

RIPENED ON THE VINE

LORI MICHELE DAVENPORT



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AuthorHouse™
1663 Liberty Drive, Suite 200
Bloomington, IN 47403
www.authorhouse.com
Phone: 1-800-839-8640

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FORWARD

IT IS MY PRIVILEGE TO recommend to you this fine book; “Ripened on the Vine” is a story of a young ladies glorious, faith- filled triumph over the trials, abuse and adversities of life. This book is a literary goldmine, you’ll find in its pages a renewed hope for living, a confidence in face of impossible odds and a joy that is only found in the unseen territories of the eternal: God’s magnificent presence. In its pages you’ll walk with a little girl as she finds her way through the most tragic circumstances, only to find that her Father-God is forever faithful. He is close to the broken hearted, and saves those crushed in spirit (Psalms 34:18). If you’ve ever faced a wall that appeared un-scalable Michele Davenport’s story will give you hope and determination. Give it a chance, you won’t regret it!

Carlo Griseta, Discipleship Pastor
Church of the Harvest
Olathe, KS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First, to my God: For saving me from the world, and from myself at times. Also, for hearing my cries, answering my prayers, and never leaving me or forsaking me.

To my Husband: You are such a special man, Thank You for all the support and wisdom you have shared with me while I was writing this book. I was blessed beyond measure when God blessed me with you.

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To my Mother: You were truly an inspiration to me and to all who knew you. I know that your pain had been great and your sorrow had been plenty, but Thank You for living even when you wanted to die.

To My friend Jerry Smart: who did all the editing. I know this was a true challenge and a sacrifice of your time. Thank you for helping me be obedient to our God.

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ANOINT ME LORD

*Anoint me' Lord in what you need me' to do
Give me' your blessing to carry it through
Opening my mouth, to tell your story
Using my life' for only Your glory
The' light in my eyes will not go away
You see, the' Lord put it there' and it's here' to stay
Teach me' to listen more' closely to you
Anointing my life' in whatever You have me' do.*

Chapter One

THE SEED IN ME

*I'm like a flower, and you planted the seed...
You were watching me grow into becoming me...
 Making mistakes along the way...
Struggling to hear what my father has to say...
 Closing my eyes and searching my heart...
 Finding the place where I needed to start...
At the beginning is a good place to be, but in the middle is where you will
 find me...
I'm like a flower and You planted the seed...*

HELLO, MY NAME IS MICHELE. I dedicate my story to anyone who has ever had a reason to give up on life and God. My heart's desire is for people to be encouraged, not by my life, but by what God has done through my life. This book is not about me. It is about the one who created me, and saved me from death so many times. I once heard a preacher, Myles Munroe, say, "God salvages (saves) people and puts them back together so he can use them for what he originally planned on using them for."

What I was born to do caused God to save me. God has a plan for all of us, and he will save you, too. God has revealed to me that my childhood and my life have been *faith builders* that he has used to strengthen my faith in Him.

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Lord God, please guide my hands and heart as I begin to tell my life story to all who need a little faith. Thank you Lord, for never leaving me alone, for being faithful in salvaging me to Glorify You.



The last two years of their marriage, my dad began to drink a lot. I was in bed sleeping when I was awakened by a loud noise, I wasn't sure what it was. I saw my dad's face. He got me out of bed. My brother wasn't there that evening. He was at my uncle's house where my dad was staying because my parents were separated. He took me into the living room where I saw the front door lying in the middle of the room. He had kicked it completely down. He sat me in the corner, while I watched him abuse my mother. I was only 4 years old, and that was the earliest memory of my dad. It was the only one that I would have for a long time. I cannot possibly tell you the impression, the visions, the distorted idea of love that was imbedded in my mind that night. I was so young and all I could think was that my dad was trying to kill my mom.

Throughout their marriage he beat her, fooled around with other women and continually assaulted her self worth. After he had left that evening, my mom found the strength to call my grandmother, and she came and picked us up and took us to the hospital. My mom was so badly beaten that the doctors did not know if my mom would live. The state attorney's representative came by to take my mom's statement but she had slip into a coma. Her neck looked like she had been strangled and since she was in a coma they could not get all the facts. Later, they found out that my dad did this with his bare hands. The officers could not believe the damage he had done. I do not remember how long my mom was in the hospital but after my mom got out, we went to live with my grandma. We had to pass that apartment every day and I would say, "That is where it happened, Mom, isn't it?" The memories of what happened were strong in my mind and I did not want to be around my dad.

When my brother found out what had happened to mom he begged her to drop the charges, and my mom did. Soon after this happened, my dad checked into a mental hospital. Later we found out why my dad decided to have this last revenge on our mother. He found out the

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divorce would be final in six days, and that was more than he could stand. He went insane that night. After dad got out of the mental hospital, he disappeared in Corpus Christi to hide from paying child support and the police. While in Corpus, he met his future wife. She seemed to keep my dad out of trouble. My parents married young and divorced young. The first two years of their marriage, Dad got put into prison for burglary. My dad was not a very nice man back then.

Before the divorce, my brother and I used to pray that God would save their marriage. After that night, we prayed that he would never answer that prayer. God has his hands on our lives even before we know him. When we pray, and we do not think God has answered our prayers, know that He is God and we might not receive the answer we expect, but He gives the answer that is best for us.



As I'm typing this story, I have an amazing chill. Not because of the pain I felt back then, but because of the healing I feel now, and the peace I have with my dad and my mom. The emptiness that followed the years to come was overwhelming at times. I did not realize how important a father figure in your life is until I did not have one, good, bad or indifferent.



Many years later my mom met a man who was God-sent. His name was Gilbert. It is just amazing how God knows what we need when we need it. This man loved life he cherished every minute. I'll never forget the family vacations at Garner State Park going camping, horse back riding, rapid riding, dancing. This was truly the family I dreamed about. He was a spur-of-the-moment kind of person, and my mom was a perfectionist. She never wanted to leave anything undone. I can still hear my dad saying, "Joni, you can either stay home and get those dishes done or we can go fishing, but there isn't enough time to do both". The house was always immaculate and he knew it would not hurt for her to leave a few

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dirty dishes. When dad said, "Its time to go", that meant he was in the car backing out.

He raced motor-cross at the Astrodome in Houston, Texas. He loved to ride motorcycles. He also liked to be in the crash- up derby contest. This man truly had a love for people and life. He did not have very many rules, but the ones he had he expected you to obey. He also believed in working hard and being honest. My brother really loved Gilbert He hadn't had a dad figure in his life for a long time.

Every year he would take us on vacation to my Aunt Linda's house outside of Corpus Christi at Weber's boat landing. That's where we would go fishing. I remember Richard and I getting in the canoe and rowing out to the middle of the lake to go cork fishing and it started raining. I ask him, "Should we go in?" He said, "No, this is when the fish really start biting." My brother had the patience of Job when it came to fishing. He did not even have to get a bite all night. He just loved the idea of fishing. That day I caught more fish than I ever caught in my life, and I have never caught that many fish since.

There was something about my aunt that I loved. She had peace and joy. My Aunt did not hesitate to let you know how she felt and what she believed. My aunt is an awesome woman of God and she ministered to me by the way she lived her life. I was blessed for having someone to keep the prayer lines open.



Richard and I had so much fun when we were kids. When it flooded, we would make up all kinds of games. One was called *jump the ditch*. Our house sat right beside this ditch. The object was to jump this six-foot ditch without landing in it. I don't think I ever played this game without getting soaked. Also, in the summer months, he would take one side of the road and I would take the other and we would look inside the meters for toads. We would collect as many as we could find then return home to see who won.

Richard and I had a good relationship. I would always follow him around and he would always tell me to stop it. I would tell on him every chance I got and he did the same to me but we loved each other. I

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remember walking down the street in the middle of summer talking to him, asking him all kinds of questions that I thought a big brother ought to know. Sometimes he would answer them, sometimes he would laugh, and sometimes he would tell me to be quiet. When we got into trouble, and that was most of the time, my mom believed in the tattle-tale-and-consequences method of punishment. If you told on someone, you got punished and the person who did the crime got punished also. When this happened we usually got grounded to our rooms, which worked out good for mom but we sure were bored. The rooms were side by side with a big mirror hanging on the wall in between them, we used to make paper airplanes and throw them at each other in the mirror. We also liked to make spit balls and launch them at each other.

Richard liked to play jokes on people. One day he went out on a mission to find as many snakes as he could. When he came back to the house with a shirt full, he walked right in to his room, pulled out his underwear drawer and placed the snakes in there as neatly as he could. Richard went back outside and waited for the moment that he could hear our mom scream.



My mom was doing laundry and she headed back to Richard's room to put his shirts away and his socks. She opened his underwear drawer, and you could have heard her from two states over. She yelled, "Richard Allen, get in this house right now." That day there was not a tattletale consequence. I don't think he ever did that again. Mom did not think that was funny at all. Years later, it is one of the funniest stories that she tells.

Back then; my mom took us to church. She loved the Lord. She wanted to raise her kids with Godly values. I remember my first experience in church. My mom would take us down the street to the local Methodist church. I don't think there was Sunday school, or if there was my mom did not take us to it. I do know we had to be perfectly still, not a peep or she would pinch us, not just a regular pinch, but also a pinch with a twist. To be honest, we got our share of being pinched. As quiet as we had to be, there were a lot of seeds being planted in those years when we

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were in church. I have my mom to thank for that. Although the seeds would not be watered until much later in my life, they were always there. When I think about that, it is amazing to me how powerful our God is. The scripture says - *He knows me and every hair on my head.* That alone is more than I could ask for, but He gave me so much more. More than I could hope for or dream I could have. Could you imagine the time it would take to know every hair on someone's head? God is faithful.



One night after my brother and I went to bed, we were awakened by a terrible noise. It sounded awful. We got up to see what had happened and my mom was just sitting there crying. For a moment, everything just stood still we knew it was bad but we were not prepared for what was about to be unfolded. She began to tell us that our dad had been driving in his dune buggy with a friend. They had been drinking, and driving on Galveston Bay wall. It was a steep wall and everyone liked to ride motorcycles, bikes, and dune buggies on it. The wall was about a mile long. They decided to get a bottle and take a ride but they approached the end sooner than they expected. Dad turned the buggy as sharply as he could. He did not want to go over because there was nothing down there but rocks and ocean. As soon as he turned it, it flipped over, breaking my dad's neck. He died instantly and his friend lived. I don't know why Gilbert had to die that night but I do know, no matter what, God is faithful. God did not cause him to die. The lies of Satan's did. I can hear Satan saying, "Oh, go ahead and drink and drive nothing will happen to you people do it every day." God tells us many times throughout the Bible about obeying.



In Genesis 2:16 the Lord God commanded the man, You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die. Acts 5:29 also says we must obey God rather than men.



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We shouldn't depend on man to know what we need. We need to learn to depend on God more and us less. I know if Gilbert had conformed into what the Lord wanted for him he would not have been out on that wall driving under the influence. More often than not we want to be the drivers in our own lives and then we blame God for the wrecks we have created. I believe we need to be a people who want to serve the Lord no matter what the cost, but every time we get a little nervous, or out of our comfort zone, we drive off.

The Lord said, *keep your eyes focused on my kingdom and me' and every thing else' will be' added unto you.* He came to give us an abundant life not to kill us. Satan came to kill, steal, and destroy. That is how he works. He makes things look fun that are really dangerous and can kill you. Satan's goal is to kill you before you can find out the truth about the one who came to save you, Jesus. The one who gave his life so you could live?

After that night every thing changed. Where we once had security, we now had none. Our lives were left so empty. I remember when my softball coach came by to sign me up for the season, I just looked at him and said, "My dad died and my mom needs me this year. I won't be playing." I loved softball, but things were not going to be the same and I knew that even as a small child. I'll never forget how my coach looked at me that day, and he said, "Maybe next year." His eyes were filled with sorrow. I will always remember his sweet spirit.

A year had gone by and our lives would never be the same. Richard was not handling Gilbert's death well at all and he did not understand why he was taken from us. He had a lot of anger in him towards God, and everyone around him. My brother really loved Gilbert. I could see the loss on Richard's face every time I looked at him. It was as if someone had stolen his smile only to replace it with tears of sorrow. It was if my brother loss his only hope of being a part of a real family. The pain that penetrated his entire being was evident in his speech, his walk, his movement; his very soul yearned from a place I had never witnessed before in him. Mom started noticing a change when the school started calling about Richard getting into fights and not turning in his assignments.

It got worse and he started hanging around the wrong people and doing the wrong things. Drugs became a part of his life as well as alcohol and he started smoking. He was getting into a lot more trouble. Our

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relationship was not the same; he did not want me around and he started treating me with a lot of hostility.

I know my mother was getting concerned, so when my brother asked if he could go live with my real dad even though she would have rather he stayed with her, she knew he needed to be around a father figure again so she agreed.



I heard my mom make the phone call that night, and my brother was overjoyed. She knew better than anyone that my dad had a bad temper and she warned Richard. Richard did not listen. That night he thought mom was just trying to talk hateful about our dad. I knew better, I still remembered that night he broke in. The place I had never witnessed my brother before was an all too familiar place for me. I knew the pain of loss. I knew the pain of torment. I mourned my own purity of mind due to the things I witness as a small child. I could reveal truth to my brother but was he in a place to receive? Would he be able to take another death, not of flesh and blood but another death of his dreams of ever having a normal family? The answer to these questions and to many more will always remain a mystery because I never could bring myself to plea a case against his hope. I remained silent.

Chapter Two

WISDOM

*The sun is shining; it is a new day...
Clouds fill my heart, only words left to say...
God give me the wisdom to understand...
My life is your life, with only one plan...
I reach up to heaven calling out your name...
Oh Lord, be with us through all this change...
Give me the heart to understand...
Give me the wisdom to know your plan...*

IT WAS JUST MY MOM and I now and I could tell she was really lonely and afraid of being without Gilbert. It has been a little over a year and she has started dating. I do not think because she was ready, but I don't think she liked being alone. The change in her had come little by little. I started noticing it after she started dating this man. Although he was sweet on the outside, his insides were tore up from the floor up. He had a very cruel side, which we would learn about later. They dated a few months, and then decided to get married. The memories of Gilbert filled our house and he wanted us to start a new life with him so he suggested we move plus he had a lot of money and I'm sure he wanted a bigger house. So we moved to another house and began our life with this new man, another step dad for me. At first our lives seemed good. We had plenty of money and friends. I was popular at school. I played a lot of

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sports such as volleyball, and basketball, and I was on the track team. All the teachers liked me. Things were good for a while.



