

# RECONNECT

A Practical Guide for Overcoming Adversity

A resource for anyone *going through* adversity

*And*

anyone in a *position to help* them

The Companion Guide to

*Shattered, Shaken, and Stirred:*

*Reconnecting with What Matters Most After Loss and Adversity*

By

**Gilbert S. Ahrens**



**A**dversity can happen to anyone, at anytime. Regardless of its form, condition, or circumstance, adversity is an element of life that eventually touches each and every one of us; either directly ourselves, or indirectly through a friend or loved one. Its effect is unique for everyone.

While some adversities are more common than others, their impact can vary widely because no two people have the same circumstances, personalities, resources, and communities. Adversity can be crippling and have a life-long devastating impact. It can also be a blessing in disguise or an opportunity to live life differently, perhaps better, than before.

A common question is: “why do bad things happen?” It is important to realize that none of us are born with a guarantee that we won’t experience hardship or real suffering. The history of the human experience is known as much, if not more, for suffering than for joy. One thing to take comfort in is that adversity can make us better people. Another, more profound, source comfort is that it can bring us closer to God and other people.

Another related question is: “why do ‘bad’ things happen to ‘good’ people?” It can seem so unfair. But a reasonable explanation is that, if we are all to endure hardship at some point, “good” people who live through adversity and maintain their “goodness” can be a source of strength and inspiration for those around them, who will at some point experience adversity of their own. Ironically, it may be the best way that we can be of service to others. If we can try to be at our best when things are at their worst, others may be encouraged to do likewise.

Regardless, adversity will come and it will change your life. It will not be expected, convenient, or in any way welcome. It will be dreadful. But this I know: If you want, you can and will find strength in the weakness and uncertainty of adversity.

Unfortunately, there is no simple solution for overcoming adversity. You have to go through the adversity, not around it, or under it, or somehow try to jump over it. You have to go through it. But in that process, you will find that the way to overcome your adversity is to actively reconnect with the things that matter most in your life. This guide is an attempt to help you in that process. It is not a roadmap, but rather a simple reference for your inevitable journey.

Soon after your journey begins, as you enter a strange highway that you thought you'd never be on, you will come to realize that the road you are now on is indeed very crowded. It is full of people who were once just like the person you once were, perhaps only a few days ago. You might not have recognized or even noticed them from the old road you were on, just like some of your friends don't recognize you in your current predicament. They may see you, but they also may want to see you only from a safe distance. They don't fear that your adversity is contagious, but, rather, that your weakness is. This too, shall be overcome.

## Why I wrote this Guide

My family and I were in a horrific car accident a few years ago that left my wife paralyzed and permanently in a wheelchair. The recovery process was (and is) a challenge that made me want a free and easy resource for others so that they wouldn't have to learn everything from scratch, "on the job" the way I did.

Our adversity was so challenging that I wrote a book about it. The book is titled: [\*Shattered, Shaken, and Stirred: Reconnecting with What Matters After Loss and Adversity\*](#). However, shortly after the book was published, I realized that while the title may imply suggestions of how to reconnect with what matters most, it is not really the kind of guidebook or field manual that many people seemed to want and need. *Shattered, Shaken, and Stirred* is a story that is more of a literary work than a helpful handbook. It is *my story* and was my vehicle to express my faith and my frustrations, to relay my gratitude and relieve my stress. At the same time, it also served as a memoir of sorts that preserved some special moments for our daughter who was only three weeks old when we had the accident. I wrote it to be a story, not a practical guide.

But there are many people who need a guide more than they need to read about someone else's story. I, certainly, was one of them. Therefore, I offer this Guide as a simple gesture to try to help others going through adversity, and to offer some suggestions that I have found useful, though often in hindsight. I wrote this because I have been there, in the thick of adversity. When my family and I experienced our accident, I sought help, advice, answers on how to contend with our sudden and uniquely challenging circumstances. I didn't know what to do, how to act, respond, communicate, or generally make sense of our world that seemed to instantly turn upside down. There were few practical resources, so I decided to create a simple resource to help not only those struggling with adversity, but also those who are in a position to help them.

