

‘This story will take you on a rollercoaster of emotions. Chris and Denise together faced a sink or swim situation after the most horrifying accident. Many would have simply given up, but this is a story of resilience, fortitude and forgiveness like no other. Prepare to be gripped, moved and inspired.’

JULIA STRACHAN

World Record Atlantic Rower and Author of *Row for Freedom: Crossing an Ocean in Search of Hope*

‘This account of Chris and Denise’s journey since their devastating accident captures astounding traits of resilience and determination in being human. They have faced insurmountable challenges together as a devoted couple with a firm foundation in their faith, fighting relentlessly for their own mobility and quality of life. They now participate actively in the science and engineering of lower limb prosthesis development for the benefit of others, and this book encapsulates their remarkable story of endurance, belief, and strength of character to never give up.’

PROFESSOR SIR SAEED ZAHEDI OBE RDI FREng

Chair of Product Advisory Group, Blatchford

‘What happened to Chris and Denise Arthey that day in May 2008 is nothing short of miraculous, given the atrocious injuries they sustained. Here they tell their story in amazingly candid detail. They share their struggles as they wrestle with what happened to them on the terrible day; learning to live with a new normal; and how their faith helped them in the desperate hours. This is a truly inspiring and faith-building account of how, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God is always with us.’

REV ROSS DILNOT

Senior Pastor of Shenley Christian Fellowship in Milton Keynes, England

‘What happened on the 16 of May 2008, on Highway 35, was a gruelling disaster, but also the start of a remarkable journey of survival, recovery and rehab, love and support based on living life to the fullest. The Artheys share their life and inspirational story in this book.

Gripped from the start, I was astonished with the Artheys’ strength (both physical and mental), lived through their journey, was moved to tears by Chris’ final victim statement in court, and came out of the book feeling extremely grateful for things we take for granted.

I particularly resonated with their experience after amputations, the rehabilitation processes, struggles, and the pain – a professional area very close to my heart. I could almost feel the pain coming out of the texts.

The Artheys have written a must-read primer for anyone trying to comprehend lower limb amputations, how much can be achieved with strong wills and love, with the support from modern amputee care and prosthetic technologies.’

PROFESSOR LIUDI JIANG CEng CPhys FIET

Professor of Materials and Electromechanical Systems, University of Southampton

‘Chris and Denise Arthey are two of the most extraordinary people I know. This book tells their story of finding hope in the midst of tragedy, of forgiveness and a faith that shaped their determination not to be held back by circumstances. It is nothing short of inspirational. Just like them.’

BILL CAHUSAC

Pastor, Emmaus Rd Church

‘For anyone with a disability life is often difficult, but this is particularly true if the disability happens later in life. Denise and Chris share their story in an honest and moving way. One of the advantages this couple had was the support and prayers of a local church. The practical and spiritual input from fellow Christians stands out. The Church is a family and this shines through a story of pain and hope.’

JEREMY R BALFOUR MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Lothian Region

'This book is a story of hope, courage, and determination. While most of us will never live through similar physical struggles, many will face huge life challenges and this book will encourage everyone to lean in and trust that one can overcome obstacles, and flourish on the other side. Chris and Denise, thank you for inspiring us all.'

ZOE CLARK-COATES MBE

Author, Media Commentator and CEO

'This is a story (beautifully written) of quiet heroism. Encompassing tragedy and despair, resilience and redemption, Highway 35 is the kind of story that awakens hope in the lives of anyone it touches. Whatever struggles you are facing, I am confident that there is something here for you.'

PETE GREIG

24-7 Prayer International and Emmaus Rd Church

'A moving and inspiring story of courage, resilience and endurance. In taking us to the scene of the accident, and through their rollercoaster of recovery, Chris and Denise Arthey don't pull their punches. Their story demonstrates the incredible power of unity in marriage, the strength of family and the power of prayer to transform hopeless situations. This extraordinary account of faith and determination helps put our momentary troubles into perspective, and inspires hope.'

