



# A Future & A Hope

## 9/11 Widow, Jeanie Braca

Story by Christmas M. Beeler

On a beautiful September morning, Jeanie Braca sat in her favorite white armchair reading her Bible and praying. Suddenly she felt a small voice whisper to her heart that her husband, Al, would be taken home to heaven that day. She put the thought out of her mind. It was the morning of September 11, 2001, and her husband Al, 54, was working on the 104th floor of the World Trade Center.

When the towers were hit, friends and family poured into the Braca home to be with Jeanie. Because of her heart condition, her family would not allow her to watch the news reports. Throughout the day, Jeanie wondered what time Al would come home, recalling how he had stayed behind to help others when the WTC was bombed in 1993.

Finally, after 6 pm, Jeanie was sitting outside with a handful of friends and family. She commented, “I wonder when Daddy’s coming home? You’d think he would have called.” Her adult son David pulled his chair close to hers, took her hands in his, and looked steadily into her eyes. He said, “Mom, there’s no longer a World Trade Center. Both towers have collapsed. We’re under attack, even at the Pentagon. Daddy isn’t coming home.”

Jeanie blinked in amazement. “But we have plans: He’s retiring, we’re going to Hawaii.” Then she pictured in her mind the towers collapsing and realized that no one could survive that.

Her voice faltered as she said, “My life is in that building. And it’s come down, and there’s nothing left.” She crumpled to her knees, praying, “God, help me. Please show me the way I need to go. I’m not going to make it without You.”

### In the Palm of His Hand

In the weeks that followed, several things happened in answer to that prayer. Reports came in from various sources that, after the building was hit, Al had leapt onto a table or desk and said to his coworkers, “I’m going to heaven—who’s coming with me?” For years, he had been sharing the Gospel with his coworkers, who often played dirty jokes on him and jeeringly called him “The Rev” because of his Christian faith and lifestyle.

Though he had been very uncomfortable with the worldly pressures at his job, reaching his coworkers for Christ was “Al’s mission and mine also—we always prayed together for their marriages and their salvation,” Jeanie recalled. “When we go to heaven, we’ll see who responded to that call. Only God knows.”

A week after the terrorist attacks, Al’s body was found completely intact—to the amazement of rescue workers and the Braca family. “I don’t know how it was possible, with Al being on the 104th floor; only God knows. Finding him intact was just the Lord confirming to me that, even in death, He took care of it all. ... He always had Al in the palm of His hand, even to the end.” She was able to take Al’s wedding ring home. Finding Al’s body helped Jeanie to have closure in her grieving.

### More Encouragement

Also, Jeanie recalled, “About a month after it happened, an MCI [telephone] operator got in touch with me with a message from Al. She said he had told her that the building was very hot, and he knew he was dying. He wanted us to know that he loved us and that he was all right.”

Other reports came in. At Al’s memorial service, Jeanie learned that one of Al’s coworkers had left a message on his parents’ answering machine before the building collapsed, saying that people had gathered in a circle and “Al Braca is praying with us.”

God used these reports to encourage Jeanie that her husband’s death had not been in vain, and that he died full of faith and leading others to Christ. Jeanie and her children grieved the loss of their father, drawing closer to Christ and to each other. God brought many believers to minister to them through phone calls, letters, and visits.

### A New Ministry

Married for nearly 34 years, Jeanie and Al had been leaders together in the couples ministry at their church. After Al died, she said, “The first thing that happened was that God gave me a new ministry; I didn’t ask for it, and I didn’t know how to do it.” Jeanie received invitations from around the country to share Al’s legacy and encourage other believers to live for the Lord. She spoke at dozens of churches for the next three years.

But soon her health problems returned, and she suffered congestive heart failure in 2005. Her new ministry suspended, Jeanie was confined to bed rest. Not only did she begin to mend physically, but God used that time to bring her emotional and spiritual healing and to show her that He still had a plan for her life.

