



Whitney Cerak

Mistaken Identity Case

Inspiration for the book by Mark Tabb (2008),
**“Mistaken Identity:
Two Families, One Survivor, Unwavering Hope”**

Graduate of Taylor University, May 2009

Whitney Cerak had led a very charmed life. She had grown up in the quaint town of Gaylord, Michigan with her older sister, Carly, and parents, Newell and Colleen. Whitney had been very involved in High School where she excelled as a student and as an athlete. She played basketball, volleyball and soccer.

When she graduated from High School, she moved to Taylor University's campus in Upland, Indiana. Her sister, Carly, was a junior at Taylor when Whitney arrived. The sister's relationship deepened as they spent special lunches together talking about their college experiences as well as how God was becoming more real to them both.

Whitney was in the student work study program through which she obtained a job with the food services department. On April 26, 2006 the food services group was called to arrange for a special dinner for Taylor's new president at Taylor's Fort Wayne campus. On the return trip, their van was hit by a speeding semi-truck as it crossed through the median. The collision left the van torn open and all nine passengers thrown from it. In the horrific chaos, two of the survivors were air lifted to Fort Wayne's Parkview Hospital. Of the nine passengers, five were killed and four survived.

Whitney's parents were told their daughter had been killed instantly in the crash. The family spent the next five weeks in heartache. One of the survivors, Laura Van Ryn, was in a coma but signs of healing were occurring with regularity. After her transfer to Spectrum Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan, it became painfully clear to the Van Ryns that the girl they thought was their daughter was in fact Whitney. There had been a terrible case of Mistaken Identity. Only by God's grace was the mistake rectified. It is an amazing story which God has used for good.

Whitney and her parents were reunited and her miraculous road to recovery began to accelerate. Four months later, Whitney returned to Taylor University as a sophomore. The journey in college has been a hard one, with ups and downs, but Whitney, with God's strength, graduated on May 23, 2009.

Her story, although amazing, is about a young lady with insurmountable injuries, healing to becoming herself once again. It is about God's sustaining comfort, strength and peace in the midst of the storms of life. It is about perseverance, frustration, discouragement and ultimately a peace found in understanding her Identity is in God alone . . . and that is no mistake.