

CHANGE of HEART

Justice, Mercy, and Making Peace
with My Sister's Killer

JEANNE BISHOP

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Chapter 4

LEARNING CURVE

AFTER THE TRIAL, I FELT SOMETHING MISSING. I HAD GOTTEN what I'd hoped for—a conviction and life sentence for David Biro—but somehow it didn't seem enough. For the past year, ever since Biro's arrest for the murders, everything had pointed toward the moment when he would stand trial. Now that the trial was over, it left a gaping void. I was like a compass whose needle spins as it seeks a new direction.

I turned to the wisest man I knew, besides my dad: Dr. John Boyle, a pastor at my church and the founder of a counseling center attached to the church. John, as a young sergeant in the U.S. Army during World War II, had helped liberate the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau. John had vowed from that day in 1945 to return

home and do whatever was the opposite of the evil and carnage he had witnessed. He became a Presbyterian minister and devoted his career to pastoral counseling, a calling that brought him close to people who had suffered from loss, abuse, addiction, betrayal, and bereavement. There was something solid and comforting about his serious, lined face, his silver hair, his deep voice, the quality of stillness and reflection he conveyed.

I sat on a beige couch in his quiet, book-lined office and poured out my own struggle: I have done everything I can to hold the person who killed Nancy responsible. I thought this would end this dark chapter in my life, that I could move on without the burden of anger and grief. Why do I feel that something is left undone? What do I do now?

John said, "Make a fist." I balled up my right hand into a knot. It felt like an echo of the exercise Reverend Buchanan had put me through more than a year ago, just after the murders.

"Now put it in front of your face," he said, demonstrating by placing his own fist within an inch of the bridge of his nose, right between his eyes. I did as he said.

"What do you see?" John asked.

I looked straight ahead, and all I could see, except for parts of John's office on the periphery, was my own hand, clenched before my eyes.

"I see a fist," I replied.

"Good," John said. "Now slowly, slowly, take that fist and move it down to your side." I gradually lowered my hand till it rested by my right thigh. "What do you see now?"

"I can see everything, the whole world," I answered.

“Do you see that fist,” John asked, “the one that once blocked out everything else? It hasn’t changed size or shape. It’s just as big as it was before. It’s just not *here*”—John raised his fist back to his face—“anymore.

“That fist is your grief over Nancy. It will be with you, the very same size and shape as it is now. Right now, it is blocking out the rest of the world. But over time, it will move away, down to your side. You will carry it alongside you while you walk. It just won’t be *here*”—again, John held his fist to his face—“anymore.”

I sat back in wonder. I recalled a friend’s counsel that I needed to “get over” what had happened to Nancy; my mind had rebelled against that notion. I brought it up to John.

“You have had a loss,” he responded. “You will never get over it. But you will get out from under it.”

Relief coursed through me. I didn’t have to reach that mythical state of “closure” after all! The memory of Nancy, the pain I felt upon losing her, my love for her—none of these were lost to me. John was telling me I could move ahead with that memory, love, and pain by my side as my companions.

Now I knew what to carry with me going forward. I also thought I knew what to leave behind: David Biro. From the moment the police told me that Nancy and Richard had been murdered, I sensed in my deepest core that hating the person who did it would affect him not a bit, but it would destroy me. I’d heard this saying: Hating someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. I refused to give him that power over me.

So I forgave David Biro. It didn’t happen in an instant; rather, my forgiveness was an idea that gathered

force over time, the way stones become an avalanche. One rock dislodged another, then another, till I felt my anger and rigidity giving way.

I forgave him, but it was the kind of forgiveness that wiped him off my hands like dirt. My forgiveness was not for David, who had gone through his arrest and trial without once taking responsibility or expressing remorse. He had not asked for forgiveness; he did not deserve it. My forgiveness was for God, for Nancy, and for me.

I left David behind, in the dust. God could deal with him. I vowed not even to speak his name; instead, I would go forward and think of Nancy, not him. It would be years before I realized that God wanted more from me.

