

On October 4, 1980, Frank Bice was playing safety for the Siena College Football Team when he suffered a compression fracture, leaving him a quadriplegic for life. *Your Cross is Your Gift* takes the reader full circle from a devastating injury on a football field, through a journey of gratitude, faith, perseverance, and true love, to ultimate redemption on the same football field. This tiny gem is destined to be a timeless classic!

Your Cross Is Your Gift

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Your Cross Is Your Gift

A signpost stands in a vast green field under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The signpost has a rectangular sign at the top and a thin post leading to a shadow on the ground. The shadow is a silhouette of a person with arms raised in a cross shape, cast by the signpost. The sun is visible in the sky, creating a lens flare effect.

FRANK BICE

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ISBN 978-1-60910-744-4

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Printed in the United States of America.

Bice & Bice, LLC
2011

First Edition

Bice & Bice, LLC
Manhasset, NY
www.frankbice.com

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Chapter I

Yes

In the fall of 1980, I was a senior at Siena College in Loudonville, New York. I was twenty-one years old and I was captain of my college football and lacrosse teams. As a safety in football, it was my job to prevent the other team from completing long passes against us. It was the third game of the season and I was having a pretty good year. I had three interceptions in the first two games and in that third game I picked off a pass in the first quarter. We were playing against St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. They had a great quarterback. This kid had a cannon for an arm. On this play, it was St. John Fisher's ball and it was a passing situation. They kept on splitting two receivers wide to one side of the field and we were in zone coverage. I was deep over the center of the field covering one of the receivers, when the quarterback threw a short pass to the tight end, who caught the ball and started running for a

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touchdown. In an effort to make a saving tackle, I came up and hit the receiver as hard as I could. The mistake I made was that I didn't get my head up in time and when our bodies collided, I broke my neck. As I lay on my back on the grass, all I knew was that I couldn't move or feel anything. When the trainers and coaches came out onto the field, they saw that I had a serious injury and called an ambulance. A student trainer named Jo-Ann knelt by my side and kept on reassuring me by saying, "It's OK, Frank. You're going to be OK." When the ambulance arrived they were able to put a board underneath my body and lift me into the vehicle.

St. John Fisher is a Catholic College and there was a priest at the game who got into the ambulance with me. On the way to the hospital, I was practically shouting Hail Marys over and over again. When I was a kid, my mother, brother, sisters, and I prayed the Rosary together as a family during the months of May and October. We would literally kneel in front of a statue of the Blessed Mother in our home and pray the Rosary. On the way to the emergency room, I desperately held onto that seed of faith that I had received as

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a kid. I was scared to death. Praying Hail Marys in the ambulance and having the priest with me was a huge consolation.

Once inside the hospital, the doctors and nurses unscrewed my facemask, cut off my jersey and shoulder pads, and took a series of x-rays. They explained that I had broken my neck, I'd never walk again, and that they weren't sure if I was going to live. The priest gave me the Anointing of the Sick and then heard my confession right in front of all the doctors and nurses. My confession lasted a good five minutes. I thought that if I was going to die, I was going with a clean slate!

The nurses then shaved my head and a doctor approached me with a Black & Decker drill in his hand. The physician said, "I'm sorry, but we need to stabilize your head and neck. Your injury is too close to your brain for sedation." While the nurses held my head steady, the doctor proceeded to drill six screws into my skull to apply a metal brace called a "halo." I'd like to tell you that I bit the bullet

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and took it like a man. I didn't. The pain was excruciating. I screamed and cried until I passed out from the pain.

When I woke up two hours later, I was in traction. They secured my body on a Stryker frame. This was a narrow bed that was suspended between two points, (the bed almost looked like a hammock that you might see in someone's backyard, suspended in the air and supported at either end). During this time they kept my head, neck, and lower extremities completely straight and immobilized. A few days after my injury, they surgically removed a piece of bone from my hip and used it to fuse the fifth and sixth cervical vertebrae in my spine.

I spent the next month in traction. To ensure proper circulation and to relieve pressure from building up on any one part of my body, I'd face the ceiling for two hours and then they would strap my body to the frame and flip it over so I could face the floor for two hours. They rotated my body every two hours for a month.