I started noticing that there was something strange about my step dad. He had a weird side to him. My mom did not seem very happy. I think she realized that she got married too fast after Gilbert's death, but she was lonely and thought that my step dad could fill that void for her. My Mother started seeing a psychiatrist every week but she just wasn't getting any better. I did not understand how this was happening. Later I found out that my step dad was behind it. He was slowly increasing my mom's medication to get her to do some things she normally would not do. He was sick.

Before long, my mom was in a bad way. She really did not know what was going on most of the time. I don't know if he was black mailing her somehow to stay with him. I am not sure but I knew that my mother had changed in a significant way. It did not take long for our house to be known as the party house. To see my mom so out of it on drugs bothered me. She was whom I counted on and I was losing her due to the choices she was making. The loneliness I felt was unbearable. I went to school and tried to act like everything was great but everyone knew better. They had seen my mom and step dad and they knew everything was far from being great. Things started to get worse. He had my mom committed.

I think my mom wanted to divorce him. I remember talking to him one time and I mentioned that I was scared of bugs, especially June bugs. He took a real interest in the things I feared.



One night as I was getting ready for bed, I shut my door, pulled back the covers, and when I did, I saw a lot of June bugs crawling all over my bed. I screamed and cried. I could not believe he did this to me. I could not imagine what entered his mind to make him do such a thing to a child. I wondered what he was thinking when he was collecting all those bugs. Was he thinking how funny it was going to be, or was he thinking

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how scared I would be, or was he just not thinking. I can tell you this, if you do not have the Lord on your mind and in your heart, Satan can get in. The Bible says, *you are either for me or you are against me*. It is that simple.

I don't know how long my mom was in the mental hospital but I do remember visiting her. I wondered why was she there, because she did not act like any of the other people that I had seen there. I knew that my step dad was behind all of this, but I could not prove it. My mom came home and everything was back to normal.

One evening the phone rang and it was a friend I used to hang around with when my dad was alive. She wanted to know if I could go with her and another friend to an amusement park. I asked my mom and she said sure. The next morning my friend's mom came and got me to take us to the park. It took about 30 minutes to get there. She was going to drop us off and pick us up at closing.

We were so excited to be going to this park. When we got there we paid for our tickets, and I remember making the comment that I wished I had a season pass so I could go anytime I wanted. My friend had one and so did our other friend. We went into the amusement park and we headed straight for the roller coasters, we rode them for a while and decided to go on the other side of the park. As we were walking, I noticed that a man was following us. I told my friend to watch and see if she thought someone was following us. We would walk into stores, look around, and when we would come out he would be there. Everywhere we went he was there. We were only eleven and did not know what to do about it so we stopped and told the security guard. He said he knew him. He was a police officer. So we decided to go ride some more rides and forget about it. A couple of hours went by and finally the man approached us. He wanted to know if we wanted to help catch some bad guys. He showed us his badge and he assured us that it was okay with our parents; he said he already called them. He also said that if we helped them catch these guys they would give us one thousand dollars. Rhonda and the other friend thought about it and said no. I was still thinking about it when he also offered a free season pass. I stood there for a few moments and then decided to help. The police officer told Rhonda and our friend to go ride the rides and we would all meet back there about 5:00 p.m. As I watched

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them walk away I was so excited about helping out and getting paid with a season pass that I did not bother to ask what I would be doing. Moments later the police officer asked what my address was and phone number?

I was puzzled. I said, "You told me you already talked to my mom and she said it was okay for me to help you." He said, "Oh, I know, I am just confirming so I know where to send the check to," and that sounded okay to me. I was only eleven.

We started walking around almost like we were trying to find someone. Every now and again he would go and talk to a security guard. He told me they were working with him and he was checking on information. He seemed real secretive and that scared me. I remember the police officer walking me to a bench and telling me not to move, he had people watching me. He was going to go in the store and he would be right back. It seem like it took forever but he came back with a paper bag and a coke. He sat down and offered me a drink. I took a drink of it and it had a funny taste to it. I was starting to have doubts about what was going to happen. I set the coke on the edge of the bench so it would spill. When it did, he got really upset with me. Then he told me to get up that we needed to walk around so his helpers could get a good look at me so they would know that I was one of the good guys. He was good. He kept me believing that I was really helping the police. Finally, we approached this place that had been abandoned. The attraction had not been working for months. We went across the bars, and threw some trees, down towards a ditch about six feet deep.

The police officer told me to sit down on my knees and he was looking all around from one side to the other. I asked him what he was doing? He said making sure they could see us. I asked, "Who?"

He said, "the people we were helping." Then he opened the bag and pulled out a rope. I just looked at him. He told me what he was going to do. He said he was going to tie my hands behind my back and not to say a word. I knew in this very moment I was going to become another statistic. For the next hour this man used my body for his pleasure then he whispered in my ear, I am going to leave now. You count to 100 and then you can leave. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9 all the way until I reached one hundred.

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As I was kneeling, I realized God had saved me. God was the one untying me. I got up and went looking for this man but the park was closed. I was determined to find him. Why? For the season pass. *Faith of a child*. I still believed in some sick way I was helping the police. It would not be until later that I realized what happened to me. The place was really dark and I was having trouble finding my way to the front gates. It seemed like it took me forever to get where I needed to be. Finally seeing some light, I heard a woman screaming, "Where is she, what has happen to her, are you going to go look for her?" As I got closer, I realized it was my friend's mom. They were standing there with this awful look on their faces crying and crying. I thought they were upset at me for being late.

After some paper work and after I told them what happened to me, I think they offered me a season pass. They did not want any unnecessary attention. It would cause panic and certainly was not good for business. I passed on the season pass. It no longer appealed to me. It no longer held the same value as it once did. The place where I went to, to have fun and be free with my friends where I escaped some of my pain, now was a part of my pain. I found my self with no place to hide, no place to feel safe, no place to escape the reality of my life.

They took me home and explained to my mom what had happened. I went to take the longest shower I'd ever taken and cried as many tears I could bare to cry. I had never felt so dirty as I did that day. I still did not understand really what happened to me. It went through my mind about a thousand times, what I could have done to change what had happened. My mother made an appointment for me to see a psychiatrist. When I was introduced to him all I could think was, Great, another man. *What is he going to do that the others have not already done? What is left of my purity, what is left of my self worth, my youth?* My trust in men by this point was dissipating. I went to him for a while, but I do not think it helped me. He was just another stranger in my world of confusion. My mom and I did not talk about it; it hurt my mom too much. Holding it all in sure had its problems later in life for me. Only God knows how I struggled with the pain. I could not stand to be touch by most men for a long time, especially older men. I always thought someone was watching me and I had a lot of fear. I based many of my decisions on fear, the fear of never being able to trust again.

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I had nightmares every night. All I could think was that this man had my address and phone number. He could come get me if they didn't catch him. Weeks went by. I could hardly keep my mind on anything. I was always looking over my shoulder. One day the phone rang and it was the police. They said they had caught him. I was so relieved. Although the memories of him were horrible, at least I didn't have to be scared that he was going to find me and kill me. The police also said that I was real lucky to be alive that day at the park because this man did this all over the place. Sometimes he would masquerade as a police officer like he did with me or sometimes, he would masquerade as a Superintendent of a school.

The next few months were very hard. I had gone back to school trying to catch up on some of my work. The harder I tried, the worse I felt. I just could not function right. I felt like every one knew and they were looking at me. I felt as if I should be wearing a sign "Innocence gone," "Purity has passed away." I also felt so stupid for believing that man. Every time I look in the mirror I could see him. He was over weight and had a wide nose. He wore his hair parted on the right side he had fat hands. I noticed his hands because I believe I saw a wedding ring, and he was short. I could not take enough showers and I never did feel clean, no matter what I did, or how many showers I took. My mind did not seem right. Even when I was awake I would close my eyes and he would be there just staring at me. The things he did to me literally made me sick to my stomach.

One day when I got home the phone rang. It was the same officer who called when they caught him. He asked to talk to my mom. All I could hear was her saying, "Okay how did this happen?" When she got off the phone she was crying she said, "Sit down, Michele, I have something to tell you." Remember when they called and said that they had caught him? Well, he escaped last night." Then she went on to tell me that the officer said this man was highly intelligent. He had escaped many times. He even had jumped from a helicopter once, but he assured my mom he would be caught again. I went hysterical. I could not believe this was happening. I remember asking God *why*? Why should this man be free? Why should I live in fear of the un-known? Why was my purity taken and then replaced with the fear of death? Many years later after being taught the Word of God I realized we live in a world with Satan and as God has a plan for our

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lives so does Satan. He has come to destroy us and he will use any means to accomplish his purpose including, molesting a child of God.



My mom thought it would be good for me to have a friend over to spend the night, so I invited someone. We were just goofing off having a good time calling my mom. We had two different phone lines in the house. We would call her and say we want a coke, or some chips, and she would laugh. The music was playing loudly. We were dancing and my phone rang. I picked it up and I heard a voice say, "I'm watching you, I know what you're wearing and I'm coming to get you," then the phone went dead. I just stood there. My legs felt like rubber. I could not move.

My friend said, "Who was that on the phone," but before I could answer her I heard a noise outside my window. It was the bushes scraping back and forth. I started screaming, and then my friend started screaming. I flew out of my room and there stood my step dad laughing and laughing. My mom came running from the other side of the house and I told her what had happen. She could not believe his sick mind.

A couple of years had passed and I was in my early teens, starting to like boys and I found one who I thought was a nice guy. He went to my school and his parents were pleasant. We started dating, if you can call it that. We went to the movies together. Our parents would drop us off and pick us up after the movie was over. We held hands to our classroom and I guess you could say we were going steady. We were just like any other teenagers going steady. We broke up and got back together, we went steady off and on for at least a year. I thought I loved him. He was my first kiss, first boyfriend, and first date.

He was a nice guy, but somehow he got involved with drugs. He didn't just do a little here and there and he did not start out slow. Within months he was doing drugs all the time and mostly at my house. His parents would come over looking for him a lot. They would drag him out of our house. He was not getting the drugs there at this time but eventually he would. I tried to tell him that it was changing him, but his desire to get high all the time overwhelmed him. At times I think he really wanted to stop, but he did not know how. His mom and dad put

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him into drug rehab and he would do well for a while until he would get out and get around some of his old friends. Our relationship did not last. The drugs were too important and we were way too young to be getting so involved, but I thought I was in love with him.

My step dad and mom were not getting along and my mom could not take anymore of him, or his perversion. A few months later my mom filed for a divorce. Another chapter in my life closed, only to open a more terrifying one. What lied a head was usually only seen in a fiction movie unless you were living my life.

Chapter Three

MIND BODY AND SOUL

*Take' my pain Lord; I give' it to you...
You are' my strength, knowing just what to do...
Heal my Mind, Body, and Soul,
Complete' me' Lord and make' me' whole...
Hear my plea Lord the' strength I have' none...
I feel Your touch and the' healing began...
Thank You Lord, for hearing my cry.
It's a peaceful feeling knowing You're' by my side...
Life' without you Lord, I do not know...
Thank you, for healing my Mind, Body, and Soul....*

AFTER THE DIVORCE, A FRIEND of my mother started hanging around. He seemed really nice; he was at our house a lot. One day I came home from school and I was all upset. I had ruined my new pants, and he said, "That's okay, lets just go out and get you another pair of pants right now." Of course, I thought he was the greatest person in the world because he solved a pants problem I had. As time went on, I noticed their friendship was turning into something more. He treated me well, and it appeared that he was treating my mom well, too so I thought, "why not?"

The divorce was final and their relationship started to grow. They got married a few months later. All I could think of was that I had another father figure in my life. I prayed that he would not hurt us; I could not bear the thought of my mom getting hurt and taken advantage of again.

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I wondered how he was he going to treat my mom after a few months of marriage and how was he going to treat me? They all started out nice, so I was skeptical.

She was going on her fourth marriage and I wondered how this was going to turn out, and if she really loved him- or was she still searching for her lost love? This man also felt uncomfortable living in another man's house, I assumed, so we had to move again. I think in the divorce settlement the house was supposed to be sold anyway.

They bought a big two-story house on Mammoth Street. Everything was okay. He seemed to love my mom. It did not take long for his real personality to come out. What we were about to be exposed to and what this man was capable of doing could have never been envisioned in the deepest part of our minds. From this point on you are going to know there is a God beyond a shadow of a doubt, and how he came to save the lost.

I did not have a relationship with Jesus, but I knew who he was. I knew He could protect us and that He watched over us. I had revelation of this because of the seeds that were planted in me years before when my mom took us to church, and because of all the prayers our family had been praying for us. *The Word of God will not come back void.* Through out this story I had a lot of unanswered questions, and I would not have the answers for many years to come. I did come to realize God is not responsible for the bad in our lives, but He can turn everything bad into good, to Glorify Him (Gen 50:20.)

It all started a few months after they got married. I started noticing little changes at first; we were having a lot more company coming in and out. Another month or so went by, and I started to see a change in my mom. I noticed she wasn't cognizant. They started doing drugs and selling drugs. I came home from school one day, and they were weighing some marijuana out on the kitchen table and bagging it to get it ready to sell. The sad part of this was that it was going to be sold to some of my friends.

I did not know what to say. Part of me thought it was so cool to have parents who participated in this, and the other part of me knew this could not be right. I knew other families did not live like this at least the ones that I hung around. My step dad introduced heroin to my mom. I do

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not blame my mom for her weaknesses in this area of her life. Satan was pursuing his attack on her. Satan knew my mom would be a powerful woman of God one day, and he wanted to destroy her. He had a strong hold on her that she couldn't break, not alone, not without God, and her mind was being held captive by the powers of this world.

One day I came home from school and he had lost some drug money. He decided to hold us hostage for days until he found the money. When this man got mad his eyes literally turned blood red, which made me even more terrified of him. You knew this was nothing but evil coming from the depths of his soul. I guess he thought my mom or I took it. You could see the drugs were taking over his life his mind and it had literally made him insane.