Another reason I wrote this is to honor both the people who helped us, as well as the countless others who help people on a daily basis. Crises and calamities happen all the time. We hear about big natural disasters, where many organizations and people are quick to jump in and offer help. What we don't hear about are the millions of individuals selflessly give of themselves in order to help someone else in their hour of need. Those people often go unrecognized. This is a small token of appreciation to them. It is my hope that guide will serve as both a resource and inspiration for others to similarly help those around them who are in need. Each of us is indeed capable of carrying a large burden, but many hands can make light work of it.

## **The Purpose of this Guide**

This is a simple guide to help those in need. It's intended to be simple, flexible, and easy to use and re-use. But this is a not silver bullet remedy or a foolproof prescription. It's all common sense. But when your world is shattered and you are overwhelmed with trauma and uncertainty, the last thing you want to do is reinvent the wheel. The sole purpose of this Guide is to help create a spark, a ray of hope, a thread of optimism, or an idea or two of how to help others.

Another intention of this Guide is to offer hope to anyone going through adversity, and to let them know that they are not alone.

Finally, as the title of this Guide suggests, my ultimate purpose is to emphasize the importance and power of connecting. But not just connecting once. We need to keep connecting. And RE-connecting.

In fact, there is often more power in the reconnection than in the original connection. That is why the simple verb for how we can best overcome adversity is: R.E.C.O.N.N.E.C.T.

## Using this Guide

Quite simply, just read it. It should take ten minutes or less. This Guide is both for those going through adversity *and* for those in a position to help them. Therefore, there are two parts to this Guide. **Section I** is for people going a personal challenge with adversity. **Section II** is for those who are in a position to help. They can be read independently, but I suggest that those who want to help others read both sections. We will be there (on the road of adversity) eventually, so understanding a few simple equipping tools now is better than being completely unprepared.

**Section I** is for those *experiencing* the challenge of loss or adversity. There is nothing tricky or complicated. You don't need to study or devote a lot of time to this. It is meant to quick and easy. It is no more than words and thoughts that support and connect to the theme of reconnecting. Though not quite a mnemonic, it is in the form of a simple memory aid where under each letter of the "RECONNECT," additional words beginning with that letter reinforce key themes. They can be memorized, moved around, substituted, or eliminated. It doesn't really matter. My only hope is that the words help you to:

- 1) reconnect with what matters most in your life; and,
- 2) visualize and connect with the hope and optimism that God's future for you is better than whatever your present condition may lead you to believe.

A note on God: He exists. How can I claim this? I have heard Him and felt Him. Trying to convince some people that God exists is often like trying to convince them that rain exists. Can you see it? Touch it? Hear it? Feel it? Sense it? Well, how did rain get created or “invented?” What purpose does it serve? It seems obvious, but mere mortals could not have created such a perfect system. God created and is in charge of things that are far greater and more profound than any human could ever imagine. Don’t get hung up on whether or not God exists. He does. Accept it and get over whatever hesitation you may have. There’s only one God...and it’s not you.

**Section II** is for those who are in a position *to help* someone who is going adversity. Despite best intentions, it is very often difficult to know, exactly, what to do. Quite likely, your first inclination will be to ask, “What can I do to help?” Those on the receiving end of such an earnest request usually have the same response: “I don’t know.” Even if they did know, the prospect of assigning tasks is yet another burden that most who are in the midst of an overwhelming situation are simply not willing to assume. They will often think – especially if they confronting a crisis situation – that it is a better use of their time to endure it alone than to take time out to train or teach someone about something they themselves are just learning.

The point is that you and others like you can and should make a difference; but don’t wait to be asked. I devised the term **RECONNECT** as a simple memory aid to offer suggestions on how to orient your mind, body, and spirit toward positive action for the benefit of others in need. I call it “love in action.” As above, the words and ideas are intended to serve as a simple and easy tool to get you oriented toward reconnecting with what matters most.

## Choices

Before you begin, you need to ask yourself a few key questions. Your answers may seem obvious to you now, but you will want to revisit them from time to time because your adversity will frequently tempt you to change them.

Here they are:

1. Is there a possibility that this adversity will make you
  - a. Better, or
  - b. Bitter?
2. Does your circumstance leave you feeling:
  - a. Hopeful, or
  - b. Hopeless?
3. Will you allow yourself to:
  - a. Find Strength through Weakness, or
  - b. Fight weakness with Strength?
4. Do you view your current circumstance as:
  - a. A new beginning, or
  - b. The beginning of the End?
5. In your hour of darkness, will you:
  - a. Rest in God's comfort, or
  - b. Resist God's presence?

