


# The Privilege of Youth: A Teenager's Story

*By Dave Pelzer*

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**The #1 *New York Times* and #1 internationally bestselling author who is a shining example of what overcoming adversity really means now shares the lost chapter of his uplifting journey, which has touched the lives of millions.**

From *A Child Called "It"* to *The Lost Boy*, from *A Man Named Dave* to *Help Yourself*, Dave Pelzer's inspirational books have helped countless others triumph over hardship and misfortune. In *The Privilege of Youth*, he shares the missing chapter of his life: as a boy on the threshold of adulthood. With sensitivity and insight, he recounts the relentless taunting he endured from bullies; but he also describes the thrill of making his first real friends—some of whom he still shares close relationships with today. He writes about the simple pleasures of exploring his neighborhood, while trying to forget the hell waiting for him at home.

From high school to a world beyond the four walls that were his prison for so many years, *The Privilege of Youth* bravely and compassionately charts this crucial turning point in Dave Pelzer's life and will inspire a whole new generation of readers.

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## Editorial Review

Review
“A monumental series of books about courage and triumph. Pelzer demonstrates, as few have, that it is in the darkest skies that the stars are best seen.”—**Richard Paul Evans, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Christmas Box***

"Dave Pelzer is a living testament of resilience, personal responsibility, and the triumph of the human spirit."**—John Bradshaw, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Homecoming* and *Family Secrets***

"A living example that all of us have the capability to better ourselves no matter what the odds... Dave Pelzer inspires us all."**—Jack Canfield, #1 *New York Times* bestselling coauthor of *Chicken Soup for the Soul***

About the Author
**Dave Pelzer** is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *A Child Called “It", The Lost Boy, A Man Named Dave, Help Yourself,* and *The Privilege of Youth*. He travels more than 250 days a year throughout the nation speaking to large groups of youth and adults on the topics of resilience and overcoming obstacles. He has appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Larry King Live*, and *The Montel Williams Show*, among other national shows.
www.davepelzer.com

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A Good Man’s Departure

April 21, 1999, 2:35 a.m.—It’s been a long four days. In the last ninety-six hours I’ve crisscrossed the country, traveling to five states, and have only been able to steal seven hours of sleep. I pride myself on a strong work ethic, but now my body is on the verge of collapse. What began as a slight quiver last week has now become an uncontrollable seizure of my right hand. I’ve been able to hide it in public by casually placing one hand on top of the other or making a tight fist behind my back until the tremors pass. But now in the nearly freezing weather of Northern Ohio, for the life of me I cannot steady my hand so I can insert the stupid key into the doorknob of my motel room. After three attempts my patience erodes to the point that I begin mumbling a string of off-color language to the howling wind. Huffing, I slide off my computer case, which contains my hefty laptop, and my worn overstuffed satchel from my left shoulder. Steadying myself, my left hand gently clutches my right one just below the wrist and, after another few stabs with the gold-colored key, I’m finally able to fling open the door to my humble room.

I’ve been on the road for twenty-one days, with another twenty-three days to go before I can catch a glimmer of my fiancée’s face, capture the fragrance from her long auburn hair, let alone hold her by my side in the middle of the night. Looking up at the darkened sky I search to find the North Star, knowing that my teenage son, Stephen, is somewhere on the other side of the country in the middle of a deep slumber. He’s about to begin baseball season. How I love to watch that boy play. I can visualize the countless times Stephen would be up at bat, and how I would stand behind the batting cage as if I were him, a child, living an endless stream of days filled with wonder. I’d dissect the grip on Stephen’s blue-colored bat and how he would twirl it in the air like a helicopter, his body positioned to hit, and the way he’d shake his little butt. I’d always burst with excitement whenever I heard the distinctive crack from the bat as the baseball sailed deep into the lush green field. I never really had the chance to play baseball as a kid. My thoughts begin to escape me, but I instantly slam that door shut. The intensity of my career coupled with my self-imposed mental compartmentalization