KATHARINE HILL

UK Director of Care for the Family

'It is very rare that you see the embodiment of the human spirit and faith in God so powerfully expressed in a story of personal tragedy. I am honored to call Chris and Denise my friends and they are, simply put, an inspiration to everyone that has crossed their path. My hope is that that through this book they can touch many more lives just as they have touched mine.'

LEE M. TILLMAN

CEO, Marathon Oil Corporation

Highway 35 is a compelling true-life story. It demonstrates how forgiveness, hope and the love of God and close friends and family can transcend the pain and suffering of a life-altering accident. Chris and Denise Arthey give a raw and honest account of their experience of disability and this book is a great read for anyone who needs reminding that God is good and with us in our darkest times, even if it is beyond our understanding.'

TIM WOOD

CEO, Through the Roof Charity

'This is one of the most remarkable stories of physical recovery from devastating injury that I have come across. It is a story of determination, not only to survive the immediate trauma, but to return to life in all its abundance. It is a story of learning to walk again, yes, but also learning to run marathons and climb Kilimanjaro, of setting goals and achieving them. It is a story of choosing to forgive, and to embrace life. And these two individuals, two of the most remarkable people I have come to know, are shining examples of just what is humanly possible with hearts submitted to a God who made us and has faith in us.'

PAUL DIJKSTRA

Consultant Sport & Exercise Medicine Physician
UK Athletics Chief Medical Officer (2008 – 2013)

H I G H W A Y



H I G H W A Y



MEETING DISASTER HEAD-ON WITH HOPE

CHRIS & DENISE ARTHEY

FOREWORD BY PETE GREIG



Published in 2022 by

Muddy Pearl, Edinburgh, Scotland.

www.muddypearl.com

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-910012-83-3

Typeset in Minion by Revo Creative Ltd, Lancaster

Printed in Great Britain by Bell & Bain Ltd, Glasgow

For John

FOREWORD: HIGHWAY 35

When it comes to mathematics, Japanese children consistently get higher marks than their European or American counterparts. But you probably knew that already. The surprising thing about this is the reason. It's not that Japanese people are somehow inherently better at maths, nor is it that they are taught maths better.

A famous study gave American and Japanese children an identical mathematical puzzle to solve. The researchers were not interested in how well each child did in the test, but in how hard they tried. And they discovered that, while the American children worked at the problem for an average of 9.47 minutes, their Japanese counterparts kept going for 13.93 minutes. It turns out that the Japanese kids are simply more determined, willing to work at the problem almost fifty per cent longer than their Western peers.

Chris and Denise Arthey are definitely 13.93 minute people. Their story is utterly inspirational, not because they are exceptionally talented people with a superhuman, innate talent for overcoming adversity, but precisely because they are ordinary people just like you and me, who get up each morning and keep going, against the odds, in spite of extraordinary challenges, one step at a time.

This is a story (beautifully written) of quiet heroism. Encompassing tragedy and despair, resilience and redemption, *Highway 35* is the kind of story that awakens hope in the lives of anyone it touches. Whatever struggles you are facing, I am confident that there is something here for you.

And since I have the privilege of knowing the Artheys personally, let me tell you something about them that they can't say about themselves: these are some of the kindest, humblest, warmest, most encouraging people you could ever hope to meet. Time and time

again I have witnessed Chris and Denise going the second mile to help other people, opening their hearts and their home. Somehow, despite everything they've endured, there's no hint of self-pity about them, only hope.

Two thousand years ago the Apostle Paul wrote that:

Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

ROMANS 5:3-5

Those words epitomize for me the Artheys and the remarkable tale they never wanted to tell of a journey from suffering through perseverance to character, hope and love on Highway 35.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pete Greig". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a long, horizontal stroke.