How we choose to think, feel, believe, act, and respond is critical to overcoming adversity. Our choices are often the only thing we can control. Our choices are influenced by our attitudes, perspectives and desires. The only way we can become a victim is when we choose to feel that way. Therefore, choose hope. Choose faith. Choose love. Choose life.

# The **RECONNECT** Circle

For those *going through* loss or adversity



## SECTION I: RECONNECT

For those *going through* loss or adversity

### **R.** *RECOGNIZE THE REALITY*

Don't minimize or sugarcoat the situation. Get real. Consult with experts to determine current and potential future implications. Demand honesty and candor.

- **Reach** out, up, and around.
  - To God, others, and your world in general.
- **Request** help.
  - Admit that you need it.
  - There's no shame in needing help.
- **Remain** in the moment.
  - Stay present in order to fully absorb and appreciate what's going on.
  - It only gets worse if you run away, physically or emotionally.
- **Refocus** on important issues.
  - There are usually only a couple things that really matter.
- **Reduce** unnecessary obligations or commitments. Unburden yourself.
- **Realign** your environment to make life easier and more efficient.
- **Resolve** to stay connected and committed to what matters.
- **Raise** your vision to what's possible.

- Lift your eyes up. Don't let them sink down.
- **Respond** with intention.
  - Don't react simply out of obligation.
- **Revise** if you're getting stuck.
  - Improvising is okay.
- **Risk** living a new way.
  - It will resolve the "what if?" question.
- **Renew** your mind, body, and spirit.
  - Treat yourself well.

## **E.**      **EXHALE**

Let go. Breathe. Some things take your breath away, so you need to get it back. To take in fresh air you have to first expel the stale air trapped in your lungs. Let it go.

- **Enter** into the situation. There's no fence to sit on, so go all-in.
- **Embrace** the situation
  - It's okay to mourn, grieve, and be angry. Don't hide from your feelings.
- **Elicit** help.
  - Be as specific as possible, or request that others do specific, concrete things to ease your burden.
- **Exercise** as much as possible.
  - Keeping your body active helps create action and momentum in other areas of life. It's restorative.
- **Energize** your environment to be as helpful and positive as possible.
- **Elevate** your mind and lift cares and concerns to a higher place.
  - Don't get bogged down in petty details that won't matter in the long run.
- **Erase Fear** from its position of power.
  - Imagine the worst that could happen: is that your situation? Probably not.
  - Even if it were, accept that God is in control.
  - If God is with us, there really is nothing to fear, except fear itself.
  - Ultimately, fear is lack of faith.

## C. **CONFRONT**

Face the situation directly and head-on. Don't run away; move into it. It will become less threatening and powerful as soon as you move toward it. If you shy away or avoid it, the situation will only continue to grow and fester. Don't let it.

- **Challenge** your view of the situation.
  - Challenge others to step up and collaborate creatively with you.
- **Cut** the clutter and nonsense around you.
  - They are all just distractions that get in the way of connecting with what's really important.
- **Communicate** often.
  - Force yourself to express yourself.
  - No one can read your mind.
  - Err on the side of over-communicating in order both make yourself understood, and also to release built up emotions.
- **Catch** the goodness around you.
  - God is present and people want to help; you have a unique opportunity for fellowship with them.
  - Blessings lie in the wrinkles on the face of adversity.

## O. **OUTSOURCE**

Ask others to help you and let them do as much as possible. Delegate mundane tasks (household chores, pets, errands) so you can focus on what's important. Let others help you determine what's urgent vs. what's important. What's urgent today often isn't tomorrow.

- **Open** yourself to God and others
  - Let them in and allow them to share your burden.
- **Observe** what's going on.
  - Be attentive.
- **Own** only what you need to (take "ownership").
  - You can't do everything. But "own" what you do take on. Make it yours and make it personal.
- **Oversee** where it's needed
  - Then trust others (you can't oversee everything)
  - Then let go.
- **Optimize** your time
  - Don't let others control it for you.

## N.

### NAVIGATE A NEW PATH

Life as you once knew it has changed – possibly forever. Take time to assess what your “new normal” should look like. Choose to respond to your circumstance as positively as possible; don’t let its negativity cause you to react in kind.