He did not know God, nor was he ever taught anything, that I knew, about God. It was bad enough that he lost his drug money, but he was also paranoid and was losing control. This went on for what seemed like forever and with every moment that passed he was getting more infuriated. His eyes were getting redder and redder. He started destroying the house in a rage looking for the money and he kept saying, "If I don't find the money someone is going to get hurt."

That someone could have been anyone, someone who came to our door, my mom, me - it just did not matter, he was aggravated by this point anyone was fair game. He thought he knew that we had taken his money and hid it from him. Why he thought we would do this I do not know. The consequences would be far more damaging and not worth the price we would have paid for betraying him.

Later that night I went to bed knowing he was about to explode. He was running out of patience with us. I could hear him talking to my mom, throwing stuff everywhere saying,

"Joni, Where did you put the money?" She was crying, "I did not touch it you had it last." You see, there were so many distractions from being on the drugs that neither one of them could remember where it was.

No one bothered telling me where it was hidden so I did not know either. GOD knew where it was therefore I called on him. *I was sure God could hear me so I started praying. 'Dear God, please help him find that money please lead him to the place where the money is. Oh Lord, I am so afraid he is going to kill us tonight in his rage. Tell him Lord where the*

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money is. A definite *Faith Builder* in my life. I fell asleep after that prayer believing God would help us.

The next morning he was still walking around with fury in his eyes. He was a little more alert now but still angry. My mom was asleep on the couch. My step dad looked really bad. He had not slept for a couple of days so not only were the drugs affecting him but the lack of sleep as well. I remember watching him pace the floors as he joined forces with the devil in a complete attack on my mom and me. He was so close to losing control. He owed the money to his drug connection and those guys do not mess around if you owe them and can't pay. You can lose a finger, a hand, or worse, your life or someone you love.

All of a sudden he took off up stairs and every thing was silent for a while then I heard him yell, "I found the money. I found the money!" I thanked God, and at that moment I knew he was there for me. He came running down the stairs with the 25,000.00 dollars and he said, "I must have stuck it in the Bible to hide it."

I knew that God was on my side from then on, no matter what else happened. There is a scripture that says: Matthew 9:29 *According to your faith will it be done to you.* I was just a kid, but I knew God was there and he could hear me. If he could hear me he could help me. When mom realized what had happened, she pulled herself together and we started trying to clean up the mess. He went about his business as though nothing ever happened. That was how he handled everything. He could beat you into a coma and then come see you in the hospital like someone else did it. He had no conscience.

My mom was starting to look bad. Mom had been weak ever since my step dad died. She really had not cared about anything except me. It was not hard for her to get involved with the wrong people. She just did not have any interest in her own happiness. In some strange way I think she thought she deserved all of this.

A month or two had gone by and at this point my mom was not well. I think he had finally taken over her mind, body, and soul. He decided they needed to go on a drug run to Mexico. When I got home from school

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that day there was a letter saying, “We had to leave for a few days here’s a little money, see you soon.”



I could not describe to you how I felt at that moment. The feelings of abandonment, and loneliness were overwhelming. I was scared he would take my mom and kill her, and then come back for me or just never come back. During this time, I wondered what was the purpose for any of this and I started wondering *where' was my God?* Days passed and I was still alone, and running out of money. I could not understand why they had not come back. I started having all kinds of bad visions of what could be happening. I did the only thing I knew, I started praying for God to bring my mom back.

There was a knock at the door. I opened it and it was a boy from my school. He had come by to check on me, so I invited him in and I was so happy to see someone. I offered him something to drink and we sat down and started to talk. He was a surfer guy and they did not do drugs. I don't know how we got on the subject but we started talking about marijuana, cocaine, and how stupid it was to mess with it. I did not want him to know that I had tried marijuana a few times and some downers on occasion. I certainly did not want him to know about my mom and step dad dealing it. I went on and on how stupid it was and how I would never do it. I lied to him because I wanted that to be the truth. I desired for that to be my truth, my life, my reality, but desire alone does not make it real.

As we were sitting there talking about surfing and going to the beach, He ask me if I would be interested in going out with him some time. I said, “Yes”, and then I heard a key in the door. It was my mom and my step dad; I'll never forget the look on this guy's face when they came in.

My mom had a sleeveless shirt, revealing track marks up and down her arms; she was so gaunt she could not even talk, and barely walk. At this point I did not bother to introduce him, I knew he would not be back. He left, and my prayer was answered. Although I did not like how my mom looked, I did thank God for returning her. This was not my mom. This was my mom after Satan had his way with her. My mom's basic personality was not like this at all.

Mark 11:25 *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*



Found in Matthew 7:7 Ask and it will be given to you; Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.



Over the next few months my mom stayed drugged. That's the way he liked it so he could have complete control over her and every thing she did. I believe he was shooting my mom with drugs so she would not know what he was doing. I tried talking to her but she did not understand. She slurred her words so I could not understand her. My mom looked so pitiful, like a hurt puppy left to die on the side of the road. All of her emotions were drained her body was alive but her mind was distant. I could not see any life in her at all. He had taken that away. When drugs enter into your life, you usually start doing them to escape something. It does not take long for them to get hold of you and wrap the powers of it, along with your dignity, into a ball of master confusion. It will have you doing things you would never other wise do without being under the influence. What Satan wants, is to get you to a point of destruction. Ironically what you are trying to escape only leaves you adding yet another thing to escape from, the drug addition. *The only power the devil has on you is the power you give him.*

One day I was sitting in class trying to act like every thing was normal. I heard a voice yelling my name. It was my mom. Somehow she made it to the school and she was roaming the halls looking for me. I just sat there hoping nobody would know who I was. Several minutes later a teacher came into the room and everyone turned around to see whom she was going to get. Of course I knew who it was. You could have heard a pen drop when I heard her say, "Michele, your mother is out in the hall and she needs to talk to you." Everyone just stared at me. I was thinking, *whoever does not know whom my mom is surly does now.*

I went out in the hall and found her leaned against a wall, drugged and trying to talk to me. I tried to help her but I could not understand

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what she was trying to say, and I finally got a teacher and they took her away. As I watch my mother being escorted out of the building I realized for the first time I was alone.

Later they told me they tried to help her but she just took off. I was popular back then. I had a lot of friends but that day the rumors began, and I wasn't popular anymore. When I got home my mom was so out of it she thought I had skipped school and in her mind that is why she was at the school. She said she could not find me. Then she grabbed a belt and started swinging it at me chasing me around the house. I made it out and ran down the street to a police officer's house and she followed me yelling, "Put her away, put her away, she skips school and she does not listen to me."

The officer looked at me and asked if I had a place I could stay for the night until she sobered. I thought *he doesn't have a clue how bad things really are*. It was amazing to me the police man lived right down the street from me and he never noticed anything unusual about our house. The cars coming and going, the unusual hours the house lights were on, the strange characters entering, leaving, and staying. The gunshots, the people jumping out of the up stairs window trying to escape their lives and what they have become. Sometimes it's what we see we cannot believe, not what we cannot see.

Chapter Four

HANG ON

*As I look to the mountains,
It's evident to me where my Lord is, is where I want to be...
This is my spirit with angel wings,
Going to the mountains, to see what he brings...
Throwing me the rope saying,
Hang on; I'm pulling you up, for I am strong... Trust in me; I know what
to do, your life is sacred, I can catch you... In all your troubles I was there;
throwing you the rope, because I cared.*

Thank You Lord, your daughter Michele

I DID FIND SOMEWHERE TO STAY that night it was at a good friend's house. I came in and sat down and started to cry. I told my friend's mother everything that night. My friend and her family lived in my old neighborhood. My friend and I went back a few years. We were tomboys together. We were also best friends when we were six. I met her when my mom and Gilbert got married. (The dad who died in a dune buggy accident.) We lived on the same street.

My friend's mother asked me if I wanted to stay with them for a while. I thought about it and decided it would be a good idea. The next day I went back to talk to my mom and she agreed. I think she knew that I needed a break from it all. You know, she did not even remember the day before or why I was not there the night before and I didn't tell her.

Mark 11:25 *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*

I believe I changed schools when I moved in with my friend's family. They made me feel as comfortable as they could. I missed my mom and I worried a lot about her safety. Days would go by and I would wonder if she was alive. I worried about my step dad and the control he would have on my mom now that I was not there. He beat her a lot while I was there, and I can only imagine what he was doing while I wasn't. Every night I would pray, *Please Lord keep my mom safe*. I know he was listening and I know the angels were with her. This was another *faith builder* in my life where I needed to trust God to be God. I saw her off and on while I was at my friend's house and I had to have faith not to go on what I could see but what I knew and I knew God was watching over her. Back then I did not know that was called *walking by faith*.

School was going good. I liked having a stable home to come home to. It was a good feeling to have a place to do my homework and it was real nice having someone to talk to. One night, after dinner, my friend's mother wanted to take us to Gilley's to watch people ride the bull, and dance. We got all dressed up and did our hair. On the way there I was thinking how great this was. We opened the door of Gilley's and the place was packed. Everyone was dancing to live music and the place was filled with lots of cowboys and cigarette smoke. I had taken up smoking at this point in my life because I thought it was cool. We all sat down and ordered some Shirley Temples and waited for some boys to come ask us to dance. They did and we had such a good time. On the way home I thanked my friend's mom for taking us out and I let her know how much I appreciated her and everything she was doing for my family and me.

After we got home we talked about our evening and then went to bed. We had been asleep for about one hour when the phone rang. My friend's mom answered the phone and came got me. When I woke up, the look on her face told me something was wrong. She handed me the phone. It was my mom. She said, "Michele, something has happened to Richard. He has been in a car wreck and they don't know if he is going to make it. I'll be right there. We have to leave tonight to get to Corpus." I just sat there. I did not want to believe her.

My friend's mother started packing some of my stuff. I heard a knock at the door and the lady I was staying with answered it, it was my mom

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and my step dad, “Can we come in?” She said, “Michele, we just got a phone call from your real dad and your brother did not make it.”

Silence filled the room and I began to cry. “Are you sure?” “Yes, we need to go now so get some of your things together.” My friend’s mom helped me. I gave her a hug and I left. It was the longest, quietest, ride I had ever been on. The silence hung in the air like a piñata hangs waiting for its cue to burst. It was like everyone wanted to say something but something was not sufficient to say. We were all thinking it, we were all contemplating our thoughts we were all in submission to the silence that had taken our own ability to vibrate our vocal cords to words. What was left unspoken was never to be discussed.

We knocked on my real dad’s door and everyone was there crying and in shock. Of course my mom wanted to know how it happened and where it happened and where the body was, and what the doctors say he died from, so my dad sat her down and told her everything.

“Joni, He said, “Richard was in a bar trying to sell a small bag of marijuana when the owner realized what he was doing. He told Richard to stay there because he was going to call the police. Richard panicked and ran out the door with his friend. They jumped into Richard’s car, a Volkswagen, and were headed back home. About a mile from the house there was a sharp corner. Richard was going about 60 miles per hour and he did not slow down. When he tried to turn, the car flipped over threw Richard out, and the car landed on him. The friend got the car off of him and told Richard he was going to get some help.”

Richard said, “Please don’t leave me,” but the friend did leave to get some help. It was the police, and they knew Richard. He had been in trouble before. “The police officer approached him and Richard said, “I’m okay, I just want to go home”. The police officer said, “Get up, Richard, you’re going to jail.” Richard tried and tried but he could not and then they realized that he must really be hurt. By this time minutes had passed and they finally called for an ambulance. On the way to the hospital they lost him but revived him.”

When they got to the emergency room they worked on him pumping 9 pints of blood into him but he was too high to fight back and he died that night. Satan comes to kill, steal, and destroy. He deceives you into thinking his way of life is more fun, more exciting, and that you will be more popular, but

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what he does not tell you is that you could die living his kind of life. Choices are for the living. It doesn't matter what you chose after your death.

My dad told my mom how sorry he was and they cried. I do not believe God took my brother that night. I believe the devil was allowed to by the choices my brother made. Richard was a great young man who just got off on the wrong road. *Matthew 7:13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life; and few find it.* It is also found in Luke 13:24 I believe the gate is small and the road is narrow because the choices are few if you want to travel the road of righteousness.



On the day of the funeral there were people from everywhere. Some of Richard's girlfriends brought me some things to put in the coffin. A lot of his friends were there and you could see their pain. You could also see the look of fear on their faces because they knew it could have been any one of them.

We went back to dad's house. We were getting ready to go and stay the last night with my grandma. We were sitting around the kitchen table all talking about Richard and someone said to one of our cousins, "You are going to have to take the place of being a big brother now that Richard is no longer here." I thought to myself, "how can any one take the place of another, it is their place once it is empty no one can fill the void except God?"



I went into his room and sat on his bed. I started looking around and ran across this medallion I had ordered out of a magazine one time to put a spell on my ex-boyfriend to make him fall back in love with me. I got it through a witchcraft magazine. It makes sense to me; manipulation is a form of witchcraft, which was what I wanted to do, manipulate my boyfriend to love me again.

Sometimes as believers this is what we try to do except we use the Word of God to try to manipulate our situation. We try to make the

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Word say what we want the Word to say instead of what it really says. Anyway, the medallion was stuff way back into his dresser. I came out of the room and I was really upset I needed to talk to my mom but not in front of everybody so I waited until it was time to go.

We went to the car and when everyone was in I showed it to my mom and told her the story behind it. I said, "Do you think this could have had anything to do with Richard's death. What if the medallion had witch powers?" My mom said, "No, it does not." It did not have power over my brother's death, but we need to know that witchcraft does come with the powers of Satan. It is never a good idea to play around with evil powers. This is what God's Word says about it:



Leviticus 19:31 "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God.



John 3:20 "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes onto light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."



My step dad wanted to see it, so I handed it to him. He was looking at it holding it tight in his hand, then he started screaming, "It's burning me, it's burning me!" He slammed on the brakes, jumped out of the car and hung it on a tree. When he got back in the car he said, "It was evil." I think evil recognizes evil.

