

In the book *From Misery to Ministry*, Brian and Leah Foutz share their story of healing and starting a ministry to help others after the tragic death of their daughter Victoria

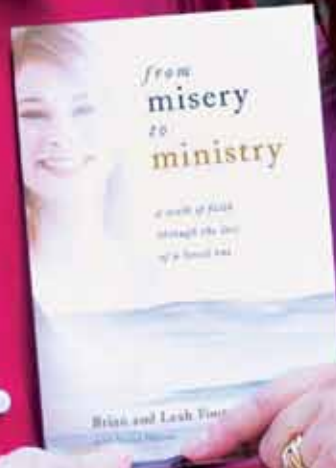


Photo Courtesy of Dan Carter Photography

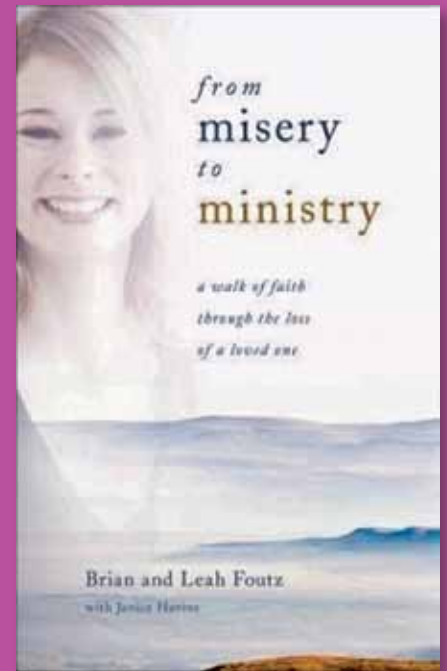
Katy teen Victoria Foutz had just celebrated her 18th birthday and was excited about finally being an adult

••• Brian and Leah Foutz decided to share the story of their daughter Victoria's tragedy in a book to help other families dealing with the loss of a loved one.

# Victoria's Story

Katy couple launches ministry and book after daughter's tragic murder

Written by Janice Havins-Hamric | Select Photography by Suzi Issa



## For Victoria

*From Misery to Ministry* follows Brian and Leah Foutz as they overcome the loss of their only daughter Victoria through faith, hope, and perseverance. In the wake of their daughter's tragic murder, the Foutzes share their struggle with finding meaning and healing.

## About the Book

The book chronicles their emotional journey from their daughter's funeral to the trial of her accused killers to their fight to keep their marriage strong. They share their experiences asking for help from friends and family, seeking professional help from a counselor, and dealing with days of emotional intensity.

-Adapted from [hazakministries.com](http://hazakministries.com)

*B*rian and Leah Foutz know that a trial can be a faith-rocking experience and almost more than one can bear. Such was the case when they lost their only child, Victoria, on March 18, 2004 to a senseless, tragic murder. In the days and years that followed, they remained faithful and hopeful, even as they mourned the loss of their daughter. Shortly after meeting the Foutzes, I knew their courageous story needed to be shared, and within a few years, we had published *From Misery to Ministry: A Walk of Faith Through the Loss of a Loved One* and started Hazak Ministries, with Hazak meaning to encourage in Hebrew.

## The Day that Changed Everything

Only four days before the tragedy that would forever change the Foutzes' lives, Victoria had celebrated her 18th birthday and was so excited to finally be an adult. Then on March 18, she was getting a ride from Houston back to Katy with three of her so-called friends. Instead of bringing her to her home, though, the three young men drove her out to a field near Beasley and ended her life. After accusing her of stealing a digital camera, they shot her at point-blank range and left her body near a road where she was later found by a passerby. The camera they were so consumed with was found days later in the back of their van.

Brian was expecting to see Victoria that morning around 11 a.m., returning from an overnight stay with a friend, when he heard a car door slam shut in their driveway. Instead of his daughter, he was stunned to see two officers from the county sheriff's office who had the unfortunate job of reporting that Victoria's body had been found in a field.

## Mourning the Loss of their Daughter

In the midst of mourning for their daughter, Brian and Leah found themselves ill-prepared for the barrage of reporters and TV cameramen once news of the crime surfaced. "Our neighbors had to tolerate the bombardment upon our neighborhood street from the media people attempting to gather information, [as did] our family and friends who showed up to bring food, love, prayers, and emotional support," recalls Brian. Throughout it all, though, Leah says God put dedicated law enforcement officials in their lives to properly investigate the murder and bring the guilty to judgment.





Leah admits she and Brian had moments when their faith in Christ was rocked to the very core and they were truly unable to function. "I think we could have easily been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder," says Leah. "During this time, we began to pray and ask God many things, such as, 'Why did Victoria have to die?' We questioned if God was really there." About 48 hours after Victoria had been fatally shot, Brian and Leah had their answer. "We felt the presence of God enter our hearts as we sat on our back patio, praying," recalls Leah. "God covered us both with His 'peace that passes all understanding.'"

### Finding Strength in Family and Friends

Brian and Leah felt blessed by the precious friends God had put in their lives to help minister to them, bring them food, and pray with them. "He showed up in miraculous ways during Victoria's memorial service and throughout the days that followed," shares Brian.

When people ask Brian what it was like coping during the trying days following his family's tragedy, he gives them an honest answer. "I tell them that God protected us when our marriage was stretched beyond what we could have ever imagined," says Brian. "When the time was right, Leah and I sought the help of a Christian counselor, when we were ready to help us sort through the waves and maze of emotions.

He adds, without reservation, "We decided to make our marriage work and stay together, regardless of the murder of our only

child. We did not want to become a divorce statistic and wounded humans forever lost and hurt. God then began to take us through a journey of restoration and preparation."

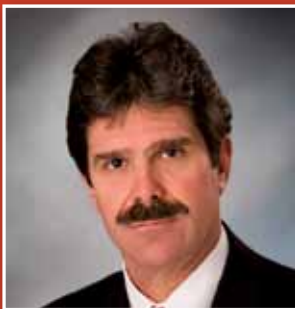
### Reaching out to Help Others Heal

When I first met the Foutzes during a Bible study course at Grace Fellowship United Methodist Church, our teaching pastor Paul Helbig asked the group to describe the difference between a trial and a temptation. Brian shared the incident of Victoria's death and his family's resilient restoration. "God gave me the opportunity to share about His peace that goes beyond all understanding and the restoration of broken lives during that class," recalls Brian.

A year later, Victoria was still in my heart and on my mind, and I asked if they had considered writing a book about their experience. Brian responded that he and Leah had been praying for someone to help them write their story. I told him that I felt I was that person. Since publishing the book and starting Hazak Ministries, Leah and Brian have continued to find many opportunities to minister to others who have lost a close loved one. **KM**

*JANICE HAVINS-HAMRIC retired after 35 years with Katy ISD and now works as an assistant to Pastor Paul Helbig at Grace Fellowship United Methodist Church.*

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