PETE GREIG

24-7 Prayer International

Emmaus Rd Church, Guildford, UK

2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We started to assemble *Highway 35* about a decade ago, with the intent that it would be as accurate an account as possible of what happened to us. We've done our best to base it on facts, with minimum interference from the concussion and medication

This book therefore relies heavily on emails, letters and cards that we received, hospital records, reports, legal transcripts, journals and such. Our recollection of the accident itself and the following days are sketchy, in Chris' case pretty non-existent. So, very early on, we asked a number of those who were anchors for us to write down what they saw and experienced. We were surprised and deeply moved by the love and care that shone through and between the lines of what they wrote. Some of those accounts are in these pages but, unfortunately, we couldn't use them all. If you're one of those many others who wrote to us and you're reading this, then please forgive us that you don't get the acknowledgement you deserve.

There are just a few of our anchors that we'd like to put a particular spotlight on:

Thank you, Ben, Tom and Miriam. We put you through the fire. You never faltered, and you treated us as the same old Mum and Dad throughout.

Thank you, Frankie and Allie. We hardly knew you in May 2008, but somehow you knew us. It's a mystery that we still don't understand, but for which we're so grateful.

More recently, thank you to Muddy Pearl for taking on this project. For sticking with it through some difficult times. And thanks especially to Stephanie Heald for the editorial inspiration that has made it a much better book.

And thank you to dear friends Graham and Philippa for your faithful support throughout *Highway 35*'s extraordinarily extended gestation. For the hours of deep discussion, prayers and coffee that helped us search our hearts and maintain perspective.

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I: HIGHWAY 35

‘The Harley-Davidson Road King sweeps us along the flat coastal highway. The exhaust pipes make a gentle rumbling and the engine is a solid heartbeat beneath the saddle. Warm air rushes past us. Longhorn cattle in a flat field watch lazily as we cruise by. The pillion seat raises me a little higher than Chris, and I can almost see over his white crash-helmet. I position my head slightly to the left. Above a leather shoulder I can see the road ahead, and a leather glove on the handlebar grip. Chris turns his head and calls to me. He’s loving this, and he thanks me again for travelling with him. I’m happy for him. He has had this USA motorcycle road trip ambition since about the time we met all those years ago. He’s in his element and I am pleased to be with him to share the adventure.

‘We leave a small town where we stopped for lunch. We take a right turn out of the town, then the road bends to the right onto a ramp to rejoin the light traffic on State Highway 35. Chris eases the big engine up through the gears. We chug along the straight two-lane highway into the early afternoon. All of this takes me back to our student days riding Chris’ Honda, and those weekends when we would escape from university in Birmingham to the mountains of North Wales. The sun smiles down from an azure May sky.

‘Without warning, the shock of a rending thunderclap engulfs me. Then darkness.’

Denise, Friday 16 May 2008.

South Texas.

Chris: It was such a wonderful adventure. Just seven months earlier, my work as an engineer in oil and gas launched us from the chestnut lanes of the Surrey Hills in England to the concrete and glass hub of the world oil business in Houston, Texas. Denise left her teaching work in a local Surrey infant school to accompany me. We were living the dream.

Our sons, Ben, twenty-five, and Tom, twenty-two, were settled in their respective occupations. Our daughter Miriam, eighteen, had decamped happily to university just three weeks before we boarded the plane for Houston. We'd joked to friends about our strategy to instil independence and maturity in our youngsters: change the locks, rent out the house and leave the country. We had no idea how impending events would require from each of them transcendent levels of independence and maturity. And no idea of the extent to which they would rise to the challenge.

After almost thirty sweet years of marriage and the rich turbulence of family life, the nest was empty. This was our time. Our time for a new adventure, a second honeymoon. It was a wrench to leave White Cottage, our country-lane, Arts & Crafts gardener's cottage that we'd bought in 2003. Almost a hundred years old, with quaint rooms and a half-acre garden of lawns, rhododendrons and azaleas, it was the home we'd always dreamed of. But it was safely rented out and we knew it was farewell, not goodbye.

