

# Introduction

*The small group of college students gathered in the dining area on the ground floor of the Holmes Student Center at Northern Illinois University, getting ready for a Bible study. Most of the students felt gloomy because it was beginning to rain, and some of them groaned at the prospect of getting wet. But Gayle Dubowski, a sophomore, was excited.*

*“I like to do cartwheels in the rain,” she told Anthony Testa. Anthony, looking outside at the downpour, turned to her and said, “Okay, Gayle. There’s no way you’re going to do a cartwheel right now.” But before the words were out of his mouth, Gayle was bolting for the door—and while the others stood and looked on, warm and dry inside, she did a cartwheel in the rain.*



It is April 11, 2008—nearly two months after the shooting at Northern Illinois University in which Gayle was killed, and it happens to be my birthday. I sit at our dining room table with my journal in front of me, alone. I stare out the window at the rain blowing against the windowpane. I think of Gayle.

I feel like she is beckoning me to come join her outside, to enjoy the spring rain, to feel its cold freshness, to relish life for its own sake, to get soaked to the bone in my pajamas.

I continue to sit and stare, my stubborn practical self—yet I feel something stirring in my heart.

The rain continues, only harder. She is calling to me to come outside and join her, but I can't. I tell her so out loud as tears roll down my cheeks and I stay fixed to my chair. I can't go out and join her—not yet. I'm not ready. The rain subsides for a moment, as if it is sad. Then it starts again, as if Gayle were saying, "Are you sure?" I nod my head, and moments later the rain stops.

My wife returns with the groceries. I dry my face and help her put them away.



On Thursday, February 14, 2008, a shooting took place on the campus of Northern Illinois University—a multiple murder that forever changed the lives of many families, especially the families of those who perished. Since that shooting, there have been other incidents of violence in which people of all ages have died, and the end of pain and tragedy in the world is not in sight.

This book is about more than surviving and living with loss. It is about more than the impact of one brief, humble life on a family and the world. It is especially about finding and holding on to faith in the wake of the unthinkable. It is about working through the pain of loss and disappointment and finding that after the work is done, you might be inspired to do cartwheels in the rain—even if you have never done cartwheels before and even if the storm had threatened to wash you away.