is protection for me. I do so by remaining rigidly focused when out on the road. I know from past brief lapses that if I let down my guard for even a few moments, I will cry a river of tears from missing those I love. I also place a great deal of responsibility on myself that borders at times on anxiety—worrying about oversleeping or missing a flight, driving hundreds of miles in the middle of the night with bewildering, mind-numbing directions, or my biggest fear of not "being there" and not giving my absolute best to so many folks who invite me into their communities and organizations.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Awareness month and I dedicate myself to this cause by traveling from one end of the country to the other, working with teens and adults to help them focus on harvesting their inner strength to overcome a horrendous past, praising those who protect and work with those at risk, and providing all-day workshops on the psychology and resilience of this subject. Today my day began at three in the morning, taping a few radio interviews over the phone, before studying for my eight-hour workshop. Then with the program completed, books signed, and encouragement offered to those struggling with difficult situations, I raced to the airport, completely exhausted, changed clothes in the confines of the airport bathroom stall, and hopped on a plane, arriving just in time to speak at a fund-raiser for a local Boys & Girls club, before catching my final flight of the day in order to start all over again and drive somewhere in the middle of Northern Ohio. As always, when my adrenaline fades it's instantly replaced with a crushing force of exhaustion. At least now, whenever I make my midnight trek, I have sense enough to drive with the air conditioner on, the windows rolled down, and the voice of a local radio talk show host ranting at full volume. Being on the road over two hundred days a year, I have an intense fear of falling asleep behind the wheel ... again. The last time I nodded off, God must have been watching over me. At full speed and with me dead to the world my rental car crossed the median. I awoke just in time to gaze up at what looked like a pair of headlights belonging to some gigantic UFO about to make contact with my car. Through sheer luck and stupidity, I mashed down on the accelerator, missing the semi truck just enough that the car shook from its wake, while I emptied my lungs chanting, "Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God!"

Before closing the door of my room, I look at the car and smile. After heaving my two mammoth-sized travel bags on the bed, I survey my home for the next few hours: a clean, pine-scented setting, a small worn bed, a fresh set of towels, and a phone. I can't ask for anything more, except for a working heater ... which refuses to do anything but pump in air that is somehow colder than outside. I'm too tired to care so I simply give up. Anyway, I tell myself that by the time the room warms up, I would have already taken a quick nap, showered, shaved, repacked, and would be on my way to work. After unpacking, I sit on the edge of the bed then notice the telephone's blinking orange light. I figure it's probably my sponsor, who's being courteous, to invite me out to dinner.

Dinner. Food. Sleep. For me these are luxuries I can rarely afford. I am always in a frantic state whenever I speak in front of an audience, to the point that I cannot keep anything down. I try to hide my fear, but there have been occasions when my clients who set up the programs can see my apprehension that sometimes brims to the surface. Then, when I fly out again, for some reason my stomach is still in knots. The only solution: I rarely eat. At least yesterday I was able to gulp down some o.j. between my two morning radio shows. Only after I am through for the day, which can be late into the evening, do I reward myself by roaming through the empty streets, searching for a bite to eat. On rare occasions I actually indulge myself with a real sit-down dinner. And when I do, I savor every bite of every morsel. For me, hunger is another switch I'm able to turn off at will. It's a trick I learned many, many years ago.

I know in my heart that I have the most honorable motives for my oddities. I have a revolting past that at times still terrifies me to the core. But yet every day I have to crawl back into the darkest recesses of my former life for the sole purpose of qualifying my message. I usually need to "go there" three, four, five times a day, or more, pouring out my soul, exposing every fiber of my being, in the vain hope of encouraging and praising others. Since the birth of my son, I woke up to some of the atrocities around me and decided to

make a difference, as so many other individuals did for me years ago. Those two primary reasons are why I push myself. If it wasn't for the invaluable assistance of others, I was destined to be doomed.