- **Negotiate** on your own behalf and for your own best interests
- **Be Nimble**
  - Allow yourself flexibility to try new things
  - Don’t allow yourself to get stuck
  - Find the path of least resistance; it’s often the best way down the mountain.
  - Determine necessary changes needed in order to survive and thrive
  - Be opportunistic whenever possible. Jump when you need to.
- **Be Naïve**
  - Look at your “new normal” with a beginner’s eye and mind
  - Allow yourself to explore new solutions and opportunities
  - Ask questions – don’t assume you know how to find your way
  - Question everything: why some things work and others don’t

## N.

### **No:** *NEVER MIND THE NAYSAYERS*

Don't let others bring you down. The intentions of some people may be good because they feel sorry for you, but don't let sympathy drown survival. You know (or will find out) what's best; don't let others separate you from what's important. Other people may be part of the system in which you now must navigate. Many such people serve as gatekeepers to prevent unwarranted access to the System. They're not being mean, it's just their job.

- **Neutralize** negativity in your own mind.
  - You can't control how others think and behave, but you can control your own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
  - Don't accept "No" when it fits someone else's agenda, but not your own. It may be easier for them to initially say "no." You just need to be persistent and persuasive. If necessary, go above them. Find ways to get to "Yes."
  - Your attitude will impact those around you and influence your environment.
  
- Be **Nice** even when it's difficult.
  - If you have health insurance, be friendly to representatives on the phone
  - Strive to good build relationships with key people you will need or rely on.
  - Make yourself and your situation personally relevant and meaningful to them.
  - Help them view you as a person, not just another project, claim, or case file.
  - Share something of yourself.
  - Send those people (insurance representatives or case managers) photographs of yourself and your family.
  - Picture of pets often create bonds between people.

## **E.** *ELIMINATE HURRY*

Adversity tends to make us busy. We will either physically run around taking care of new tasks and responsibilities, or, worse, we'll be constantly preoccupied on our emotional roller coaster. It seems that there's never enough time to do all that's necessary. It's true in ordinary life, and it's only magnified in the heightened state during an adverse period.

- **Erase** chaos.
  - You can control your environment. Turn your den into a quiet zone or your garage into a monetary.
- **Engage** intentionally.
  - Do things for a reason, not a mindless habit.
- **Establish** what's essential
  - For your survival, health, and well-being.
- **Eradicate** energy vampires
  - Prune the people and situations that really care only about themselves, not you.
- **Extinguish** harmful habits
  - The ones that conspire to replace your real priorities.
- **Erect** a sacred zone that is yours alone.
  - Find a place where you can unwind, mediate, pray, and get your thoughts together.
- **Experiment** – don't settle for the status quo.
  - It's your life. You can sculpt it accordingly.

## C. **CONNECT**

We cannot get through life by ourselves. We need and rely on others all the time. Adversity only heightens our need for others. Similarly, God really only wants two things from us: our fellowship with Him, and our fellowship with each other. At the very least, adversity is an opportunity to achieve both. When viewed from that perspective, it can become a precious gift. Adversity brings people together more deeply and profoundly than anything else.

- **Consult** with as many people as possible.
  - Seek expert help.
  - Don't be afraid of what you don't know.
- **Create** a life of meaning.
  - One that reflects well when both you and God look at it.
  - This usually means creating a life with, for, and about others.
- **Chronicle** your experiences.
  - They may be invaluable to those around you, to a stranger going through a similar challenge, or to a future generation.
- **Collect** the generosity and love of others.
  - Use it when you need it, but don't hoard it.
  - Accept these things with open heart and open arms.
  - Don't let your arms get so full that they get closed holding too much.
  - Release them periodically and let go.
- **Choose** love, faith, and hope.
  - It's better than anger, despair, and hopelessness.

## **T.**      **TRY**

Don't give up. Results will vary, but making a real effort will reward you even if the results aren't what you wanted.

- **Be *Tenacious*** in everything you do.
  - Put your best effort forward.
  - Don't give up if you fail at first.
  - Perseverance is always rewarded.
  
- **Take *time*** to reflect, give, get, and live.
  
- **Taste** what you're eating and doing.
  - Don't rush through it.
  - Sense it and savor the moment.
  
- **Transform** weakness into strength.
  - Admit your weakness to God and ask Him to take over and restore you to a place of confident humility.
  
- **Transfer** your burdens to God.
  - He can handle them...and wants to.