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During this time, my family and friends were incredibly supportive. My buddies were really funny. Like most college kids, my teammates and I took pride in shattering social boundaries. My area in the hospital turned into a locker room. I had friends sleeping on the floor and hiding in closets and bathrooms after visiting hours. Some would wear hospital gowns and ride around the halls in wheelchairs so that the staff would believe that they were newly injured patients.

One of my buddies used to write notes to the nurses on my body with a magic marker. A high school friend brought in a fake hand that looked real and hid it under my sheet. When the nurse rotated my Stryker frame, the fake hand fell on the floor and the nurse screamed and ran out of the room!

In the middle of the night, when my friends weren't around, I had time to pray. One night, while I was praying, I made a deal with God. My prayer went something like this: "Lord, I know my life has not been perfect. I know no one's life is perfect. Even if I didn't have this injury, my life was

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never going to be perfect anyway. If You will give me grace to live the rest of my life with a positive attitude, I will say, ‘Yes,’ to whatever You ask me to do.” In other words, I surrendered.

When I finally got out of traction, and was able to sit in a wheelchair for a short amount of time, a nurse came in my room and asked me to visit a newly injured patient down the hall. Believe me, the last thing I wanted to do was to visit another newly injured patient. I said, “Yes,” because that was the deal I had made with God. After I visited with the young man, as the nurse wheeled me back to my room, I couldn’t believe how good I felt. I realized that saying, “Yes,” would lead to new possibilities and situations, and more often than not, would lead to some type of service. I learned early on that any type of service would set you free.

Chapter V

Trust Me

The summer that I was first home from the hospital, I had to decide how I was going to finish my last year of college. I didn't want to go back to my old college because I thought that everyone would remember me the way I was before my injury, and now I would be going back in a wheelchair. Both my football and lacrosse coaches encouraged me to come back and said that I could serve as an assistant coach on each team. My friends and teammates encouraged me to come back. The deciding factor was my friend, Rence.

I'm about to describe how my buddy, Rence, helped me. As I describe this relationship, I do not in anyway mean to overlook or show a lack of appreciation for the amazing generosity of my family and many other friends. This chapter could have been dedicated to almost any member of

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my family and to numerous friends. To illustrate my message, and for reasons involving time and clarity, the character of Rence embodies the spirit of so many incredible people in my life.

When I was in high school, I went away to boarding school. As an eighth grader, I was reluctant to be away from home for high school. It turned out to be the best thing for me. One of my best friends was a really creative, generous, and funny kid named, Rence. Rence played football and was one of the top wrestlers in the school.

After high school graduation, Rence and I attended separate colleges. After a year and a half, Rence transferred to Siena. Before long, Rence took the college by storm. He started dating a beautiful girl named Virginia, played on the football team, and became the most popular kid on campus. Rence's charm, wit, humility, and incredible sense of humor, made him a legend on campus. Although when Rence transferred into Siena, he lost a lot of credits and wound up being a year behind me.

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The day of my injury, Rence was on the football team. I can't describe what a huge consolation it was to have an old friend with me when I had my accident and during those first few days in the hospital. At the end of the following summer, it was time for me to decide what I should do about college. Rence said that if I came back to Siena he would be my roommate and that he would take care of everything. I said, "Yes."

When I went back for my second senior year in college, everyday for nine months, Rence got me up, helped me take a shower, got me dressed, helped me go to the bathroom, pushed me in my chair to class, wheeled me to football and lacrosse practices, and helped me go to bed at night. Rence, everyday for nine months, served so joyfully and made it so much fun, that we were laughing hysterically for the entire year. Anyone who witnessed the way Rence assisted me, couldn't help bursting into a fit of laughter.

That year, Rence and I took a Greek mythology class. An incredibly kind-hearted, brilliant, short, chubby,

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completely bald, ancient, Franciscan priest, named Father Liguori Mueller taught the course. Father Mueller, dressed in his brown, Franciscan robe, resembled an elderly and smaller version of the cartoon character, Shrek. We concluded that Father Mueller was an authority on Greek mythology because he must have been alive in antiquity, when polytheism was the rule of the day.