We all went back to our lives the way we had known them before the accident except death was more prominent in the soul. Life had very little meaning for the mother who had buried her son. I knew then that God could hear my prayers and answer them. I had peace from that but now my mom only had me left and unfortunately the pain for her was more than she could bear, sober or otherwise. She went back to the drugs and alcohol.

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My step dad had such a strong hold on my mom by now in getting her addicted to heroin and other forms of drugs. I had started losing hope of ever regaining her. He also believed in beating her regularly, sometimes beyond recognition. I can't tell you how many times she was in the hospital because of the beatings she had to endure. Every bone in her face at one time or the other had been broken and some of them twice, her nose a lot more than I could count. I don't remember if her limbs were ever broken but maybe dislocated. He always went for her face. He said he would disfigure her one-day, and he was trying real hard to keep his word. Every day there was some kind of physical or mental abuse in our lives. The drug deals were getting out of hand and dangerous as well.



I remember one night we had some of my friends over and everyone was partying. I was tired of fighting the battle of being straight so I became the cliché, *if you can't beat them join them*. Everyone was doing some kind of drugs, downers, smoking marijuana, and shooting up- so I decided to try downers. For the next year or so I messed around with drugs. I mostly stayed sober, but at times I would want to escape the pain of my reality. The reality of living in a drug zone marked for disaster.

One night I woke up in so much physical pain I crawled to my mom and step dad's room and woke them up. They took me to the hospital. I had been complaining for days that my side hurt, and my insides hurt, but with the confusion of drugs and the alcohol it was dismissed. We finally got to the hospital and I was admitted with toxic syndrome. The doctor scolded my mother and said, "If she would have waited until morning I would have been dead". I stayed there about a week or so. God saved my life once again.



Thinking back on it now, that was a blessing in my life' because' it gave me' time' to rest for a few days. I loved' my mother and I wanted' to help her, but I was young and I didn't know what to do. I don't blame' her. I don't even blame' the' drugs. I blame' Satan and the' evil influence' he' tries to use' on people' when they are' in a vulnerable'

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state. He' came' to destroy and that is what he' was trying to do to my mom and me.

I finally arrived home' and I want you to know God is a good God. I'm not saying this because' of what was going on -- I'm saying this because he' was saving me. His word says he' came' to save' the' lost, and I was definitely lost. I did not know if anyone' knew what was going on or if they even cared. We' needed' to get out of there.

What happened' next is a fine' example' of how the' devil can use' you for his evil if you don't know who you are' in Christ. I believe he' used' my step dad to do this very thing.



One day, like any other day, I got up and got ready for school trying to act like my house and my life were like every other kid's. I invited a good friend to come over after school. I had to convince her mother that everything was okay and safe. She was reluctant but she let her daughter come home with me anyway. As we were walking to the house, I had a bad feeling. The closer we got to my house the worse I felt. We approached the front door, and I opened it and looked in. I saw blood everywhere. All over the walls, on the floor, up the stair railing smeared and dripping with horror.

I begged my friend to stay and help me find my mother. She was so frightened but she stayed with me and we slowly walked all around downstairs yelling for my mom, but there was no answer. Finally, working up our courage, we began to walk up the stairs. Step by step I knew I was getting closer to the truth. *What was behind all the' blood in the' house?* I couldn't hear anything. The house was more subdued than I had ever heard it. After all, this was the house people came to either buy drugs or use them. Noise was just a natural part of it. We kept walking up the stairs. We were at the top now and I noticed all of the doors were shut and had blood all over them, even more than downstairs. I went to the spare room first and slowly opened the door only to find more blood.

The house looked like someone had been mutilated there. I had never seen that much blood and I had never been so frightened thinking, *"Who did this, is my mom still alive; are the' people' who did this still here' waiting*

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for me' to open the' right door?" The bathroom door was half open with blood on the outside, so I pushed it the rest of the way and found the walls covered and the sink saturated. I looked into the mirror and could not even see my reflection. Finally, I went to my mother's room crying as quietly as I could, praying to God to let her be in there and okay, but from the looks of the house the possibilities didn't seem real.

Unlike all the other doors, this one was not only closed but locked as well so I couldn't open it. With my heart racing and fearing the unknown, I started knocking quietly at first whispering, "Mom are you in there?" No answer. I got a little louder, but still there was no answer. It was silent and a million scenarios had crossed through my mind, none of them, which were good or even acceptable, my friend was terrified. We did not know what to expect. I began to holler, "Mom, open the door if you're in there." Still no answer. "Please, Mom, I'm scared. Open the door."

Then finally the door opened slowly, squeaking the whole way. There stood my beautiful mother, 5'4 about 90 pounds, wearing the whites of her eyes-- this was the only part of her that was not covered in blood. Not knowing what had happened, I just stood there. I could not move. I asked her, "What happened?" "Who did this to you?" She did not answer; she just stood there. I was saying, "Mom, do you know what's going on?" "Why do you have blood all over you?" She was in shock and could not speak. She just stood there empty, scared, and strung out. I rushed downstairs to call my grandma. I told her what had happened and she was on the next flight out. I walked my friend out, told her, "Thank You for staying," and at that moment I knew she would never be back. I also new she left my house being a little bit more grateful for her life and her parents.

I rushed back up stairs to my mom to see how bad her injuries were. She was just lying there in her own blood, in a daze. I tried to get closer to her, but she was so frightened and completely out of it I don't even know if she knew who I was. She let me help her out of what I found out later was a white T-shirt and what I witness next I could hardly believe. There were cigarette burns embedded in her breast. The tip of her baby finger had been shot off. The bruises on my mom's body were worse than I've ever seen on her. I decided to wash her face and underneath the blood was a broken nose, two black eyes, busted lip and cuts all over her face.

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I only knew she was my mother by the color of her hair and her frame. Also, she looked at me when I called her mom. I sat with her for hours until my grandma got there late that night.

We kept asking her, "Where is he, did he do this to you?" But she kept saying "No," He's gone fishing with some friends." *How convenient*, I thought. My grandma and I talked and decided either she did this to herself in a cry for help or he had done this to her. Grandma called a doctor to come look at my mom. That night I bonded to my grandma forever in a way that could only be understood by the spirit. I had a special piece of her heart, and she had a special piece of mine. The doctor came out of Mom's room and said, "There was no way she could have caused these injuries." Grandma and I went back up the stairs to ask mom who did this to her. To our horror, she started to tell us what had happened. A drug deal went bad and they owed some money. They had a limited time to pay it back and their time was up. The men came looking for my step dad and found my mom. They broke in, and beat her then burnt her with cigarettes. I'm not sure if they raped her. They shot her, and dragged her all over the house and beat her with a baseball bat up and down her legs. Then they left her there to die. We wanted to call the police, or at least admit her to the hospital, but she refused. Grandma stayed a little longer. My step dad finally returned. He acted so surprised about what had happened and was nice to everyone but I knew he was behind it all. If he did not do this he was still responsible for the damage, for the broken lives, for the broken promises.

Peace had filled the house while my grandma was there and we were safe for a little while. The day was coming too soon when my special angel had to leave again, but not without putting food in the icebox and hope back in our hearts. As soon as grandma was gone, the life I knew was back and I cannot possibly tell you all the nights I laid awake in fear. Fear of what could happen, fear of what was happening. I know now the drugs controlled my mom so I was trying not to blame her for staying in such an awful environment. You see I couldn't leave because I couldn't leave my mom there alone with him. After she lost my dad and now my brother, I was getting scared that she was going to give up. She had tried to kill herself many times, once with slitting her wrist and later with a drug overdoses.

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I remember one time visiting her in the hospital after one of these times and she looked so sad. I remember begging her not to leave me. I understood she had lost a husband and a son, but I remember telling her, "Mom I'm still here." I think that made all the difference in her will to fight back. Also, I do believe he would have killed her if I had not been there. He could see the look in my eyes when he would abuse her and somewhere I think he had some compassion for me. He knew she was all I had left. I hardly knew my real dad and my other dad who raised me (Gilbert) was dead and so was my brother. I don't know if he had mercy on me but I do know that God did.

Chapter Five

WITH THESE EYES

*With these eyes, I have seen some things...
Some were my hopes, and some were my dreams...
With these eyes, I have felt some pain, not for what I have lost but for
what I have gained...
With these eyes, I have cried some tears,
Some for my dreams some for my fears...
With these eyes, I have praised your name, some for the sorrow, some for
the pain...
With these eyes I am forever changed...*

I PRAYED EVERY NIGHT FOR GOD to save us. That day was coming. My step dad lost the house to drugs and he was in bad shape. Only God knows how he kept us safe. We found an apartment and my step dad straightened up for about six weeks. I was getting ready to go out with my new boyfriend and I noticed that my step dad had bought a bottle of whiskey. The deal was, no alcohol or drugs. My mom assured me everything would be okay so I went out. Later that night I felt like something was wrong, that my mom needed me, so I called home and the phone rang and rang. Finally someone picked up whispering, "Help me," please "help me." It was my mom. After I hung up I asked my boyfriend to take me home. I told him that there was a problem.

As soon as I got out of the car I ran to the apartment and knocked on the door. I waited and waited for the door to open. There he was, lying in

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the middle of the glass coffee table. His eyes were red; his body just shook. Mom said he started talking about the devil and death and all kinds of crazy stuff. Then he flew straight up in the air and landed on the coffee table. Mom said to call the police and have both of them arrested. When we got the apartment mom said to put it in my name so if there was ever a problem it was in my name. I called the police and I had them arrested for public intoxication. The next day I was wondering how I was going to get my mom out of jail. I thought about pawning something but we did not have anything, everything worth pawning was already gone. I decided to go for a walk to think about things and what I was going to do.

I came back mid- afternoon, stuck the key in the door, and heard a loud bang. "Get away from the door if you don't want to die." It was my step dad. He had gotten out and come back. I went to get the police. We started back to the apartment. They got him out and realized that he had wired the door so whoever opened it would get electrocuted. He had cut the iron cord off and plugged it in. He put some water above the door so whoever opened it would get shocked. He was taken to jail and my mom got out. Several days later he got out and came back. Of course everything was fine for a while, until he got mad again. We were safe as long as we agreed with him, as long as we complied with his suggestions, as long as we were sympathetic to his anger, everything was fine.

My mom and step dad had another fight and she decided that we were going to move without him and we did move, to an efficiency one bedroom apartment. I slept on the couch in the living room. I would have slept on the street to get away from him. It was very small but my step dad was not there so it did not matter to me. I was happy. Mom and I had part-time jobs and everything was going well. We worked in a clothing store next door to each other.

As the months went by, it was getting harder for me to go to school. I remember a time I had gotten up for school and found my mom crying. I asked her, "What is wrong?" She said she had burnt the last piece of bread and she didn't have anything else for me to eat for breakfast. I hugged her and told her it was O.K. and then I left. When I came home I realized the only thing in the cupboards was a can of creamed corn. My mom called my grandma and she was on the next flight out to come see us. When grandma got there, she filled the cabinets with plenty of food,

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and once again, our hearts with hope. My grandma had a way of making you feel that the moment you were in was the only moment that matter. Her presence made you intensely observant of God and His presence. Grandma stayed for a few days and paid some of the bills and then she had to return home. She asked me several times to come with her but I just could not leave my mom.

I know my grandmother prayed hard, and I know she worried. Mom seemed to be doing good now, she had even started to date again and I thought we were going to be O.K. My mother and I went out one night and when we came home we noticed that one of our windows had been broken and we knew that it was my step dad. We opened the front door and the apartment was ransacked. All of our clothes had the private areas cut out of them and our only bottle of perfume had milk poured into it. My mom and I were really upset. This time we called the police and had a restraining order put out on him. We both worked at a clothing store, so getting something to wear was not a problem.

As time went on, we eventually got our lives back in order. I was trying to forget all about my old life with that man and it was working until I came home one evening and found him and my mother sitting on the couch holding hands and wanting to talk to me. I did not want to hear a word they had to say and further more I could not believe what I was seeing. I was really hurting because I thought my mother was going to keep this man out of our lives. This man and my mother were very persistent in making me listen to what they had to say and what they had to say was how much he had changed and things were going to be different. Drugs and alcohol were not going to be in his life anymore. I was only about fourteen years old at this time and I could not support myself so I did not know what to do.

I accepted what they told me and then we packed and moved; not only to another apartment, but also to another school. We moved in and everything was fine for a while. I had my own bedroom. This apartment was a lot bigger than the last one. Mom seemed real happy and everyone seemed to be keeping his or her promises. This guy and I, whom I began dating again, were getting pretty serious. Life did not look so bleak anymore. One evening my boyfriend and I came home to find my step dad cleaning his pistol on the couch. I asked him what he was doing and

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he said, "Someone is going to die tonight." My step dad and my mother were high and he was upset with my mother about something that had happened earlier at the bowling alley. To this day I do not know exactly what happened to make him so angry. It wasn't abnormal for him to be in a rage.

One time he sat across from our apartment and shot my car full of holes. He came just inches from puncturing the gas tank, knowing that my mother and I were about to get in the car and leave. So being in this state of mind, once again, wasn't out of character for him. My mother came walking in and he started beating her like a punching bag. I ran over to help her and he picked me up and threw me across the room. My boyfriend then tried to assist in helping my mother and me. My step dad told him if he takes another step he would shoot and kill him. So with him having the pistol and being in full control we had to just watch him beat my mother. Once he was done beating her we were told to sit on the couch. My mother signaled to my boyfriend and me to be patient and then we could escape once he passes out.

Well, It was hours of torture just sitting there with him and his pistol. He pointed it repeatedly, putting the bullets in, spinning the cylinder, and then pulling the trigger. The pistol never fired, thank God, but he just kept repeating this process finally passed out. We thought he had fallen asleep so we slowly inched off the couch. We got to the top of the stairs there were about 15 leading to the front door and then we heard a voice, "Don't move or I will kill you." Then we heard the sound of the trigger going "Click" but the pistol did not fire. Once we heard "click" we ran down the stairs towards the door. I had some *faith builders* in my life and I knew Jesus was there and he had other plans for my life so we ran out the door and left without looking back. We went straight to the bowling alley to get a police officer.

