

# 'I'm never going to retire': After childhood of abuse, John Neyland wants to spend life helping others

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Life could have broken John Neyland. Shattered him.

He remembers at age 5 hiding in a broom closet with two siblings as his father beat his mother. They heard her scream. They heard dishes breaking. They heard his closed fist striking her face. They knew what would happen to them if they intervened.

Neyland describes it in the present tense, as if 48 years haven't passed.

"I feel horrible for Mom," he said. "I feel horribly guilty for staying in the closet, horribly guilty for not helping Mom. But fear of my father is greater than my ability to help my mother."



Yet, in that moment of fear — and others that followed — a resolve developed: He would not become his father.

"I learned a lot," he said. "I know what it's like to need help and not have it. I know what terror is. So, if I can help somebody, oh, my God ... I will benefit more than you ever can."

Neyland can say that from experience. Seventeen years ago, he mentored a troubled teen in the juvenile justice system, encouraging him to stay in school and out of trouble. Their relationship continues today. He supports another area student attending film school in Los Angeles. And he is trying to create a philanthropy in which volunteers adopt inner-city schools.

Last year, Neyland wrote a book, "How to Live the Life You've Yet to Dream," detailing his life story and philosophy. He sells it on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and his own website, [johnneyland.com](http://johnneyland.com), which also describes his philanthropic plans.

"If I leave this life and I never did anything other than take care of me and my family, I'm the most selfish bastard in the world," Neyland said.

One of six children, Neyland was raised in Baton Rouge, with the family settling into the Broadmoor subdivision when he was in second grade. His father, Norman, owned several restaurants and an income tax and accounting business. Neyland remembers times when his dad encouraged him and took him out for treats, but his dad's hair trigger left a bigger impact.

"He didn't give me a whipping or spanking," Neyland said. "He beat the living crap out of me. And the look on his face — I will always remember his eyebrows furrowed together and the anger in his eyes. It looked like he's trying to kill me. The belt would hit me and sting so bad, and before I could fully feel that sting, he'd hit me again.

"I learned it's not right to beat people up. It's not right to take your anger and vent it on anybody."

Neyland said that when he was 9 or 10, his older brother, Bill, was on the receiving end of a beating. Neyland decided enough was enough. He ran to his parents' room and retrieved his mother's .38-caliber pistol.

"I cried because I don't want to shoot my daddy, but I've got to," he said. "I've got to help Bill. I've got to do this, and I'm going to go to jail forever. I'm going to kill my daddy and I'm going to go to jail forever, but I cannot let this happen to Bill."

The beating stopped before he intervened. He put the gun back.

When Neyland was 15, he started dating Karen Williams, now his wife, and also developed a crippling case of obsessive compulsive disorder, one that he would fight into adulthood before two brain surgeries helped him control it.

Now a successful financial planner and tax adviser, Neyland has three children and, in his words, a great life. Along the way, he developed a desire for others to have the same thing.

Early in his mentoring experience, Neyland sat in on some of the teen's classes and saw other students he thought could benefit from a mentor. That helped give him the idea for the John's Dream Foundation. His plan is to recruit volunteers to work with disadvantaged children in schools. More than helping them academically, Neyland said he wants the foundation to help them learn self-worth, to love others and to reach their dreams. He is raising money through speaking engagements and book sales and said he hopes to have it running in two years.

"That really will be my life's mission. In the second half of my life, that will be my life's mission to put a lot of energy into that," he said. "It will take more time than I have now. ... I'm never going to retire."

Paradoxically, his upbringing taught him to do this, Neyland said. He wants others to have what he didn't.

"You don't make any money doing this, but you're paid in a currency that money can't fill," Neyland said. "If I can leave this Earth ... and I've been that kind of daddy and I've been that kind of spouse and I've helped hundreds of thousands of people have a life they otherwise wouldn't have, there is nothing more I can ask for."

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