With the two fluffed pillows I jammed behind my lower back, I snatch a file and scrutinize every piece of information I can digest for today's first program. I pride myself on knowing my presentation backward and forward yet being completely spontaneous, so I can give the program without the aid of a single note. I make a quick mental note that my day will begin with my first radio interview—which is less than two hours from now—and my last program will probably end somewhere around nine, nine-thirty tonight... which means I'll most likely crawl back to my motel room around eleven-thirty. I'm thankful I won't have to drive somewhere else in the middle of the night. At least tomorrow, tonight, my mind corrects, I can get some sleep, grab a Big Mac, and pray that my boxer shorts and my socks that I'll soon wash in the sink will be completely dry before I carefully and painstakingly repack every article in its place; assurance that I'll be able to carry my necessities for the next round of flights.

After studying my folder and going over the exact sequence of what to speak on, I allow myself the pleasure of flipping on the news on television. Since Stephen and I love the same baseball team, catching an update allows me a chance of being just a little closer to my son. Because I have little trust in the ancient alarm clock or the clerk at the registration desk who looks like she can slip into a coma at any minute, I set my mental clock to wake me up in just under ninety minutes, which is more than enough time for me to recharge my batteries and give the day every ounce of myself. Before dozing off I clasp my hands together and mumble through my prayers. Although I desperately miss my family and push myself to extremes, I do love my life and all it entails.

Slipping away I feel the tension ease throughout the length of my body. I catch a final glimpse of the television and decide I'm too lazy to switch it off. I let go of my right hand as the shaking subsides. My mind plays a mental tape of children running in the sunshine with their hands raised in the air as if playing a game of cops and robbers. My dream tells me it must be a serious game, since no one is laughing. From somewhere a dull ring penetrates my dream. I think it's part of my dream and try to ignore the sound, but the ringing continues to become louder and sharper until I bolt upright in the bed thinking I somehow overslept and committed my own cardinal sin of being late. But the alarm clock reads just after three in the morning. I've only been asleep for about eight minutes. Though the ringing from the telephone continues, I become entranced by the television set displaying my dream. I can't seem to understand why children are being marched outside in single file with their hands thrust in the air while an army of police officers have seemingly quarantined the entire area. The commentator dispels my ignorance. "Oh my God!" I whisper. "I can't believe it!"

As I shake my head, denying the tragedy in front of my eyes, I stretch to grab the phone. Before I can place the receiver to my ear, the voice of my fiancée, Marsha, screams, "Thank God! I've been trying to reach you! Have you heard?" Marsha, a lady of absolute grace, who directs the entire operation of our frantic, hypersonic-speed office, and who keeps everything under control, is now on the verge of panic. "Where have you been?! I've been trying to reach you.... Have you heard?"

Turning back to the catastrophe in front of me, I nod my head up and down. Still mesmerized by the television, with every ounce of my being depleted, I reply in stoic short sentences. "Um, sorry. My cell-phone battery ran down. I just came in a few minutes ago. I didn't want to call you and wake you up.... Yeah, I'm seeing it on TV now. My God, I ... I can't believe it.... How could this have happened?"

"No, it's not that! I'm not calling about the shooting...." Her voice then softens to a whisper. "You don't know. You haven't heard?" I can hear the pace of Marsha's breathing pick up. "Are you sitting down?"

My heart jumps to marathon speed. My vision is suddenly clear and my mind wide awake. The receiver of my phone strikes the side of my head from my trembling hand. I think it, but can't form the words. Shutting my eyes, my worst nightmare has come true. With perfect clarity, I picture Stephen's bright eyes and wide smile.

One step ahead of my terror Marsha calmly states, "It's not Stephen. Stephen's fine. He's okay. And I know you're exhausted, so please, just tell me you're sitting down." My brain now tallies a long list starting with my oldest brother, Ron, whom I haven't seen or spoken to directly in over eight years. I fear that Ron, a police officer of over twenty years, had been shot in the line of duty. My first thought is to throw everything into the rental car and race back to the airport, catching the first flight to...

