, spent many months seeking to understand how this could have happened. Gradually his experience as an addictions counselor helped him sort through the maze of conflicting information.

Willbur earned his BS in Psychology and MS in Addictions Counseling after he retired from the United States Army. He worked in Army aviation as a Crew chief during the Vietnam War.

Willbur, with his wife of 26 years, Ki, reside in Vancouver, Washington and are both actively involved in increasing awareness of domestic violence, its causes and solutions.