On the way back to my house I told him the story. When we got there, my mom had cleaned up and answered the door. The officer asked if everything was all right, my mom said yes, and she said she did not know what I was talking about. At this point, I did not have a choice. I left her there. Later I found out he was holding a gun to her head and told her not to say anything or he would kill her and then kill everyone else. She did the only thing she knew to do and that was to save everyone else. I left for the

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night and realized I had some decisions to make. I stayed awake most of the night wondering what would happen if I went back, and where it was that I could go. Then the answer came to me. My boyfriend said, "Do you want to stay with me for a while?" I thought anything would be better than this situation. Little did I know the hidden secrets of my boyfriend's life?

In the beginning this man was nice. He treated me better than most of the other guys because he was much older. I think I started noticing something was not right when he started telling me what to wear, and how to wear my make-up. He really did not like me wearing make-up at all. I thought he was just picky about how he wanted me to look. He started to tell me I could not leave the apartment when he was gone, except to go to school. I was still trying to get my high school diploma. I did not know how bad things were until one night when he came home. I was lying on the couch. He said, "Get up and fix me something to eat." I just looked at him. He got me by my hair and yanked me off the couch and threw me in the kitchen against the counter and said, "I said fix me something to eat now."

After I made him some dinner, I put it on the table. He got mad about something else and tipped the table over with his food on it. I was so scared I was crying. He said, "Shut up," and grabbed me by my hair again and made me clean up the mess. I did exactly what he told me to do because living with him was bad but living with my step dad was worse.

The next day he would apologize and I would forgive him until the next time. I knew as long as I was with this man there would be a next time. Each day got worse for me. He seemed to be getting meaner. I knew I had chosen the wrong road to be on but I was determined to make my own decisions. One day he came home and everything was fine. He decided I was not acting right. He thought I went out that day when he wasn't home, and I did. My mom had given me a dog for my birthday before she and my step dad moved to Corpus Christi, and the dog needed food.



He found this out and I got punished for leaving the apartment without him. This was not the first time this had happened. He liked to punish me when he thought I was not behaving the way he wanted me to.

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Another thing he liked to do was to get on top of me and pin me down so I could not move. He would hold me down and scream at me, gritting his teeth and calling me names. I tried to fight back one night and I still have the scar from it.

My nightmare with him did not seem real. It didn't seem like this could be happening. I could not believe I had made such a bad decision. Every time this would happen he would apologize. I do not know how long I lived like this. I know he kept me prisoner in that apartment. I could not have any friends, couldn't wear make-up; and all my clothes were picked out for me. I was not allowed out without him. I couldn't even answer the phone. He would tell me, "If it rings twice it's me and then I'll call right back. Then you can answer it."

Just for fun one time he hand-cuffed me to the bedroom door just to see me humiliated he thought it was funny to scare me and torment me. When we went on trips he would never stop to let me go the ladies room, he would say, "If you really need to go, "Go in your pants." He had to have all the power in this relationship.

Any time he would go out I was not allowed to ask where he was going, and most of the time he was going to the bars. He was pretty safe there because I was not old enough to get in. He was scared that I would have other relations because that was what he was doing. I did catch him a few times and he was furious. I just gave up and did what he said.



I accepted this as part of my life and I tried to be at peace with it. I would tell myself it could be worse. He could beat me every day or never come home or kick me out so in a way I was lucky. I had a place to stay. I listen to the fiery lies that came shooting straight from hell into my ears. I made the decision to stay. Choices are for the living. Satan only has the power we allow him to have.

The phone rang one day and it was he. He said, "Get ready, we are going to Las Vegas with my dad's company." He got home that night and we went out shopping to buy him some new clothes for the trip. I tried to tell him I needed some things but he said, "I was fine." I was wondering if anyone in the department stores knew how he was abusing me or how I

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felt so ashamed. Could they see it on my face? Could they hear it in my voice? Could they save me from the grave I have dug?

About two days later, we left for Las Vegas. We checked in at the Hilton and everything was going just fine. He had told me that his dad wanted him to marry me while we were there. I just looked at him and wondered how this weekend would turn out. The first night went good. We ate, he played some poker, and I was under age so I couldn't. The next morning we got up went to eat breakfast and then he had to go to meetings and told me to go to the room and don't leave. I did what he said in fear of making a scene.

Five o'clock came around and he came walking in telling me to get ready we were going to eat and to go get married. I took a shower and started to get dressed. He said, "No, you can't wear that. I want you to wear this." He left and told me to meet him downstairs in 15 minutes. I thought about what he picked out and it was ugly and I was not going to get married in that.

I got on the elevator and went down to the lobby. The door opened and I walked out. I started to look around and I saw him and he grabbed my arm and showed me to the table. I could tell he was very angry and I would pay for not wearing what he said to wear. We ate and a lady came by to take pictures. He wanted our picture taken. After we had eaten, he told me we were going to go up stairs to our room because I did not deserve to go out and he did not want to marry me until I could learn how to obey him.

The whole time we were waiting for the elevator, I was wondering what he was going to do to me. As we got closer to our room, my heart was racing. I was a lot more scared here than anywhere because we did not know very many people. I did not know anyone. He could have killed me and no one would know. It's sad, but I would have not been missed for a while. We made it to the door. All I want to reveal about this guy is he had a lot of anger which he diligently took out on me every chance he had. He hurt me more mentally than he did physically. How does the old saying go? "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, and this is where I chose to leave the pain and pick up the cross of forgiveness?" Finally, It was morning and he got up, and said, "Are you ever going to act like that again?" "I said, "No."

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Then he said, "Let's go get something to eat." I knew from that moment on I was going to get away from him somehow. I prayed for him to let me go. The chances of this were unlikely without being hurt. A *faith builder*. I had to put my trust in God. At times in my life when I had tried everything in my own power, and nothing worked, that was when I would go to God. I did not know enough then to go to him first.

On the way back home, somehow I convinced him to let me call my real dad. When I got him on the phone I asked him to come get me, and he said he would. When I got off, I told this guy that my dad was coming to get me. My dad arrived about 3 o'clock in the morning and we left.

I looked across the street as we were leaving and there he stood watching me leave. My dad asked a lot of questions on the way to his house outside of Corpus Christi. I did not have many answers that I wanted to talk about, at least not right then. I was just so happy to be away from that man and the mental and physical abuse. We got there about 9 am, got unloaded, and showered. My dad lived in a trailer with my step mom and sister. I liked it there. I settled in and got a job at a western store. Dad and I seemed to be getting along pretty well.

I was a little bit hesitant with him. When my brother was alive he said dad had a bad temper and you never knew when it would come out.

One night a guy I knew back in Pasadena called. My dad said, "Dinner is ready." I said, "I'll be right there." I was finishing the phone call and he said again, "Dinner is ready."

I said, "Okay!" I got off the phone and walked into the kitchen and my dad started screaming calling me names and said I didn't appreciate them or the food that they were giving me. I knew from what my mom had told me and from what I had seen that my dad was abusive when I was young, but I did not know he still was. My step mom got my stepsister and they went to lock themselves in the bathroom. I knew something was going to happen, and sure enough my dad picked up the kitchen chair and launched it at me. He then threw a half a bottle of wine, bellowing mean horrible things to me I got so upset I ran out of the trailer to the front yard and started throwing up. You know I'm not even sure if it was because he scared me so bad. I had seen worse, and even been in worse. I think it was that I had just had enough of the psychological, mental and physical pain in my life. I had been broken, verbally abused, laugh at,

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mocked, sexually assaulted, hand cuffed, spit on, kicked, thrown, pushed, hit, used, and now I have had enough it was making me physically sick. My mind had been painted the color of pain. I could not erase what had happen to me. I needed the paintbrush of God to paint me healed to paint me the color of righteousness. I needed to be healed.



The next morning I woke up and Dad and I talked. He told me that I reminded him a lot of my mother and he said he never got over her. Also that he loved me, but he did not like me at all because I reminded him of my mom. I can't tell you how that hurt me. He did not even know me. He was judging me on what he thought I was like. I called my grandma and asked if I could live with her, and she said, "Yes." I knew that she and my grandpa went to my Aunt Linda's church. At this point, I was mad at God and didn't want anything to do with a God who let so many things happen to me. I told my grandma that I wanted to live with her, but asked her not to ask me to go to church. She agreed and even understood. The *faith builders* in my life would be put on hold for a while. Even though God had answered all my prayers, I still did not understand why all this things had to keep happening. I was not happy at all.



Back then I was losing my faith in God and everyone around me. Also, while I was living at my dad's or staying with my mom briefly, I went to a going-away party. It was for my aunt and my uncle. They were going to Yuma Arizona, the next morning. They had tried moving to a small town to be closer to family but they did not like it so everyone was giving them a going-away party. Early in the evening everyone was drinking a lot, joking, singing, dancing having a good time. My mom was there with my step dad and my other aunts and uncles and cousins. The whole family was there to say their good-byes.

The night went on and it was getting into the wee hours and they had to leave the next day. Every one was getting ready to go. They were putting on jackets and wishing them well and my aunt said, "Why don't

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you stay, Michele.” I stayed. I adored my aunt. I thought she hung the moon; I wanted to be just like her. We stayed up for a minute and visited then we went to bed. I didn’t have my pajamas so my aunt let me borrow a long nightshirt of hers. I was thinking, *“This is cool.” I’ll be the last one to see them off.* I got snuggled down in the sheets and went to sleep.

Sometime during the night, I was awakened with a man putting his hands all over me. I opened my mouth to scream and he covered it. I tried to push him away but he held me tighter. I was struggling to see and then I heard a voice. “Be still and be quiet.” It was my uncle’s voice. I could not believe this. I was wondering where my aunt was, and why my uncle was in here doing this to me. There was nothing I could do because he was so much stronger.

I began to wonder if God could hear me- I knew He could, and I knew He could see me, but why did He let all this go on in my life? Why me? Why not me? We live in a world where sin lives. At one point in my life I found the grace to forgive because I was willing to put myself in the victimizers shoes. I asked myself one question and the question was, “What did someone do to them that caused them to want to hurt me so bad?” In other words their pain became my pain.

I did not tell anyone for a while. I felt so guilty, like I did something wrong. I pictured that night in my head over and over and wondered - *what did I do to make my uncle think that I wanted him to do that?* I even thought that my aunt might have known what he was doing to me and chose to ignore it. I tried to hold this information in but it was tearing me up inside. I was hurting so bad and I was confused and scared. Every time I would close my eyes, I could see his face and smell his breath. There were times I thought the pain would be more than I could stand.

One day I called my other aunt, her sister, and told her. I asked her not to say anything to my aunt, but she did, and several months later my aunt filed for a divorce. My aunt told me it was not because of that. They were having a lot of other problems before this happened. I did not find that hard to believe. I don’t know how to explain how I felt after this happened. Everything that I thought was good in life turned out to be bad. The people I loved and trusted the most were the same people who were destroying me from the inside out. Isn’t this where most battles are won and lost? I was so numb from the pain and disappointment in my

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life. My heart was getting harder and harder and I did not know what to do to help myself. I never did find out why my uncle did this to me, and it does not matter anymore. Hurting people, hurt people. I picked up my cross and forgave him. In my ignorance I blamed God at times for the sins of others. Since then I have realized God's protection was sufficient for my life. God was faithful.

My mom was still with my step dad but things were about to change. One night he beat her so badly that she had to have her jaw wired shut. I remember the time my mom told me about when he was strung out on heroin. One night he had gotten mad at my mom again and held her hostage, but this time it was different. It was only he and my mom, and he did not have to worry about me interfering.

Going on what my mom shared with me, he tortured her all night, and she had to wait for him to pass out. It seemed like we were always waiting for him to pass out, for us to get out. They lived in a little cabin on the lake where they used to go fishing. When he was not drinking or doing drugs this man could be nice, even pleasant to be around. The drugs and the devil had taken him over and the only one who could save him was Jesus. It was Jesus' desire for him but he would not invite him in. God had his paint brush ready to paint him healed, ready to paint him white as snow, but he was not interested in being God's canvas. He could not even see past the evil that surrounded him. If I would have known what I know now I would have cast the devil out of him and he could have been free from his pain and the pain he was putting others through.

Anyway, she waited and waited and my mom said she knew this time if she did not get away from him he would without a doubt kill her. He told her he wanted her dead. So she sat there after being abused all night praying that this man would fall asleep, pass out or something so she could get away. The time had come, so she quietly moved off the couch towards the door, got the keys, and slipped out. She ran down the hill where the car was parked, put the keys in, and tried to start it. Then she heard the screen open and saw his reflection. She started crying because he was coming straight for her. She knew he was going to shoot her. She prayed, *"Oh God, please let the car start."* She tried it again and then noticed the gas gauge empty. *"Oh God, please help me!"*

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She kept turning the car on but it wouldn't start and he was getting closer and closer. As he approached her, the car started, she backed up, and he started shooting at the car hitting it several times. Mom backed up, put the car in drive and it died again. *Oh please God, start the car, please start the car.* It was an old yellow Monte Carlo and as God would have it, the car started again. She put into drive and took off. This man was shooting at her the whole time and chasing her. The car was dying and there was an enormous hill the car had to climb so she could get away from him. The more she pushed on the gas, the more it sputtered. My mom prayed and God reached down and gave my mother a huge push and the car acted like it had a full tank of gas. It climbed the hill and got my mom to safety. She made it to a pay phone where she called the police. Within minutes the police came and picked him up. I do not believe we ever saw him after that happened. I have prayed for him and I have picked up my cross and forgiven him. I have found peace in knowing God has his hands on my life.

Chapter Six

CHANGE

*Hello Lord it's me' again, where' do I start,
Where' do you begin?
A change' is coming, this I know,
Gathering my sword, ready to go...
The' path I'm taking you're leading the' way,
Some' will follow, some' will stay...
Spirits behind are' not left alone;
They're in my prayers after I'm gone!..*



I am all moved in with my grandmother now and I think every thing is going to be okay. I talked to God, and told him how I felt and how I did not understand why the things that happened had to happen. I was confused and getting very frustrated. I was not sure what it was all about. I was not living for God, but I knew God had rescued me. I can't explain the feeling. I just always knew. I was having a lot of trouble trusting in God and His plan for me.