"Dave," Marsha interrupts, "Dan Brazell passed away."

With my free hand I pound my knee as I slowly rock back and forth on the side of the bed. "... should have known. I should have known. It's not like it's my first time with this ... I ... I should have ... have known."

"I'm so sorry," Marsha cries. "Dan, he was like a father to you, wasn't he?"

"Yeah," I choke up. "Dan's the kind of father any kid would have wanted for a dad."

"Was he that sick?"

"No! He was sick, yeah, but, uhh, last time I saw Dan, um ... was the day he went to the doctor to get a clean

bill of health. At least that's what he told me when I called later that day. I can't believe it. I just saw Dan right before Christmas. He looked, fine, so good...." As my voice rambled on, I kept repeating in my mind that it seemed only yesterday that I had just seen him.

Within minutes Marsha eased me back to normalcy. I almost had a clean getaway but, before saying good-bye, I fibbed that I was getting enough sleep and eating well. Marsha worries about me and constantly lectures me on taking care of myself. After hanging up the phone with Marsha, I dialed one of the only telephone numbers I knew by heart since I was a young teen: the Brazell family. I left a brief message, replaced the phone in its cradle, then lay back on the bed while listening to the howling wind as it seeped through the gaps in the wall of my motel room. Closing my eyes I could see the man who, in an odd sense, had played the role of my father since the days I was a frightened and, at times, manic teenager in foster care. The same man who guided me into adulthood, and who years later held my own son, Stephen, in his mighty arms.

Due to my frantic lifestyle and my own home being hours away from his, I never had the chance to see Dan as much as I wanted to. Our last encounter almost never happened. After leaving my two-bedroom condominium at three in the morning in order to make the drive down to the San Francisco Bay Area to have my unique sports car serviced by the dealer—who claimed they needed the vehicle all day—I was surprised when the maintenance was completed hours earlier. When I phoned Dan, he seemed reluctant to see me. Baiting him, I told Dan I had something to show him. The last time I said something like that to him I was eighteen and showed up in the neighborhood in a brand-new Corvette that the car dealership I had worked for loaned me for becoming salesman of the month.

The first thing I noticed about Dan when I saw him was how tired and thinner he looked since our last visit. But his smile for me never waned. In his home, where we had spent so many hours together when I was a teenager, I excitedly ran down the "what I've been up to" checklist that ranged from my son's progress in school, my upcoming marriage to Marsha, and my career as an author and presenter that, after being

mismanaged and surviving off of Cup-a-Soups and French bread for years, had recently taken off. I was shocked when Mr. Brazell casually informed me that he had had a bout with cancer. I felt like a complete idiot rambling on about Dave this, Dave that. Dave, Dave, Dave. For years, because of my low self-esteem, I had the tendency to try and overimpress without really meaning to. Especially when it came to Dan.

As I was spilling over with apologies, Dan and his wife, Beth, just smiled. Making it no big deal, Dan assured me he had a clean bill of health. More than anyone else in my life, Dan knew how much I hated that disease. It was Dan that I fled to when my biological father had died in my arms from cancer. Then, years later, one of my foster fathers, a man of great courage, became stricken by the same illness. The word itself summoned such dread for me.

Strolling outside with his arm around my shoulder, Dan again assured me that he was in the best of health. In fact he and his wife were about to leave for another semiannual checkup.

“So, this is it?!” Dan exclaimed, as we approached my black sports car. “Who would have thought ... the terror of Duinsmoore....”

For Dan and me it wasn’t about the fancy car or the overrated success of a few books I had written. Stopping in front of the Lotus Esprit sports car, we both took in the moment and nodded our heads. I bent down to Dan’s ear and whispered, “You.” Dan turned back up to me and smiled. “You knew,” I stated. “You always treated me like a real person and kicked me in the behind when I needed it. You really cared about me and I can’t tell you how much that still means to me. This block was the neighborhood I loved and you were the father I never had but always prayed for.”