Father Mueller's nickname was "Mule Train." As Rence would push me into class, usually a few minutes late, he would pretend he was driving a stagecoach, whipping the imaginary horses in front of my wheelchair. Rence would sing the lyrics from "Rawhide," bellowing, "Rollin', rollin', rollin', keep them doggies rollin'..." At the end of several verses, Rence would conclude his song by substituting "Mule Train!" for "Rawhide!"

Father Mueller started his class with the dual ritual of leading us in a prayer and then lighting a non-filtered cigarette. He would sit there in his brown, Franciscan robe, chain-smoking for the entire eighty-minute class. Father

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would take a huge drag off of his cigarette, but you'd never see him exhale. We concluded that this must have been some sort of mendicant ritual and the secret behind Father's longevity.

Father Mueller would lecture for twenty minutes, and then he would call on us to read the stories from our textbooks. The class was painfully boring. To make things interesting, we would try to distract the student who had been called upon to read. When it was your turn, you had to do everything in your power to defend yourself. While you were reading, one of your classmates might reach over and slap you on the head or try to close your book. As the semester progressed, the onslaught from the thugs sitting around you became more intense. You might receive a shot to the ribs, a Charlie Horse inflicted upon your leg, or a page actually ripped out of your book. During the last class of the semester, I had been called upon to read, and my disability didn't preclude me from the friendly fire. As I was reading, Rence reached over and unlocked the brakes on my wheelchair. The gentleman sitting behind me put both feet

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on the back of my chair and pushed as hard as he could. I went flying to the front of the classroom and hit my head on the blackboard! In mid-drag of his cigarette, Father Mueller turned and asked, “What’s the matter with you?” I replied, “I’m sorry Father, I just had a muscle spasm.”

My second senior year in college was great in everyway possible. During spring break, fourteen of us rented a Winnebago, and headed down to Fort Lauderdale. I sat on a couch in the back of the vehicle and held on for dear life. The trip was a blast. All of my friends made me feel completely accepted and appreciated. I was included in everything and I never once felt like I was imposing in anyway.

At the Last Supper, when Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, He taught us that to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven, we have to serve. Jesus also said something in the Gospel that always confused me. When the disciples didn’t want Him to leave them, Jesus assured them that if He went home to the Father, He would send His Spirit and His

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followers would do even greater works than He did. Now, even though Jesus said this, I never believed it. I mean, how could anyone ever do greater works than Jesus? Well if you witnessed the way Rence, literally, carried me through my second senior year at college, you would know that the words of Jesus were true.

When Rence served, he made it so much fun, that the person being served felt absolutely wonderful. I felt so great that entire year that, honestly, the year that I went back to college in a wheelchair was my best year in college. I loved it. That year, Rence set me free. His spirit and enthusiasm set the entire college free. Rence gives us an excellent example of how we should serve. We should see service as an honor and a privilege. We should never serve out of obligation. We should always strive to make service fun. If you know someone who is suffering and you don't know what to do, just show up. Just be there. When in doubt, just show up. Say "Yes" to service and make it fun.

Chapter VI

The Mustard Seed

When I arrived back home after graduating from college, my friends had a fundraiser and bought me a van that I could drive with hand controls. Their generosity gave me an incredible amount of freedom. Almost immediately, I got into coaching. One of my first jobs was coaching the Boys' Junior Varsity Lacrosse Team at St. Mary's in Manhasset.

The routine was basically the same everyday. I would drive my van to the field, my players would meet me and push me in my chair to the field and we would have practice. The kids were great. My chair disappeared and we had an excellent season. Something started happening that year that I will never forget. Almost everyday, before I got out of my van, a kid named Dave would approach the driver's side window and say, "Coach, I made a big mistake. I'm playing

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baseball, but I know I should be playing lacrosse.” Dave was a sixteen-year old sophomore at the time. Finally one day I said to him, “Dave, you seem like you’re in a lot of pain. What’s going on in your life?” Dave replied, “My parents are going through a divorce and it’s killing me. My dad was a baseball star. I’ve been playing baseball to try and heal that relationship in my family, but I can’t do it. I know I should be playing lacrosse.” I explained to Dave that I would be coaching summer league lacrosse at Manhasset High School and that he should come out. He said, “Don’t worry, Coach, I’m definitely coming out for summer league.”