“There were times when I was just running away from things; I didn’t know how to handle them,” Jeanie recalled. “Then, the time I

was on my back and very sick, I had stopped running, and I was able to really hear from Him again.” Her friends Peggy and Gary Cuozzo encouraged her in the Lord, prayed with her, and offered their home in Naples, FL, as a refuge where she could get away from New York and regain her strength.

“God surrounded me with so many people like that,” Jeanie recalled. “They helped me see with spiritual eyes and look beyond all the chaos.”

### A Time to Heal

One day in 2002, Jeanie approached her pastor’s wife, Candice Beckelman. Bill Beckelman had just become pastor of CC Coastlands, NJ, where Jeanie still attends with her youngest son, Christopher, 23.

“Candice, I don’t know what to do, who I am, or where I fit in here,” Jeanie said.

“Neither do I, Jeanie,” Candice replied. “Let’s seek the Lord together.” For the next few years, the two women met regularly to read the Word and pray. Candice recalled that Jeanie has always been “very teachable,” humble, and faithfully attended the women’s Bible study. “I don’t remember one time that she ever came with any rebelliousness or bitterness toward the Lord for what had happened,” Candice said.

Candice encouraged Jeanie to let God do a new work in her life at that time, a year after Al’s death. “Now she has a ‘God story’ of her own because the Lord has worked in her life ... through the Word,” Candice said. “She ministers to the women in our church—single, married, widows. She has a real desire to encourage them in contentment.”

### God’s Word: Transforming Power

“Jeanie has gotten hit hard in many areas,” Candice said. “But she always goes to the Word and works through it with the Lord.”

Because of her ongoing illness, Jeanie often lies in bed listening to Scripture tapes or Bible teaching tapes. She still has only 14 percent of her heart fully functional. Some days she is well enough to go out; other days, she must stay in bed and rest. “When you can’t breathe or lift your head from the pillow, it’s easy to put a tape in, lay your head back down, and listen to the Word of God,” she said. “Those are the times when you need to stay closest to Him rather than filling your mind with other things that aren’t really important.”

Jeanie added, “You just have to keep close to Him, close to His Word. When you’re feeling the sickest and the lowest, go to His Word. You will know Him in a deeper way, but you have to make that choice every single day.”

### New Purpose: To Serve

Looking back at 2005 and 2006, Jeanie sees that God was equipping her to minister to women. “He was pouring into me, teaching me more of Him, to apply the Word to my life. ... He has become what Al was: The Lord has taught me that He is my Best Friend and my Husband.”

**“For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth.”** Isaiah 54:5

Jeanie said, “I’ve learned that it’s not about me—it’s about others. I’ve realized the real reason I went through this: to be more like Christ. God had something He wanted to pour into me. And it wasn’t just for me to hold it in—my quiet times, my journals—it was to pour it out to my own immediate family and then to others.” She’s been ministering to women for the past two years.

### “A Future and a Hope”

In January of this year, Jeanie Braca stood before a small crowd of widows at a CC

Costa Mesa retreat and said, “God still has a plan for our lives—He still has a future and a hope for us.”

**For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.**

Jeremiah 29:11

Talking about herself and the other widows, Jeanie reflected, “I think it’s good for us to be honest with each other, to cry when we need to cry, to be genuine about our emotions and feelings. But we can’t use that as a crutch; it’s a way to let the Holy Spirit cleanse us, renew us, and allow us to work through that pain. We need to praise God and stay in His Word even when it’s hard.”

She added, “There are different seasons in my life, but it’s all the same: I have to stay as close as I can to the Word of God, to live it out. Otherwise, I could easily backslide. But I choose to continue to fight the good fight, with Christ. We can’t go on emotions; we have to draw from the Living Water, the Bread of Life. Then we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.” She looks forward to seeing Al again—in heaven, with Christ. ☞



Jeanie and Al Braca  
Photo taken July, 2001.

Personal Testimony