IT DID NOT KEEP ME from praying every now and again, because even though I did not know why things had to happen, I knew God loved me. I started dating again. Before I did, I prayed that God would send me someone good, not someone good looking, not smart, not rich,

Mark 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

just good. A few months went by and then I met a real nice guy. Just so happens he was good looking, smart and good, God is awesome. He liked to dance, and he didn't use drugs. He was really against drugs. He was just a cowboy. We started dating and for the first few dates I was not sure. I really did not trust him, but he grew on me and proved to be a really nice, sincere guy.

I was not living my life for God at this time, but God knew what he was doing and he was helping me, and building my faith through the little things and soon I would glorify Him. I just wanted someone good in my life. Grandma and Grandpa liked my boyfriend a lot, and my Aunt Linda knew him and his family. They went to her church. I felt good about the relationship. I believe this was the first guy who ever treated me nice other than Gilbert, my step dad. We went out dancing a lot to a place called the Marina. They had live music every Saturday night and we loved to dance. He pointed out a guy there and told me he was a ladies' man and to stay away from him. He was up to no good and he did drugs. Also, his parents owned the Marina and he worked there. He really did not want me going there without him. I did not think much about it right then. He was so sweet to me that I did not have a problem with what he was asking me to do.

When he picked me up that night, he had me wear a shirt with his name on it. The shirt said, SHE'S TAKEN, with his last name on it. I thought that was so sweet. Now God can write that on my shirt. I belong to Christ and He belongs to me. We went out every night because we could not stay away from each other.

I was so happy. I did not know I could be this happy. Certainly didn't know I could be treated this way. Before this relationship, I did not have a clue how you were supposed to be treated. Most of the times when you choose to stay in an abusive relationship it is because you think you deserve the treatment. I guess I thought I deserved to be abused because I left my mom there with that man. I could not help her. I was to scare and I did not know what to do for her. In my mind I thought that I should be punished for leaving my mom.



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Our relationship was like a fairy tale. He would come get me, bring flowers, open doors for me; even the way he looked at me was special.

One night he came and said we had to talk. He started telling me that he had applied for a job in Amarillo before he met me and that they called him. They wanted to know if he could start the following Monday. He said it was an opportunity of a lifetime. He was crying and so was I. We stayed together that whole weekend. We talked and talked about what we were going to do and finally decided we really did not want to break up. We thought we would have a long distance relationship.

Monday morning came and we hated that we were going to be apart but we convinced ourselves it would only be for a little while. He gave me a kiss and told me anytime I went out to wear his shirt that had his name on it so every one would know whom I belonged to. Many in our town feared him and he thought that it would help defuse the guys. I'll never forget telling him goodbye. I thought that this was not going to work. He will probably meet someone and then I'll get that dreaded phone call that he found someone else. I was not ready for this but I did not have a choice. A couple of weeks went by and he had called a few times. He did not seem sure of our decision to have a long distance relationship and I was having my doubts, but neither one of us wanted to say anything.

Another week went by and we kept talking as if nothing was wrong. One night I decided to go out to the Marina to go dancing, of course not without putting on that shirt first. It kind of gave me some false security. I really liked the idea of belonging to someone, especially as nice as he was. Anyway, I got dressed and headed out the door, kissed my grandma and let her know I would be home later. I got into my car and headed to the Marina. You could hear the music from a mile away. It was country and it was loud. I got out and went inside to pay for my ticket and get something to drink. A lot of my boyfriend's friends were there and they were doing a good job keeping an eye on me, not to mention his younger sister.

As the night went on, and I had a few drinks in me I decided I wanted to dance. I started asking, and soon I was dancing, and having a really good time. I told everyone who I danced with that I had a boyfriend, and he was just out of town, as if the shirt didn't give them a clue. As I was sitting on a bench, I noticed this guy talking to some of his friends and every once in a while he would look my way. I thought that this was the

Mark 11:25 *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*

guy he wanted me to stay away from, but something was attracting me to him. It was his smile it was in his flirtatious eyes.

I went back onto the dance floor and started dancing again. I was getting tired and it was getting late. I went back in for one more drink and then I decided I was ready to go home. As I was heading out to my car Nathan, the guy who was off limits asked me to come back in and talk to him. I thought about it for a minute and decided it wouldn't hurt anything.

He proceeded to ask me what my name was and who was the guy who belonged to that shirt. I told him all about my boyfriend and what had happened with the job offer. He seemed very sympathetic and even apologetic towards my situation. We talked for hours- way into the morning. He seemed nice and concerned about me. I left there thinking, "What was I being warned about." He did not seem to be a womanizer. When I got home to grandma's house I told her about this guy. She did not have much to say. Grandma believed in letting you make your own decisions, wrong or right, and then you would have to live with them.

The next few days I would talk to my boyfriend, but I did not tell him that I had been talking to that other guy. I knew he knew something was wrong with me. I stopped asking when he thought he was going to be able to come home for a visit. I stopped telling him how much I missed him, and I stopped telling him what I had been doing. I stopped caring about right or wrong.

Saturday night came around again and I thought and thought about going back out to the dance. Around 9 o'clock I decided it would not hurt to go out there for a little while. I got in my car and drove back to the Marina. I was excited about going back out there to see him and talk to him again. When I got there, he came to the front door and said, "She does not have to pay, she is a guess of mine." *Wow, I thought, a guest! How special did you have to be, to be a guest?* I sat down and he brought me a drink. My mom lived up the street in that little lake house. She was divorced and working in a club that her friend owned. Anyway, he sat and started telling me some things about himself. When his mom approached us, he turned to me and said, "Don't listen to her. She doesn't know what she is talking about." She looked straight at me and said, "Are you sleeping

Mark 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

with my son?" If you are, he will get you pregnant and then leave you. He's already done it once."

I looked at him. He said, "I told you not to listen to her." Then he went on to say, "Yes, I did get a girl pregnant but I do not love her, and I am going to help her take care of my son." I was thinking, *Wow, a kid, this guy has a kid.* I was not sure this was the place I wanted to be anymore. Maybe he was trouble. I should listen to my boyfriend and not even talk to him. I went and danced for a while, and then he returned. I told him I was only looking for a friend. He seemed to understand. The night was over and I went home.

I climbed into my bed and I couldn't get this guy out of my mind. He was, in a way, like the forbidden fruit.



Genesis 2:17 "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat you will surely die." There is usually a good reason something or someone is off limits and I believe that Satan tempts us with the things that he knows are not good for us. Our job is to recognize those temptations, but if you were not saved how would you know that it was Satan tempting you?

I do not mean that I was going to die, but I could have easily if I didn't have so many people praying for me. The power of prayer is underestimated. I don't think people really are willing to absorb all the power they could have if they would walk by faith and not by sight. When some of those people were praying for me, they could see that I was still drinking and starting to get involved with drugs and the wrong guy and by sight things looked worse instead of better. I thank God that those people did not go by sight but by faith.

The next morning I went to work. I worked at a western clothing store. I was putting up some boots and straightening the store when this guy came in. He was well dressed and very handsome, and asked me what my name was. I told him. He asked if I could help him find some new boots, and I said sure. The store I worked at served beer to our customers so I offered him a beer. We began to talk and he had seen me in the store before and thought I had a boyfriend. I told him I had a long distance

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boyfriend. He wanted to know if there might be a chance I would ever go out with him? I said if anything happens between my boyfriend and I then I would consider the option. He said he would just keep checking back with me, and I told him that would be just fine.

I went home that night and decided to call my boyfriend and tell him that I met someone else, because this was so hard not to be able to go out with him, and I did not know I would be asked out so much. When I made the call he was not that happy but he agreed that it was hard and he didn't know when he would be coming back home either. Before he hung up, he did ask, "Is it that guy at the Marina?"

I said, "No." I went to bed wondering about all the possibilities for me, and my life. The next day I got up and went to work. The same guy came in around noon and asked me to go out with him for lunch I agreed. We had a great time and we hit it off. He was really smart and he had a good job. Over the next few weeks we went out every night and it was taking a toll on him because I lived so far out in the sticks. It took him 45 minutes to come get me and another to bring me home, then he had to drive all the way back to his own house.

One night we were talking on the phone and he asked if I would move in with him. I just laughed. He said, "No, I am serious." I got off the phone and talked to my grandma. She did not know what I should do, but she did like him. The next day went by and we talked again, and finally I said I would move in with him. He was so happy.

He came and got me at grandma's and he moved me into his apartment. He went to work and I stayed home to clean the apartment, cook diner sometimes, but mostly we went out to eat. It's just as well. I really didn't know how to cook.

He called me from work one afternoon and asked me if I wanted to go out. I agreed. He was home within the hour with a friend. I was drinking a beer when he walked in. He did not seem to enjoy the fact I was having a beer so early. I was so bored being there with nothing to do. I had quit my job and thought it would be fun staying home taking care of him and the apartment, but he was use to taking care of himself. Anyway, we went ahead and went out that night and had a pretty good time.

Even though we had been living together almost a week now, we had not had relations, and I did not know why. Back then I did not know the

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heart of God, and I certainly did not know what I was doing was all that wrong. Purity was something I was never taught. As far as the relations, he was still in love with another girl and I was the rebound, and we all know the rebound person is not the one you end up with. He shared with me what had happened with him and the other girl. She was married now. We kept living together for about week or two. One day we decided this was not working for him or me. It was right before the weekend and he said he would move me back to grandpa's on Saturday.

That was on a Thursday. Friday morning he went to work and I started packing. The phone rang. It was a friend from Pasadena, Texas, and she was crying. She said, "Michele, I have some bad news for you. You need to be sitting down. I don't know how to tell you this but, Rick died last night because of a drug over dose." I fell to the floor screaming, I felt like my heart had been pulled out of my chest. Rick was my first boyfriend, my first kiss, and my first date. The last time I heard from him he was going to go to work for his uncle and he was going to get married. You see he had a special place in my heart. We became real good friends and I learned to love him in spite of the drug problem he had.

I got off the phone and called the guy I was living with, and I told him all about it. He came home right away. This guy really did have a heart of gold, but he was still in love with someone else. That was our only problem. He even said he wanted to love me. The next thing he did was called the airport and booked me the next flight out and paid for it. The next flight was about 8:00 P.M. I'll never forget the look on his face when I got on that plane. He even kissed me goodbye and said, "Maybe we can work things out," but I could not think about anything right now but getting to Rick.

One of my friends picked me up at the airport. It was good to see her because I had not seen her in years. We went to her house and her parents were exactly the way I remembered them and still very strict. We stayed up most of the night playing catch up. Morning came real early, and we took showers and went to the funeral home to see him. I could hardly believe it was he. We only stayed for a moment. The wake was that night

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and we were coming back, plus a lot of relatives were there and I felt like we should wait until evening to pay our respects.



All of us, the whole gang, went to eat and talk about him. How he had given into the drugs, and how it ended up taking over his whole life, and eventually killed him. We were having this conversation like we were better. The truth was none of us had a clue to the real meaning of life. Eventually we went back to my friend's house and got ready for the wake. Time had passed so quickly that day. We were standing in the small closed-in room looking down on a person I had really loved and could never help. I'll never forget the feelings I had that evening. There was something about seeing someone dead that was the same age as you. I saw his fiancée' across the room and all I could do was cry, I knew how it felt to love him, and I knew what she had been going through, with the drugs.

After we left, we were invited over to another old friend of ours. He had hung around our group when we were younger. He was a little bit older. We ended up at someone's house that we did not know we walked into the room and everyone was high. My friend asked me if I wanted to stay, and I said I would. We went into the kitchen where a lot of our other friends were and they offered us a beer and, as the evening went on, we drank more.

About two hours into the evening I noticed people coming in and out of the bathroom. I got curious and went and checked it out. A guy opened the door and everyone was shooting drugs. He said, "Do you want a hit," and I just looked at him. Then he said, "You never did this before?" I shook my head, No. I could tell this was a proud moment for him. He wanted to be the first to shoot them in me. I told him no, and asked if there was another way to do cocaine. He said that you could snort it up your nose, and I agreed. That night was the first time I ever did cocaine.

Before I knew what was going on, it was morning and it was time to go. I went back to my friend's house and got my clothes. I wanted to party and hang out all night with my friends again.

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I went back to his house and partied some more. I really liked the way that the drugs made me feel. I could forget about everything and life did not look so bad when I was high. It was time to get ready for the funeral, I am sad to say that I went there completely out of my mind, high as high could be. I don't remember much about it. I just remember all the sad faces. As they lowered him in the ground, I remember thinking, *How sad to die so young and because of drugs*, and now I was choosing the same path.

I called my boyfriend where I had been living back home and asked if it would be okay if I stayed another few days? He wanted to know why, and I said that I needed more time. The truth was, I wanted to do more drugs. I personally did not know how powerful drugs could be. I've always heard that you shouldn't even try cocaine but I also watched my mom almost die from the addition. I thought not me. I am going to try it a few times that is it. It will get hold of you and will not let go. At this point in my life I quit dreaming and hoping for something better. I decided to be satisfied with the pain. My spirit had been broken and for the moment it would appear that Satan won.

Days had gone by and it was time for me to go. I left that night without even saying goodbye to most of my friends. I had been so busy getting high that I ignored all of them for the high. The guy who introduced me to the cocaine took me to the airport and dropped me off. I have never seen him again and that was okay, but it was not okay that I hurt my friends like I did. All I cared about was getting my next high. It was the only thing that could get me away from my nightmares of my reality. The reality that I had lost the only dad I knew, and my brother. I had been raped three times, once when I was eleven years' old and once when I was sixteen and once by a boyfriend. I had been physically, mentally, and verbally raped by every guy and man I knew, except for the dad I lost, Gilbert and the dad I have had for the last twenty-two years. Every corner that I turned was more frightening than the one that I left. I was scared and I could not handle the pain of being me. The drugs were the only answer that I could find. I found my seat on the plane and as soon as they would let me order a drink I did. I was wondering what was waiting for me back home.

Mark 11:25 *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*



Deuteronomy 31:6 *He will never leave you or forsake you...*



This is true, he won't, but you can leave Him, or even worse, stop wanting to get to know Him. I had been living my life for me and me only for just a few short months now, and look at all the trouble I had found. I had moved in with a guy, I'd quit my job, lost a lot of my friends, and started doing some heavy drugs. The very thing I fought against my whole life was now a part of me. I was apart of my own pain.