So, now in our mid-fifties and full of energy, we had a broad plan for the second half of our marriage. I was determined to develop my career and Denise wanted to experience the American education system. We would enjoy the expatriate life together. I could pursue my distance running and racing in a warmer climate, we'd explore the USA, and then at the age of sixty-ish we'd retire back to White Cottage with the mortgage paid off and everything to live for. On the ten-hour flight from London Gatwick to George Bush Intercontinental Airport, Houston, Denise took my hand, leaned over and told me it was like getting married all over again.

Texas is nothing like the Surrey Hills, and we found the adjustment hard work. With a population of over two million souls, Houston is ranked the fourth largest city in the USA. Built on oil and gas, its low fuel prices, cheap land and tolerant land use policies have led to inexorable urban development. Greater Houston is now by land area the largest US city. My new office was in the Greenspoint district, where the never-sleeping eight-lane North Freeway, the I-45 (Interstate 45), spears northwards towards Dallas and intersects Beltway 8, a similar

eight-lane concrete runway that throws a ninety-mile loop around the city at a radius of fifteen miles. No chestnut lanes here.

The Woodlands, a further fifteen miles to the north and where we settled, was more manageable. Located in densely forested pine woods, The Woodlands stretches nearly ten miles west from the endless billboards and strip malls of the I-45. Turning off the freeway, you find yourself on wide avenues leading through the quiet evergreens, with stylish residences and businesses peeping through the trees. A big attraction for Denise was that it's possible to drive everywhere you need to get to on pleasant roads without venturing onto those scary freeways. The home we bought, in the Prosewood subdivision, was just a mile back from I-45 for easy commuting. It was a comfortable four-bedroom property, mainly on one level, which turned out to be an inspired choice.

The culture shock of the relocation took us by surprise. We'd echo the statement attributed to George Bernard Shaw that Britain and the USA are 'two nations divided by a common language'. Time and again we found that we misunderstood or were misunderstood. Life administration revolves around having a Social Security Number and a Texas Driver License; we possessed neither on arrival, and it was a tough circle to break into. Even when finally armed with these essentials, simple tasks like setting up a telephone account were fraught with misconceptions and took much perseverance; the process of buying and mortgaging a house required far more.

But by May 2008, seven months after arrival, we were through the administrative frustrations of the move. I'd settled into work at Greenspoint and made some international business trips. Denise, true to her calling, was back in the classroom, volunteering in a local Kindergarten class. We'd found our church home at Celebration Church and were exploring our new surroundings.

The weather was warming up beautifully with highs of 30°C (or 85°F; in the USA temperatures are always in Fahrenheit) and the seventy-five per cent humidity was still manageable. The roadsides were a mass of wild flowers, including the Texas state flower, the Blue

Bonnet, a type of lupin. The Texas Redbud, or Judas Tree, in our front yard at Prosewood, had been a rose-purple riot of blooms on bare branches, and the petals had now given way to opening leaves. We'd been warned about the summers with temperatures over 38°C (100°F), saturation humidity and mosquitoes. But right then, the big outdoors was at its most exuberant, with nature springing delightful surprises at almost every turn.

It was, of course, my bright idea to take the motorcycle road trip. I've always loved motorcycles and was riding one on my sixteenth birthday. To me, motorbikes were much more than low-cost independence, although that was a big factor. Motorcycling is totally exhilarating. It's hard to describe how different it is from driving a car, although Robert M. Pirsig captures it well in his 1974 epic, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*:

In a car you're always in a compartment, and because you're used to it you don't realize that through that car window everything you see is just more TV. You're a passive observer and it is all moving by you boringly in a frame.

On a cycle the frame is gone. You're completely in contact with it all. You're *in* the scene, not just watching it anymore, and the sense of presence is overwhelming.*

I had borrowed the book from a friend while an engineering undergraduate and an avid motorcyclist. My bike at the time was a 1966 Honda Super Hawk 305cc twin, the same model that Pirsig was riding on his journey from Minneapolis across the Rockies to San Francisco. I was captivated by his book, and over the intervening years must have read it half a dozen times. I've never fathomed all the philosophy (and have yet to meet anyone who claims to), but his writing calls to deep things. An exceptional travelling read.