That summer Dave came out with a defenseman’s stick and all of his equipment. He was a big kid, over six feet tall, a natural lefty, a good athlete, and very aggressive. After we played a few summer league games, Dave gave me a list of five Division I college coaches to whom he urged me to write letters. He wanted me to inform them that he needed a full scholarship for lacrosse. I tried to tell Dave that it was too soon to write the letters because he hadn’t even played in a varsity game yet. Dave said, “Don’t worry, Coach, I’m

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going to be awesome. Please just write the letters.” So I tried to avoid Dave after that because I didn’t want to write the letters. To his credit and because of his belief in himself, Dave wouldn’t take “No” for an answer. Dave called my house everyday. Dave even showed up at my house asking if I had written the letters. Finally, just to get Dave off of my back, I wrote to the five college coaches. I only heard back from one coach who said it was still too early to take a look at Dave.

This is Dave’s story. Dave took all of the heartache and pain in his life and he took a step back. In the midst of his parents’ divorce, he realized that he had a unique gift that no one else realized he had. Dave took all of his frustration and channeled it into something incredibly positive: becoming the best lacrosse player he could possibly become. From that time on, you never saw Dave without his lacrosse stick in his hands. Everyday, Dave ran sprints, lifted weights, and worked harder than anyone else at becoming a great lacrosse player.

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In Dave's junior year, he made varsity and earned a starting position. Before long, Dave really started to dominate. The next summer, Dave made the Long Island Empire State Team. This is an incredible lacrosse team comprised of high school All-Stars who play against other All-Star select teams from all over New York State. Dave continued to carry his lacrosse stick wherever he went. He also kept growing.

As a senior in high school, Dave was amazing. He made High School All-American and earned a full scholarship to Johns Hopkins University. At Hopkins, in Dave's freshman year he got sick and saw limited action. As a sophomore, Dave made 1st Team All-American and his team won the National Championship. In Dave's junior year, he made 1st Team All-American. As a senior, Dave made 1st Team All-American and was named Player of the Year in Division I College Lacrosse. Dave was named Player of the Year as a defenseman, which is almost impossible. That award usually goes to a really high scorer, an attackman or middy. Dave was named Player of the Year as a defenseman!

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After college, Dave played on the United States Lacrosse Team. In the World Games in Australia, the United States defeated Canada, and Dave was named the Most Valuable Player of the World Games. So just a few years earlier, this kid Dave is walking up to my van everyday saying, “Coach, I’m playing baseball, but I know I should be playing lacrosse.” Now he’s named the greatest lacrosse player on the planet Earth!

When Jesus wanted people to understand His message, He taught in parables. A parable can be defined as a story with a double meaning. Jesus used parables as a teaching method because He comprehended human nature. Jesus understood that we need to come to terms with the truth by figuring it out for ourselves. One of the major themes that Jesus tried to express in His ministry was the mysteriousness of the Kingdom of Heaven. An element of the Kingdom of Heaven to which Jesus continually referred was the power of faith. To illustrate the power of faith, Jesus gave us the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Jesus said that when you hold a mustard seed in your hand, it is the smallest of seeds. No one

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would ever expect that a mighty tree could grow out of that tiny seed. Ultimately, the seed produces a tree in which the birds of the air can build their nests, we can be shaded from the sun, and we can be fed of its fruit. All from what seems like nothing!

I can't think of a better modern day parable that illustrates the mysteriousness of the Kingdom of Heaven and the power of faith than the life of the young man, Dave. Dave went from playing baseball as a sophomore in high school to being named the greatest lacrosse player in the world! Like the mustard seed, the power of Dave's faith expanded his talent and ability to unimaginable heights. Dave's ability to transcend and transform his heartache and pain into something so awesome stands as a monument to the power of determination and faith. The modern day parable of Dave's life challenges us all to question if we are living up to our potential. Dave's success also serves as a warning that we should never underestimate another person's ability.

On October 4, 1980, Frank Bice was playing safety for the Siena College Football Team when he suffered a compression fracture, leaving him a quadriplegic for life. *Your Cross is Your Gift* takes the reader full circle from a devastating injury on a football field, through a journey of gratitude, faith, perseverance, and true love, to ultimate redemption on the same football field. This tiny gem is destined to be a timeless classic!

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