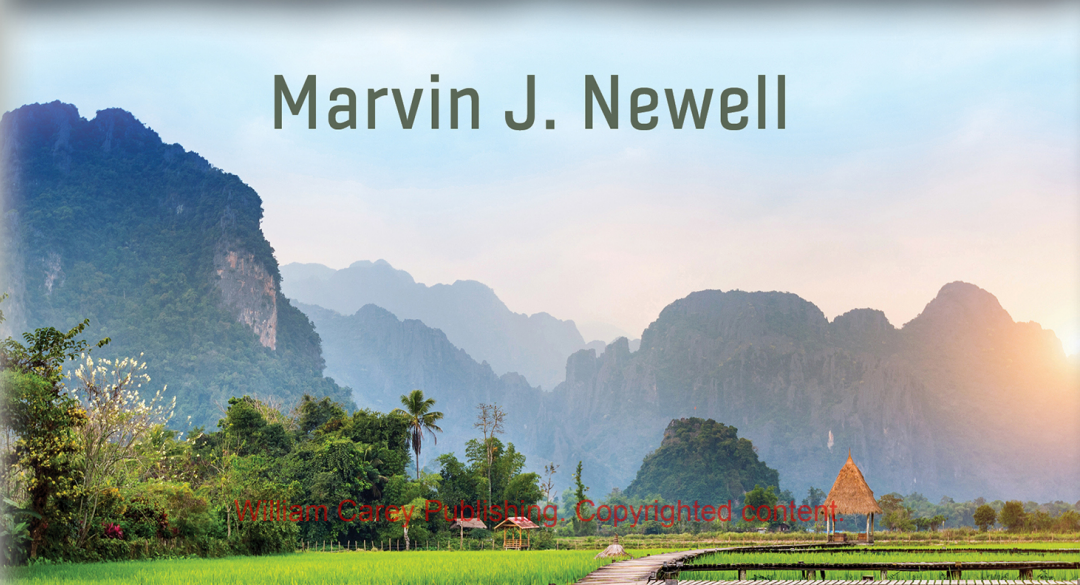


Taking You Under My Skin

A Novel about Love, War, and the Unreached

Marvin J. Newell



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Taking You Under My Skin: A Novel About Love, War, and the Unreached
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Bedford Springs, Pennsylvania

Summer 1969

"I love this song … it makes me feel so close to you," said Lisa as Mike slid the 8-track cartridge into the deck player he had attached to the underside of the console of his blue 1964 Ford Falcon 'Sprint' convertible. Mike pushed the play button, and the light-brown plastic tape began rolling against the metallic silver cassette heads. After a brief melancholy prelude, the familiar voices of their favorite male pop group began singing in romantic, slow harmony:

I'm taking you under my skin
I'm taking you deep inside of me
So deep inside, you're really a part of me
I'm taking you under my skin …

Lisa snuggled next to Mike and laid her head on his shoulder as the four male voices slowly and passionately took the tune through its four stanzas. The two quietly listened as the young men's melodic voices sang about the devotion Mike and Lisa had for each other.

It was a Sunday evening, and the two eighteen-year-olds were driving from church to Lisa's home. The late August air was warm, and the car's convertible top was down, blowing a breeze through Lisa's long, brunette hair that mesmerized Mike.

"You know what?" Mike asked, not really expecting Lisa to answer. "Sometimes I wish we'd just run off together rather than be going to college in two weeks."

"That is OOOH so tempting!" whispered Lisa. "But we have made a promise," she continued, "and that promise is to One higher than ourselves and our personal desires. We made it to God, and we both know that it is most serious."

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Mike thought about that for a moment. He knew that what she was saying was right. It had been almost a year earlier that the two of them unexpectedly felt a call to do something unselfish with their lives. It was the appeal to abandon their selfish ambitions and follow God's leading to something bigger than themselves.

That was back on September 15, 1968, when a missionary speaker had come to their church, Bedford Springs Bible Church. He spoke about the people that he and his wife, Shirley, worked among in a hard and dry North African country. It wasn't the location that drew Mike into his talk. It was the dire need of the people whom the missionary so powerfully described.

"Those people are living in spiritual darkness," he said. "Not only are they deprived of any knowledge of the gospel of Jesus, but they are also deprived of very basic healthcare. Many are needlessly dying from curable diseases and entering a Christless eternity as well. It is happening day after day."

The thin, lanky middle-aged man went on to say that although this was the case in the country where he and Shirley had spent the past fifteen years, it was true on a grander scale over the whole region.

He began to wrap up by making a passionate appeal. Dropping to his knees and with genuine tears, he pleaded with all who were listening, "Please take up the challenge and either go yourselves or stand behind those willing to go."

Riveted to every word, Mike's heart was struck, as was Lisa's. The organ began to softly play as the speaker continued to plead, "I invite anyone who feels the leading of God to go to those who have never heard to come forward and publicly make that known."