## The **RECONNECT** Circle

For those *helping someone* in loss or adversity



## SECTION II: RECONNECT

For those *helping someone* in loss or adversity

### **R.** REACH OUT

Reach *out* to those in need, and reach *in* to their lives. Be proactive to make your presence known and felt. Be real: Sincerity, honesty and candor are required. Avoid superficial small talk.

- **Reassure** them of your love and support.
- **Rally** the troops.
  - Get others involved.
- **Reinforce** the reality of the situation, as well as your support.
- **Re-direct** distractions away from someone in need.
  - Be a shield for them.
- **Reiterate** your desire and ability to help out.
  - Demonstrate it with actions.
- **Re-establish** common bonds.
  - Use them to build new, stronger ones.
- **Reward** any progress or milestones with acknowledgement and praise.
  - Be a cheerleader.

## **E.** *ENGAGE IN THE PROCESS*

Be active and proactive, don't wait to be asked to do something: volunteer to do something, anything that is specific and tangible. It doesn't have to be "big" so long as it is done with loving intent. Ideally, what you do should help to ease a practical burden.

- **Examine** the situation.
  - You may have a better perspective if you are not as intimately involved or as emotionally consumed.
  
- **Evaluate** potential solutions.
  - Your perspective may be clearer than someone being overwhelmed in their situation.
  
- **Explain** what you see and how you can help.
  - Be specific and outcome-oriented, though be sensitive to the importance of the process.
  
- **Educate** others around you.
  - Help others to be similarly helpful and to get on the same page both with their intentions and actions.
  
- **Equip** others to help realize positive outcomes.
  - Use available online resources like [www.lotsahelpinghands.com](http://www.lotsahelpinghands.com)

## C. *CARE FOR THEM*

Think about what you can do to care for someone...then do it.  
The cost of waiting can be huge.

- **Capitalize** on the situation in the moment.
  - Don't wait.
- **Contribute** your time, prayers, and heart.
- **Coordinate** with as many people as necessary.
  - Do so with the intent of helping to ease someone's burden, not add to it.
  - Deliver meals, have the house and yard cleaned, bills paid, etc.
- **Collaborate** with key providers
  - And anyone who can help.
    - Church, neighbors, school, co-workers.
  - Make efficient use of online tools and technologies for maximum efficiency.
- **Counsel** to those in pain.
  - Be frank and honest, even if it hurts.
  - Provide sincere and loving advise that is in their best interest.

## O. OFFER YOURSELF

Your fellowship is the most valued and treasured gift you have.

- **Open** your heart and mind.
  - And, potentially, your wallet.
- **Observe** what's need – then do something about it.
- **Organize** others
  - Create a caring network with similar goals.
- **Overhaul** your priorities
  - Enable yourself to give time and energy without feeling resentful.
  - Don't turn it into yet another obligation.

## N. NOMINATE YOURSELF

Step up and be accountable as a reliable and trusted friend. If not you, then who? Chances are, once you step forward, others will quickly rise up to join you.

- **Enlist** - don't wait to be asked.
- Join with others and nominate yourself as a group.
- Be visible to both the person in adversity and those around them.
- Become a self-appointed advocate and ambassador.

## N.

### NOTIFY

First determine if the situation is one that the person in it would want shared. . If so, notify friends, family and concerned others about the situation. Spreading the word can be an enormous relieve to someone in adversity. Other people may want to help but are unaware of the situation. They may want to, but don't have the time, energy, or inclination to find the right words. This act also enables you to create and build a support network.

- **Network** through online social media tools
  - Facebook, Twitter, and email are pervasive.
  - [LotsaHelpingHands](#) is the best online care giving resource tool. With it, invited participants can effectively organize and:
    - Schedule visits
    - Babysit / pet sit
    - Share information
    - Cook / deliver meals
    - Provide practical, everyday help
    - Run errands for household needs
    - Research solutions for specific needs
    - Identify and contact necessary experts

## **E.** **ENCOURAGE**

People going through adversity need lots of encouragement. They need cheerleaders to pick them up when they are feeling dejected or defeated. You don't want to be gratuitously cheerful, but there is always a reason to be encouraged by something. Even in death, which brings us closer to God!

- **Empower** with love and kindness.
- **Ensure** that their anguish is only temporary
  - God is more present and profound in times of adversity.
  - There's always the hope and possibility of a better tomorrow.
- **Entertain** the challenges and the inefficiencies of someone going through adversity.
  - They are stressed and not at their best.
  - Be patient.