With its registration, MUU 78D, my Super Hawk was affectionately known as 'Muu'. Muu transported me through the last of my school days, through university and into the start of my engineering career.

* Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Bodley Head, 1974), p4.

Muu was our magic carpet on our first date in 1973, and Denise and I covered hundreds of miles together through those university days. I dreamed of riding road trips across the USA.

I've long known that on a motorcycle you are around twenty times more likely to be killed or seriously injured than you are in a car. *On a cycle the frame is gone*; it isn't there to confine you, or to protect you either. And if you do get knocked off a bike you have to land somewhere. Even at low speeds, any accident has the potential to be extremely serious, or fatal. Put simply: don't crash. The risks can be reduced dramatically by not riding in the dark or on wet roads, by keeping all the lights on for visibility even during daylight, by wearing the right gear, by anticipating surprise moves by other vehicles, and by not 'filtering' between lanes of traffic. It also makes a big difference if you're over the age of thirty. Even so, bikes will always be relatively dangerous compared to cars. But they are just such fun to ride.

The Road King trip was essentially an extended test ride. My plan was to try a couple of serious touring machines, then make an informed choice. Being British, one of my top picks was the Triumph Rocket III, a 2.3-litre straight three-cylinder colossus that had been launched in 2003 with a view to the USA touring market. The other contender was a 'big inch' (large capacity) Harley-Davidson, a much more conservative and lower-tech design. Harley reviews are always mixed but, even after a hundred years, the iconic big V-twin, low profile design concept remains hugely popular. And their 'rolling thunder' exhaust sound is unmatched.

We rented the motorcycle from Harley-Davidson of The Woodlands, an imposing sales, service and rental outlet with a vast atrium in the shape of an aluminium and glass Harley front wheel towering over the I-45 service road southbound but visible for a mile in each direction. The machine we chose was a 2008 FLHR Road King. It had their ninety-six cubic inch (1,600cc) V-twin engine with six gears, and it was a beauty in white, silver-grey, matt black and plenty of chrome. It was an ideal choice for effortless long-distance cruising, and I could hardly wait to get onto the highways with it.

I bought road maps from our local filling station and spread them out in front of the computer to set about planning a suitable route. I've always loved maps, planning and long journeys. For a while in primary school, I'd set my heart on becoming a long-distance lorry driver. My teacher's quizzical reaction to this perfectly reasonable ambition baffled me. Denise has never fully understood it either, although she does make very gracious allowances. I'm at home in my own thoughts and dreams, watching the road unfurl and looking for what might turn up. It's the same pleasure I get from endurance sports, particularly running. The same pleasure that James Taylor sings of in his 2002 song, *My Traveling Star*:

Run before the wind, run before the rain,
 Over yonder hill, just around the bend.
 Never knowing why, never knowing when,
 Every now and then, there you go again.*

Corpus Christi looked like an interesting destination, southwest along the Gulf Coast towards the Mexico border at Brownsville and the Rio Grande. I wanted to stay off the freeways as much as possible, to add interest as well as safety, and there was an intriguing alternative route. FM (Farm to Market road) 1488 leads westwards and cross country from The Woodlands through Magnolia and Fields Store to Hempstead. We'd driven that route on the way to Austin and it was a pretty, single carriageway road, or 'two-laner', with more asphalt than concrete, swooping curves, and some elevation. That would be brilliant on a motorcycle. From Hempstead I picked out a route along Highways 159, 36 and 60, jogging generally south to Bay City near the Gulf Coast. They all looked like quieter two-laners as well. From Bay City, Highway 35 follows the coast southwest again for the last 130 miles

* *My Traveling Star*. Written By James V. Taylor. ©2001 Owl Rat Publishing (ASCAP). ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. USED BY PERMISSION.