I drank about three beers on the plane- the legal drinking age back then in Texas was, 18. When I had landed I felt like I had drunk 8, I guess because of the lack of sleep and the altitude. The drug I was doing made you not want to sleep. I have not slept for about three days. The guy I was living with sent a friend of ours to pick me up. She was a troublemaker. She suggested that we go have a drink before she took me back to the apartment. I said, "Okay." I already had had a few.

I got into the car with her and she began to tell me that the guy I had been living with was just using me to get over his old girlfriend. I already knew this but I did not have enough self-esteem to care. She took me to the local club where we stayed until closing time. We went back to the apartment around three in the morning. The guy I was living with told me because I did not come straight home when I got off the plane he knew I really didn't care about him. He would be taking me back to my grandma's house the next day.

I slept on the couch that night. We got up the next morning and he helped me pack. He had to follow me in his truck because I had so much stuff. He stopped a few times to ask me if I was okay, and if I was mad at him. *How could I be?* I realized this was all my own doing and I was paying the price.

I will never forget my grandma's face when I got home. She opened the door and gave me a great big hug and said, "I'm glad you're home." At that very moment I knew I could call my grandma's house my home. She made me something to eat and helped me get unpacked. Then we

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talked about Rick for a while. I did not tell her what I did while I was out there. I tried to put all of it out of my mind. I rested for a few days and then I went to find another job. This time my grandma went with me. I remember her saying, "Michele you need a good job, so we will stop and get a paper and go into Corpus and find you one."

The next thing I knew I was applying for jobs I wasn't even qualified for. She had me go into this job placement place and tell them I could type 50 words a minute. On a good day I could type about 5. Anyway, I went in that place and sat down and filled out some forms. I sat there for a long time thinking about my answers when it asked if I could type and how fast? I knew my grandma was out in the car waiting for me, and how she wanted me to have a good paying job. All I could think about was that I was a high school drop out. Somewhere along the line back in Pasadena I quit school. I cannot be exactly sure when this happened, but it was while I was in the 10th grade. I believe it was when I was living with the guy who physically abused me and took me to Vegas to get married. I put *Yes, I can type; and further more I can type 50 words a minute*. Not once did I stop to think they would ever test me. I turned in my forms and had a seat. I waited for about 30 minutes and then they called out my name. I thought *Great; they already found me a job*.

I went into this room where there were headphones and a typewriter. It still did not dawn on me that I was there to take a test. I sat in that room for about 10 minutes, while I was waiting a lady came in and said, "Put on these headphones." Here is your material to read and type. We will time you." I looked at her and said there had been a mistake, but she said, "I'll be back in a minute" and left the room. I just sat there. I could not believe I was being tested on whether or not I was telling the truth.

I turned the machine on and started typing as fast as I could. A minute had gone by but it seemed like an hour. Then the lady came back in and took my work from me. I sat there thinking, *this cannot be good. Not only did I lie about being able to type but also about how fast*. I heard the door open and there she stood, holding back what I surmised was a laugh. She handed me my score and said, "We will call you if anything comes up". I looked down at the piece of paper and to my surprise it had been proven I could type 10 words a minute with a lot of errors.

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I came out of that building feeling dumber than I did when I went in. I looked at my grandma and said, "You failed to tell me that whatever I lied about they were going to test me." She said, "Michele, I thought you could do anything you set your mind to."

Then I replied, "Grandma, you just cannot set your mind on learning how to type in a few minutes." We laughed and I told her we were going to try to do things my way; the way I always got a job. I would just walk in and see if they were hiring. We must have gone to 15 different places that day and finally the last one was a car dealer.

As a matter of fact, it was the same car dealer that my grandpa helped me buy my car from. I walked in and asked if they were hiring. He said, "No, but I guess we could be. What can you do?" I said, "Nothing really, but I'm a fast learner and I will never be late. You can just take my car payment out of my check and pay me the rest." He just looked at me like I was kidding. I looked back at him and said, "I have been looking for a job all day. I have my grandmother with me. She is getting tired and I really could use the job. I'll tell you what, give me two weeks and if you're not satisfied with my work you can fire me." He shook my hand and said that we had a deal.

I know my face was glowing when I went back out to the car. Grandma looked at me and said, "I guess your way works for you." The drive home was about 45 minutes so that meant the drive to work would be the same. I was becoming a grown up now, except for the fact that every morning my grandma would come in and wake me up, iron my clothes, and fix my breakfast.

My first day at work I was so excited I could hardly stand it. I got there a little early, so early that no one else was there. When they got there I said, "I told you I would not be late." The office was a mess. He certainly did not know how to keep paper work very well, and he did not have a filing system at all. That day I spent most of my time answering the phones and organizing. My mom was a very neat person and those skills that I had learned from my childhood came in handy that day. I do not know how he kept up with everything. At the end of the day everything was in its place and I left there feeling good about the job I had done. I was trying to get my life in order and believe for something more than I had.

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As I was driving home, I had to pass the Marina and I decided to stop and have a beer. I opened the door and Nathan was behind the bar with his back to me. He said, "Come on in." He turned around and said, "My, where in the world have you been?" I said, "Here and there." "What can I get you?" "I'll have a beer please." I tried to pay for it but he insisted on it being on the house. We started talking and I told him a few things that had happened over the last few months. I kept hearing a voice saying *be careful - he gets girls pregnant and then leaves them* - the voice of his very own mother. I had another beer and then left. He asked if I would be back, and I said maybe another day. Then he wanted to know if I was coming to the dance on Friday night? I shrugged my shoulders as if maybe or maybe not.

When I walked into my house, I could smell this amazing smell. It was my grandma's cooking. She had made me a wonderful dinner, and I was really glad I did not stay and have another beer. I began to tell her all about my first day at work and she was so proud of me. I think I was proud of myself too. The next morning I woke up the same way. My grandma was ironing my clothes, fixing my breakfast, and now she wanted to know what I wanted for my lunch. I was truly blessed by her kindness. There was not a day that went by that I did not tell her *Thank You*.

While driving, I thought how different things were now that I was living with my grandma. My mom was living with her boyfriend. She had met him at her job and they lived at her lake house. My last step dad was in jail. Everything seemed to be calming down for us, and our lives. I was thankful.

A couple of weeks went by and everything still was going just great. I felt peace for the first time in a while about my life, and my moms. I was not sure what the next step was for her, but I sure was enjoying the one I was taking. My job was going well and living with my grandma was fun; she just spoiled me. My mom seemed to be doing a lot better also. It was the first time that I had seen her happy in a while.

One day when I went into work there was something different about the way my boss looked at me. It was more of a flirty kind of way than a boss way. He made eye contact all day with me and he was starting to make me feel uncomfortable. Five o'clock rolled around and I said,

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“Listen, I could not help but notice you looking at me all day. What is the matter?” He told me he found me attractive and wanted to know if there was anyway we could go out.” I said, “No.” I also let him know if this was going to continue I would find me a new job. He told me that he would stop and I could keep on working there. I left and went home again to another great meal. My grandma knew how to cook. We talked about my day, but I did not tell her anything about what had happened. I did not want to worry her.

I went back to work and he would walk up to me and brush up against me. He would always tell me how pretty I was, and how he wished I would change my mind. I would tell him that I was going to quit if he did not stop. Everyday he said he would leave me alone, but every day things got worse. One morning I came in and he was being very persistent. I told him I could not take it anymore. I quit that day.

Chapter Seven

WHISPERING ANGELS

*Whispering angels down in my ear...
God said something I needed to hear...
Listening closely to what they have to say...
God is with you on this day...
Your prayers have been answered, no worries for you...
For I am with you in all that you do...*

ON MY WAY HOME THAT day, I decided to stop off at the Marina and have a drink. I walked in the door and there was a girl playing pool with Nathan. He turned and looked at me and introduced her as being a good friend of his from high school. I didn't care because I only had a little interest in him at that time. She left about an hour later and he asked me if I wanted to play pool? I played a few games and thought it might be best that I go home. When I got home I told my grandma what was happening at my job and that I had to quit. She was so upset that it happened. I know she prayed for me that day.

I took the next few days off. I began looking for another job Monday. I headed into this place called five points. It's not all the way into Corpus. It's only about 25 minutes away from where I lived. I wanted to look there for a job. I must have gone into about 10 different places. I would just walk in and ask if they were hiring? Most of the places, if not all of them, did not have a sign saying help wanted or they were not advertising in the paper. I believe you should just walk in and ask. *Seek and you will find.*

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The last place I was going to try for the day was a Spa and Pool place. I walked in and asked, "Are you hiring?" The man turned to me and said, "You know, I could use some help. Do you know bookkeeping?" "No, but my grandma does." He just laughed. Somehow I convinced this man to hire me and to let my grandma come with me to teach me how to do payroll and how to keep his books. Grandma worked for a 6 pack, and I would take her out to lunch. She loved her beer.

My grandma came to work with me for about a month. We had a blast and I sure did learn a lot about bookkeeping. The time had come for me to work alone, and I think my grandma was ready to stay home for a while. I know my grandpa was ready. I still couldn't forget about Nathan the guy I knew at the Marina. Again I stopped by but this time was different. When I came in, there was no one there, just the two of us. He asked me if I were seeing anybody now and I said no. He smiled and gave me another beer. I thought he was so cute in a rough looking way. I stayed there for a while, and he offered to cook something for me to eat. I said, "Great, but let me call my grandma." I wanted to call so she would not worry. After about the third drink he approached me and kissed me. I stayed talking for a long time and decided that I really liked him. Hours had gone by and it was almost morning. I knew I needed to go home and get ready for work. I kissed him goodbye. He asked if I would come by after work and I said okay. When I got home my grandma was worried. I did not tell her that I would not be coming home. I told her I would never stay out like that again without letting her know.

I got to work and I was so tired but so excited that I had met someone. I worked all day and when it was time to go home I was ready. I stopped on the way to the Marina to get a beer. I noticed that I was drinking more. I did not think too much about it. When I got there he seemed so happy to see me. We played some pool and talked about things we liked and things we didn't like. It seemed we had a lot in common. He told me he really liked me and asked me what I thought about him. I said I thought he was nice. I did not want to sound too eager.

We saw each other every day for months. One day on my way home from work I decided I wanted to stop by and see my aunt. I went in her trailer and we had a drink. I started telling her about my new boyfriend. She was so happy for me. I was there about an hour and the phone rang.

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I could hear her saying, "Okay, okay we will be right there." She got off the phone and said, "Your mom took an over dose of pills and tried to kill herself. They don't know if she is going to make it. We need to get to the hospital as soon as we can." Then she looked at me and said, "Do you want a valium?" I could not believe it. Like I wanted to be out of it when I saw my mom. I said, "NO".

We got to the hospital in about 20 minutes. I prayed all the way there, "*Oh please Lord don't let my mom die!*" I kept and saying that all the way there. When we got there my grandma and grandpa were there and they were crying. I just knew my mom had died. When they looked up they said, "She is hanging on, but they don't know if she is going to make it." I sat down and prayed. All I could think of was how much stuff she had already gone through and survived. Many men had tried to take her life but did not succeed. I did not want her life to end this way. She was strong and the devil was trying to take her before it was her time. Hours had passed. The doctors came out and said, "She is stable now and one at a time may go and see her." Everyone looked at me, so I got up and went into the cold sterile room where I had seen her many times before, and something came over me. I was angry that she was trying to leave me here all alone.

Her eyes opened and I told her how much I loved her, and that I never wanted her to leave me. I also said, "Mom, I know you've lost a lot in your life, and I will not pretend I know how losing a son or a husband feels, but I know how it feels to lose a dad and a brother. Please do not make me know how it feels to lose a mother." I begged her that day to try to find a place in her that made her want to live because she still had me. I believe that day there were whispering angels in her ears.

Something happened that day in her spirit that made her want to live. Later I found out that the man she was dating, and really cared for, told her he was married. She could not take another disappointment so that's when she decided to try and kill herself. I think he is the one who found her in her lake house.

We stayed at the hospital most of the day and evening and then I went home with my grandma and grandpa. Mom was in there for several days. I'm not sure if she went into a mental hospital at that time or not. I remember crying and crying asking my grandma why was it not good

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enough for me still to be alive. Why didn't she want to fight to be with me? Looking back it really did not have much to do with me, but with Satan and how her life was turning out. We do need to recognize that he has come to kill, steal, and destroy. The chances of him doing this to you are good if you do not know Jesus and how to fight back with the power of the blood. My mom recovered and went back to work.

I went back to work and on the way home I stopped by the Marina. This was becoming a habit for me and not a good one. The more I got to know him I realized he liked to party and stay up late and do drugs. I think it was this time in my life that I gave completely in to drugs and alcohol. I had always drunk a little, and every now and then I did some drugs.

It made it so much easier to do them when I had someone supplying them and doing them with me. Every weekend I would go to the dance. Afterwards we would snort some cocaine and drink alcohol well into the morning. If I had to work, I would go home, shower, change clothes and go to work. When night came I would start all over. This would go on for days and days. Finally, my body would just give out. I would have to get some sleep. I kept this up for a while and then finally could not keep up and I quit my job or got fired. All I wanted to do was escape. I knew the road I was taking was the same one my mom took several years before, but I did not care. I had a bad attitude towards everything and everybody. I thought that I had finally found happiness and I did not want anybody trying to tell me anything different.

I remember one time we went into Corpus to a friend's house. When you're doing drugs, everyone becomes a friend. We walked in and they had a whole counter full of cocaine. They asked if we were ready to party. That night I did so much cocaine that I thought I was going to die. This went on all night. About 6 in the morning I looked at this guy and realized he had track marks all up and down his arms. He had not been snorting it or smoking it he had been shooting up. I was so out of it all night that I did not even notice. He took me for a walk and told me he had been doing this for years and that he could handle it. I was so high at the time that my heart stopped. I kept telling him my heart is beating too fast and then it would stop. He would say, "You're going to be fine."

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He told me, "That happens all the time when you get high," and I believed him. Later in life I found out I could have died from a drug overdose. I only weighed about 98 pounds. This continued for a while. We finally went home after spending the whole weekend there. I had called my grandma several times while I was there to let her know where I was and that I was fine. I think she knew I was not fine. I got home late that night and slept for days.