## C. CONTINUE

Stay involved. The hardest times are often after an initial crisis has passed, when the trauma has worn off. Many people assume that things get back to normal. They don't. Yet people drift away, back to their normal lives. The afflicted, however, is just learning to live with their "new normal." After the storm, when the immediate help is gone, can be the loneliest and most challenging.

- **Check-in** with them often.
  - Stay involved and present.
- **Carry on** – keep carrying their love and care.
  - Help carry the burden.
- **Confirm** that their adversity is real and powerful.
- **Champion** their case and cause.
- **Coach** them through tough times that may ensue.
  - Be an advisor and friend.
- **Commend** and cheer their efforts.
  - Great accomplishments are often made in tiny steps.
  - Keep encouraging forward momentum to avoid entering into inertia and then falling back.
  - Every victory is huge.

## **T.** *TEAM-UP*

Team up with others. Team up with God. You will, most likely, all be brought together for a different adversity, perhaps your own.

- **Tackle** situations and issues head-on.
  - Gang tackling works best.
- **Talk** through the big picture and how it affects the details.
- **Target** how you can be most effective and beneficial. Hit those first.
- **Trouble-shoot** recurrent problems to find untried solutions.
- **Translate** your actions and intentions.
  - In a way that others can understand and appreciate.
  - Don't assume that someone in a challenging situation understands your motives. They are under stress and their mind can easily conjure up negative ideas.
- **Turn into the wind** to confront the challenges directly.
  - Don't try to find a clever way around them; look at them straight on and go right into them.
- **Transform.** Allow yourself to be transformed through the situation.
  - It can shape your life more positively than a myriad of "good" that might happen.
  - Use this as an opportunity for growth and renewal.

## CONCLUSION

Whether you are going through adversity yourself, or are in a position to help someone who is, there is recovery and redemption in the process of connecting and reconnecting. We cannot go through real adversity alone and by ourselves. We need each other. We also need God. Times of adversity bear out these two facts.

Therefore, don't be afraid of weakness because, when we lean on God and others, we find that their strength is sufficient. Ours never is...at least not for what really matters.

Be intentional with all you do. Choose your mindset and perspective. Work in partnership with your Creator and those around you to construct and live a life that matters. Through the process, you will go to places you otherwise never could have found.

## About the Author

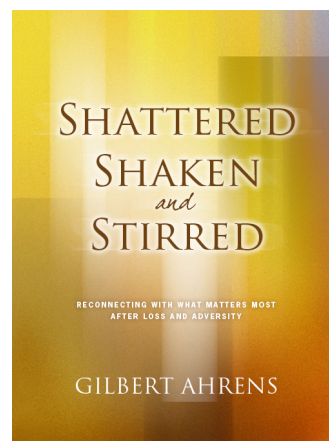
**Gilbert von der Schulenburg Ahrens** is the author of [\*Shattered, Shaken, and Stirred: Reconnecting with What Matters Most After Loss and Adversity\*](#). He is a sought after speaker on the topics of overcoming fear and adversity, and is a business consultant specializing in strategic planning, change management, mergers, and capital formation.

Early in his business career, he co-founded a consumer electronics start-up, then worked at Sanyo Electric Company in Japan as a strategic planning executive. He subsequently became an investment banker, most recently as a Managing Director at J.P.Morgan. He holds degrees from New York University and Boston University.

Several of his relatives played significant roles during dramatic turning points in the histories of the United States and Germany. He is a direct descendant of [Israel Bissell](#), who has been credited with performing the *real* mid-night ride in 1775 (while Paul Revere slept in a tavern) that warned American colonists of the British invasion. Another relative, [Daniel Bissell](#), was the second U.S. soldier awarded a Badge of Military Merit by General George Washington. The medal was a predecessor to the Purple Heart, given originally to soldiers who exhibited unusual courage. His German uncles, [Fritz-Dietlof Graf von der Schulenburg](#) and [Friedrich Werner Graf von der Schulenburg](#), were among the high-ranking German officers who were executed for their central roles in the July 20, 1944 assassination plot against Adolf Hitler.

Gil was born in Suffield, Connecticut, and currently resides in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife, daughter, and their dogs. He is a member of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, and is on the board of directors at [Abilities United](#), a non-profit in Palo Alto, California that helps champion those with developmental or physical challenges.

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