“Well,” Dan said, brushing it off, “you overcame a lot. You did it yourself. And, if we, the neighborhood did anything, well, we just put you on course. You had to carry the load. You drove us crazy.... You had this entire block in an uproar....”

“Privilege of youth, Dan. Privilege of youth,” I grinned.

“And now you’re the one helping kids,” Dan said with a smile.

“Duty, honor, and country,” I joked. “Truth, justice, and the American way!”

Strolling around the car, the smile I had known within Dan’s eyes for years still shined through. The man who had engineered and rebuilt so many cars by hand, rubbed the sides of the Lotus as if it were a piece of art. As Dan slid into the tiny driver’s seat and turned over the engine, he seemed like a teenager. While he tapped the accelerator, I sensed how much Dan wanted to take the car out for a quick spin. Fantasizing, I imagined Dan behind the steering wheel with me beside him, tearing down the road at hypersonic speed without a care in the world.

Dan gave me another nod. “Take it....” I mouthed to him. “Go ahead, take it for a spin.” For a second, Dan’s left hand gripped the steering wheel and the other on the stick shift. An eternity passed within a few beats of time. But I knew I was making Dan late for his doctor’s appointment. With Beth standing beside Dan as he crawled out, I knew it was time to leave.

We stood next to each other, slightly nodding our heads before embracing. I always hated saying good-bye to him.

“I know I say this all the time, but I love you. I love you, Dad ... Dan...” I slipped.

“You’re a good son, David.” Dan hugged back.

Sliding into the car, and while adjusting my sunglasses, I proclaimed, “Next time, we take her out for a spin.”

Dan nodded in approval. Then, playing the never ending role as the concerned father, he inquired, “Ever get any tickets?”

Taking in the scene, I let out a laugh. I was seventeen again, wide-eyed, and spilling over with adventure. Raising my eyebrows, I confessed, “Not me, Sir. I’m a good boy!”

Minutes later at the end of the block, I eased the black, needle-nose Lotus beside Dan and Beth’s car before we both drove off in opposite directions. I had thought of making a grand departure of racing through the gears, but reminded myself I was a grown adult, in my mid-thirties, and therefore too old, and far too mature, for such a childlike spurt of recklessness. So, I waved good-bye and casually headed northbound on Bay Road. When their car disappeared behind my rearview mirror, a sudden impulse took over. I slammed the car to a stop and, as I had years before on the same street, my mind ran through a simple but thorough checklist: (1) Check for police, (2) Ensure there are no children or any other pedestrians in the street, (3) Make certain there is adequate clearance in front of the driver at all times, and (4) Reverify checklist and think about what you’re about to get yourself into. Two-point-four seconds later, I took a deep breath, leaned back into the seat, floored the accelerator, popped the clutch, and sped through the gears.

With a streak of burnt rubber and grayish-black smoke in my wake, I quietly announced, “Adios, Dan. See ya next time.”

And now, in the middle of the night, thousands of miles away, in the midst of a freezing room, I sat on the edge of the bed. I didn’t cry. And for a moment my trembling hand seemed to subside. With my fingers on my forehead and with my eyes closed, all I could do was listen to the howling wind and realize how much Dan Brazell and that small neighborhood changed the course of my life.

## Users Review

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**Richard Martinez:**

Now a day folks who Living in the era where everything reachable by interact with the internet and the resources inside can be true or not need people to be aware of each details they get. How many people to be smart in having any information nowadays? Of course the reply is reading a book. Reading through a book can help individuals out of this uncertainty Information specially this The Privilege of Youth: A Teenager's Story book because book offers you rich facts and knowledge. Of course the details in this book hundred pct guarantees there is no doubt in it you may already know.

**Jacob Lehr:**

This book untitled The Privilege of Youth: A Teenager's Story to be one of several books that best seller in this year, honestly, that is because when you read this book you can get a lot of benefit onto it. You will easily to buy that book in the book shop or you can order it through online. The publisher with this book sells

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**Sabrina Crockett:**

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