Suddenly Mike leapt to his feet. Rushing to the front of the sanctuary, he fell at the altar in full surrender. A few seconds later, Lisa was prostrate beside him. Together, in front of the watching congregation, they covenanted that they would give their lives for the sake of the lost, wherever God would lead.

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"Dear God," prayed the missionary, "please honor the commitment these two young people are making this evening and work your will in their lives as they make their way to some needy nation that we are confident that you, in your providence, will show them over time. Amen."

At the conclusion of the service, the missionary approached Mike and Lisa and said, "I'm thrilled about the decision you both have made this evening. Do you know where in the world God may be calling you to serve?"

"I haven't even given it a thought," answered Mike. "This is all so new to Lisa and me."

"Then I'd like to offer both of you a word of advice," responded the missionary, dipping into his knowledge that came from years of service. "It's easy to remember but rather profound," he said, clearing his voice. "If you take care of your spiritual relationship, God will take care of your geographic location." After a brief pause to let those words sink in, he continued on, "You see, the measure of a missionary is not how far from home one serves, but how close to God one stands. Walk close to God and he will direct your steps in a way you could never have imagined."

"I'd also like to make a suggestion as to where you could go for good missionary preparation."

"Oh, where's that?" asked Mike, thankful for some direction about something he knew little about.

"There's a school in Chicago, Chicago Christian College," replied the missionary. "It has been training young people for mission work for close to a hundred years. I encourage you to give it a look."

Before that night of surrender, Mike had other plans for his life. His plans were to become a medical doctor. He had already applied to the pre-med program at the nearby University of Pennsylvania. Once he earned his BA degree, he would enter the school of medicine for his MD. All those plans had now been changed by his answering the call of God.

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Like Mike, Lisa's plans had been changed too. Her goal was to major in music at Princeton University with the hopes of becoming a concert pianist. Now those dreams had been put aside for a new divinely orchestrated direction in life.

Mike snapped back to the present. "We'd best get you home," he said to Lisa. "Your parents will be waiting, hopefully with some of that fresh apple pie your mom likes to make."

For the past ten years, Lisa's family had lived in the medium-sized town of Bedford Springs, six miles west of the Delaware River in Bucks County, just north of Philadelphia. Mike's family had lived all his life on a small farm seven miles further west.

The smell of freshly brewed coffee met them as soon as they stepped through the door. Lisa made a beeline for the piano, gracefully lowered herself onto the bench, and played a funky 60's tune while her mother finished setting the dining room table. Lisa had taken piano lessons since the age of eight and had become quite an accomplished player. At the senior recital in June, she had been the star of the evening, flawlessly playing Polish composer and pianist Frederic Chopin's difficult *Fantaisie-Impromptu*.

Once Lisa finished playing, the four of them sat down, enjoying a leisurely late evening together. Their conversation mainly centered around their final preparations before heading off to college in Chicago in two weeks.

At 10:30 p.m., Lisa accompanied Mike to the door. They stepped out into the still, warm evening, embraced tenderly, shared a kiss, then said goodnight to each other. As Mike's car pulled away, Lisa was already inside, standing at the living room picture window and watching until the taillights of the Falcon vanished into the dark.

Mike turned into his parents' driveway just before eleven. He was in bed less than ten minutes later. "Boy, that was another nice evening with Lisa," he thought as his brain began to shut down. "Dear God," he managed to pray before trailing off into sleep, "Please work it out so that I marry that gal."

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By the fall of 1969, Chicago was once again a booming city, rebounding from the scars inflicted on it a year earlier. With a population of 3.3 million, it was the second-largest metropolis in America after New York City. It was a city on the mend, almost finished cleaning itself up after two devastating sets of riots the previous year.

First, from April 5–7, 1968, destructive riots involving mainly African Americans were sparked by the tragic assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Then in August, the Democratic National Convention had been held in the downtown sector of the city. From August 23–29, a series of violent protests against the Vietnam War broke out in Grant Park and along Michigan Avenue, bringing with them pilfering and destruction.

The city had nearly recovered by the time Mike and Lisa arrived. Urban renewal was making the city a more desirable place to live and work. New skyscrapers were popping up across the city's skyline. The one-hundred-story John Hancock Center had just been completed and stood proudly as the jewel of the city at the edge of Lake Michigan.

Chicago Christian College had long been a part of the city. Established in the mid-1880s, it had occupied a ten-acre campus on the near north side, six blocks west of the lake for nearly a century.

"I'm so glad we chose CCC for our education," Lisa said to Mike late one afternoon, three weeks into their enrollment, as the two sat in the school's plaza. "Everything I was hoping for in missionary preparation seems to be here."

"I totally agree," replied Mike.

Mike was enrolled in the linguistics major with a minor in medicine. While in high school, he had discovered that he had a knack for languages, doing exceptionally well in three years of French and a year of Latin. Lisa was also enrolled in the linguistics major, with a minor in music, specifically piano.

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