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through Port Lavaca, Rockport and over the historic Harbor Bridge into Corpus Christi. There are three long causeways over the bays on the landward side of the low-lying Gulf Coast islands of Matagorda, San José, Mustang and Padre. The whole route was about 270 miles and five hours riding, perfectly manageable without hurry if we started reasonably early and gave it the whole day. I could see from the map that we could always stop at Port Lavaca for the night if fatigue set in and we weren't enjoying the ride any more; that would knock off eighty miles and an hour and a half. The plan was looking good. Again from *My Traveling Star*, the prayer:

Watch my back and light my way.

Watch over all of those born St. Christopher's Day.

Amen, James Taylor.

The previous weekend we'd driven down to Galveston and met Scott Johnson from church and a friend. We dined splendidly on blackened shrimp and catfish with dirty rice at Gaido's Seafood Restaurant on the sea wall, and afterwards took off our shoes on the beach opposite and paddled in the silty, shallow water of the Gulf of Mexico. Our last paddle in the sea. My work week was office-based in Greenspoint, and I'd been running at lunchtimes. On the Wednesday I'd run an interval training session from the office with a few colleagues, over Greens Bayou. After a warm-up we'd completed six two-minute efforts with one-minute recoveries, and had been caught out in a sharp rain shower so torrential that we could only laugh and run even harder. On the Thursday afternoon I'd left work promptly to collect the Road King. A colleague reminded me later he'd taken the office lift down with me, how we'd chatted about the bike and the trip, and he'd wished me safe travels.

Later, I drove with Denise to Harley-Davidson of The Woodlands, taking one of the two crash helmets we'd brought from England. I recall filling in a lot of rental and insurance paperwork, then riding slowly round the parking lot behind the showroom to get familiar with the balance of the machine and the clutch action. The centre of gravity was

low, rather like a BMW flat twin, but the seat position was much lower than the tiptoe (for me) perch of the big BMWs. I remember Denise following me in the car back up Sawdust Road into The Woodlands, the bike's loping tick over and engine heat at a red light, then the thudding tug of each power stroke through the belt drive as I fed the clutch in to pull away. Those are big cylinders, and a massive flywheel.

Back at Prosewood we equipped Denise with the other helmet, leather jacket and gloves, and took a short test ride out towards Magnolia. Our neighbour Jim* came out at the sound of the Road King's pipes to take a few photos.

The next morning, anticipation of the forthcoming adventure got me up and about early. My journal entry reads: 'Wide awake with a mug of tea and excited about the trip ... as soon as we have had breakfast and packed, we'll be on the road.' I emailed a dear friend and distance running partner Matt Brewis back in England about 'the Big Beast waiting in the garage'. We were on board and mobile at 8am and spent the next six-and-a-half hours ambling along the route I'd mapped out.

By 2.30pm we were moving south down Highway 35 just past Tivoli (Texas pronunciation Tie-VOH-luh) in light traffic. The highway at this point is arrow-straight asphalt, two lanes with a hard shoulder then a broad grass margin on each side. There is a 70mph speed limit. We would have been riding at about 55mph; I have a fleeting image from earlier in the day of shifting between fifth and top gear and back at about that speed. The Road King could go a lot faster, but 55mph was just fine for our journey and I'd felt the engine was lugging a bit in sixth, so I left it in fifth.

A young driver in a Ford F150 truck was also travelling south, from Houston to Rockport with his girlfriend for a weekend break. They caught us up, and 55mph was too leisurely a pace for him so he overtook safely to our left. The F150 is a sizeable truck, so it was now obscuring my view of the road ahead. Shortly after his manoeuvre

* Name has been changed.

the truck driver was startled to see a red SUV veer into his lane. His immediate reaction was that this sometimes happens when drivers get tired or distracted, and they usually come to attention and correct. But this red vehicle wasn't correcting. At the last moment he had to take action:

‘ ... I pulled away into the shoulder and he barely missed my rear end and hit ... the motorcycle head on ... I looked into the rear-view mirror, and it was a kind of an explosion of glass [and] debris ... ’

It was 2.34pm.

* From court transcript: District Court of Refugio County, Texas, Case Number 2008-7-5026.