I do not know if it was the drugs, or what but we started getting serious, even talking marriage. We decided to go away for the weekend to go camping and ride some rapids. That sounded like so much fun. It sounded like the things we used to do when I was a kid. We loaded everything and headed for our camping trip. We had several other couples going with us, so there were a lot of cars. We all followed each other. My guy rode with some of his friends and I rode with some of mine. About half way he pulled off and gave me a hit of acid. I had never done it before. He told me to put it on my tongue and let it melt. With no questions asked I did just that. About 20 minutes later I felt horrible. I would start laughing without stopping for hours, then the hallucinations, then the laughter, and this went on most of the day.

I could not tell you what all happened that day. There were hours that were not accounted for. I do know that we were doing cocaine by that night. I do not want to imply that he was solely responsible for me getting into drugs, because I could have said no. *Choices are for the living.* The scary thing was we were camped right in front of the river, which was very strong. It was pitch black and everyone said let's walk down about a half-mile and jump in and then let the rapids bring us back. We had no life jackets, it was very dark, and we were all high, and drunk. The rapids were very strong that weekend because it was just after a rain. We decided to do it. The first person jumped in and all you could see was a shadow of them jumping in. After that it was so dark you couldn't see anything else. Then it was my turn. You could hear them say, "Go Michele, you can do it, jump in." I stood there for a minute and jumped in. As the rapids were pushing me I noticed I was passing some giant rocks and stumps.

We were just jumping out there blind, not knowing what was hiding out there. As stupid as this might seem, we did this all night. I remember a few times I could barely fight my way to the one limb that was standing

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out when you passed the camp site. That's what everyone would grab hold of; otherwise, you would go flying down the river. I don't know how far it was to the end. I did not know what the conditions were on the way down and I am glad to say I never had to find out. Again God saved me. I was so high and it was so dark and the rapids were very strong I am surprised there were no casualties. To this day I know God was there for me. I was not living my life for God, but He heard my prayers and knew my heart. He knew I was looking for something better and that I would find Him one day. I heard someone say, "If you do not feel close to God, guess who moved?" I had not moved. I just had not found him.

That weekend seemed like it lasted forever. When I arrived home, I slept for days. During this time in my life I had given in to peer pressure. Everyone I was around was doing drugs, so that's what I was doing. If only I would have picked friends who were going to church, how different things would have been for me. The road would have been much easier.

I went to see my mom after I had rested and she met a man she really liked. They dated for a little while, and then he asked her to marry him. They got married where she worked, which was in a bar. He seemed like a nice guy, but I was going to take it slow. He had a daughter who came to visit for the summer. I started living with my mom and him after they got married. I'll never forget when I first met his daughter. She was so nice and a little younger. She was tall, thin, and pretty and we hit it off from the very first day.

My mom lived a couple of blocks from the Marina and she and my new step dad would go there and have a few drinks. My new sister and I would go there and play pool and see my boyfriend. I did not tell her about the cocaine I was doing.

One night I remember him wanting to take us out in the boat to go skiing. It was foggy and about 4 o'clock in the morning. We had been drinking Bloody Mary's all night, plus I had been doing other things. We looked at each other and said it sounded like fun. We got into the boat, but you could not even see two feet in front of you. We were so high that we thought it would be a good idea to go skiing.

We did ski that night and by the grace of God we were not killed. The lake was down several feet and there were logs and stumps everywhere.

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The only way we made it through the night without flipping the boat was by the grace of God. God had a purpose for each of us.

When we got home that morning we both got into trouble. She got into trouble because she was too young to be staying out all night, and I got into trouble for not bringing her home. The next few months were about the same except I was getting deeper and deeper into cocaine. I really liked the way it made me feel, or should I say how it made me not feel. I did not notice that my appearance was diminishing. I had dark circles under my eyes from lack of sleep and I had lost a lot of weight. I did not care either. All I cared about was my next high and the next chance to forget. To forget about being molested as a child, to forget about being raped by my uncle, to forget about the emptiness I felt as a human being. The reality of my life was more than I could digest without the numbing effects of drugs.

Months had gone by and everything seemed to be going real good for my mom and my new step dad. I was working at another western store. My boyfriend and I had broken up a few times in the last few months, but we were back together now. The drugs were starting to take him over. We started fighting a lot and he was changing into someone I did not know. There would be days that would go by that I did not see him because he would be hiding out doing drugs.

Our relationship was not healthy. Even though I did not shoot drugs, I liked them as much as he did. I definitely had a problem. I knew this when I did not want one day to go by without them. I even started drinking it in my coffee. I was convinced that drinking it was not bad and, because I did not do it every day and did not shoot it, that I did not have a problem. I was not going into debt over it and I never had to pay for it. He always got enough and if he didn't, someone else would give me some, usually one of his friends. We both were a mess. We started fighting a lot because of him shooting the drugs. I was not okay with that and I wanted him to stop. I even thought one day, *I am going to do it to show him how it feels*. I came close one night, but I walked away. Praise God.

One day my mom told me that they were going to move to Missouri where my step dad was from. He was not from Corpus. His job had just brought him there on business. It would be in a few months, during the summer, so Stacey would get to come back one more time before they

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moved. I told her I did not want to leave at this time because of my boyfriend. By this time she had already figured him out and did not like him. She had married many of his kind. I was young and did not want to listen to her. Plus, I really thought I loved this guy and I also thought I would be the one to save him. Looking back I couldn't even save me. Stacey did come for the summer and we had a lot of fun, still dating the same guy, but things were not good. My mom asked me if I would help her and my step dad move. I think she thought if she could get me away from Nathan and his influence on me, it would straighten me out. I said, "Yes I would like to take a vacation." It was time for me to come down off the drugs and start living my life again.

Chapter Eight

CATCH ME

*One dark night while I was driving through town,
I looked over, and I had to slow down...
I saw a boy, not yet a man,
I said, "Catch me, catch me, if you can"...
I looked in my mirror and what did I see,
Ten years later a man looking back at me...*

MORNING CAME EARLY AND IT was time to leave. We helped load the moving truck and left. It was cramped but a lot of fun. It took a couple of days to get there. It was an eighteen-hour drive. I felt so free. I was looking forward to relaxing and not worrying about anything. I did bring a little cocaine with me. I knew I did not know anybody there to get more from so I figured I was safe. I had a feeling the strong hold of this drug was going to start being lifted off my life. I had a heart for God. I remembered all the prayers I prayed and all the prayers He answered on my behalf. He knew me. God wanted me. He had plans for my life that did not include drugs or alcohol. I also was a smoker. I was a far cry from an angel. Remember, God uses the unlikely to be the likely. He loves a loser, so he can make them a winner.

My sister and I rested a little and then we hit the town. We were staying in a small air stream trailer. It was parked at the local liquor store side parking lot, and that is where we lived. It had one bedroom, if you can call it that. It was one of those that you pulled behind you. The living

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arrangement was only until they closed on the house they had found. My sister was dating a local guy and we went out that night. As we were driving through town, her boyfriend would say anybody in this town would go out with you, whom do you like? Well, I did not know anybody and I had not been with anyone since I was dating the guy back home. I felt guilty looking, but that did not last long.

I remember when we were driving through town, seeing this guy standing in this jeep with a Wolf mask on. I said, "Who is that, slow down let me see him." Her boyfriend said his name was Marty, and when I asked if he was cute, his reply was that most girls thought so. He used to play football, and he was popular. I said, "That is who I want to go out with." I had not even seen him, but that was going to be fixed within minutes. Before I knew it, we were at a party. I walked in and there he was. I was thinking he was one handsome guy. We got to know each other that night. He found out I liked to drink a lot and could not handle my liquor. I never have been able to. I just drank to get drunk. I did not even like the taste at all.

The next day he wanted to see me again. I agreed and thought, *He does not know what he's getting into.* We went out again anyway. He sent me flowers and opened doors for me and called me two and three times a day. I felt like a princess. He was too good to be true, and everything was going great except for one thing. One evening my boyfriend from home called and asked when I was coming back. I was having so much fun that I had almost forgotten about him. This man had caused a lot of emotional and physical pain and I was ready for a change.

I had not done any drugs except for drinking in a couple of days. What I had brought with me was gone, and I did not want anymore. I spent the rest of my time with Marty. He asked me if I would go home and get my things and move back. I got so caught up in all the excitement that I agreed. I really did want to come back, so I went home with that intention. My boyfriend from home picked me up at the airport and we stopped off at one of our friend's house. As we were talking, I brought up that I had met someone. I thought I would be safe saying it there in front of them. My boyfriend just looked at me and said, "What?" I told him that we were not getting along and I thought I might move back with my mom.

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Over the next several days, Marty would call and ask, “Are you coming?” I would say, “I’m working on it.” He knew I had a boyfriend and that I needed to break up with him. The more Marty would call and ask me to move, the more the other guy would send me flowers and said he would change. I had been seeing him for over a year and I did not know what to do.

Finally, I could not keep Marty hanging on so I told him, “I can not leave right now.” I also let him know how sorry I was. I stayed with this guy. He was on his best behavior for a few weeks. Then he started doing the same old stuff and I started doing the same old stuff – partying and staying out all night. It just was not fun anymore. He had asked me to marry him and I said, “Yes.” It was not long before I got back into drugs and alcohol. There was something really different when we would party. I could feel the prayers for me by my aunt, who is a preacher, and my mom and grandma. I had a hard time having a good time knowing I was hurting so many people. My mom would send post cards telling me how much they missed me. She would send pictures of their house covered in snow. She was showing me how beautiful everything was. It all looked so perfect and so far away from what I was doing.

As time went on, he started treating me very badly. When we would get into a fight he would throw me into the lake and walk off laughing. We were not nice to each other anymore. Things got really bad.

His personality was being altered by all the drugs and so was mine. I did not know him anymore. My life with him was miserable. I was no longer happy. I think drugs have a way of making you think you are happy, but the truth is you are so high all the time you don’t know what true happiness is. The facade of masquerading around as if your current life has any meaning is only denying the fact that the choices you’ve made had led you to denial. I got tired of the lie, I got tired of wearing a mask of deception and I called my mom. She flew my sister to me so she could drive back with me. We left in my little Pinto station wagon that was orange and brown with the words “Missouri or Bust” written on it.

When I got back to Missouri, I was so happy to see my mother. Everything in her life seemed to be so much better. The first thing I wanted to do was to find Marty and see if we could start over. My mom had taken me out and bought me some new clothes, new shoes, and

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perfume. She just spoiled me. She was tickled I left that guy. I found out that Marty, the guy I came back for, was seeing someone else. I had heard he was going to be at a party so my sister and I went. I'll never forget when I walked in the house and there he was in the swimming pool. His girlfriend was there, but I knew we would see each other again. Later that night we had a long talk. I told him everything, he forgave me and we started dating again.

We went out all the time. He was really a great guy and I did not know how you were supposed to be treated but he was doing a good job of it. I was pretty sure he was doing it right.

He came by all the time. I liked him a lot but I could not get this other guy out of my mind. God had delivered me completely from the drugs and that was a true miracle. It was another wonderful *faith-builder* in my life. I started drinking more than I ever had. That just meant there was a lot more room for another *faith-builder* in my life. There was hardly a day that went by that I did not drink to the point of getting sick. I could not go out and have just one drink. I was so torn between the two guys in my life. All that was good in me wanted to be with Marty and all that was bad wanted to be with Nathan.

I started talking to him on the phone and he would plead with me to come back and give him another chance. I did not know what to do. I asked my mom and she was so mad at me for even thinking about it. She said if you go, you leave everything I bought you here. I was so confused.

The phone calls did not stop, and finally I gave in. He told me that he would fly in the next morning to Kansas City and we could drive back to Texas together. He made it sound so good. He said he had changed and that he did not want to live without me.

When I got off the phone, I talked to my mom and let her know what I would be doing. Only God knows how bad that hurt her, not because I was leaving, but what I was leaving for. My mom knew we were doing drugs. She knew the signs to look for. I cannot imagine the fear that must have been with her that night. When I got finished talking and crying with my mom, I called Marty. There was no easy way to tell him this, so I just told him. He cried, and right then I knew I was making a mistake, but

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I felt like it was too late now to change my mind. I regretted this decision in my life because I hurt two people I really did love.

Morning came and it was time for me to go. I left everything new that my mom had bought me, except for my dog that she had bought me a long time ago. I gave her a kiss and a hug and told her I was so sorry. I also said I would call her when we got to a hotel that night. Right after I left, his mom called and said, "Well I guess we ought to be getting ready for a wedding." My mom did not say anything to her but she was thinking *I would never get ready for that wedding.*

I picked him up at the airport and we left for Texas. The first day was great. We played catch-up on everything. We laughed and we played with my dog. He told me how much he loved me and missed me, how we were going to get married. I thought that maybe everyone was wrong about us. That night we stopped at our hotel room and I called my mom. She tried to sound okay, but I knew she was not okay and I had hurt her really badly.

The next morning we got up and his mood had changed. He was not as happy as the day before. We had some words and then got into my car and drove towards Texas. We drove in silence for a long time. I could not figure out what was the matter with him. He had told me on the phone that he had quit shooting drugs, so I knew that could not be it. Hours went by and I could see his mood changing again. Finally he said, "We are not going to stay in a hotel tonight, we are going to stay with some friends of mine." I thought, *great we can visit, have a good meal and relax.* I asked him if could I call my mom there. He said, "Yes." I asked if it was okay that we had a dog with us and he said, "Yes."

By the time we got there it was dark, but I could tell this was not a good neighborhood. We got out of the car and approached the front door. It was a run-down shack. I walked in and I had never seen such filth in all my life. You could not even call this place livable. He started calling out their names, and here they came from the back room. When I saw them, I knew why we were there. These people were dirty and were obviously on a lot of drugs. I pulled him to the side and told him I did not want to stay here. He just looked at me and said, "We are." I was so tired and I asked him where could I clean up and call my mom. He showed me where the bathroom was, if you could call it that. I don't think it had

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any running water and there were bugs everywhere. This house looked like it should have been condemned. There must have been at least three months of urine in the toilet. I could not even tell you what was in the shower. I did not understand how people could live like this. There were roaches everywhere. I wandered around for a minute until I found him. There he was shooting up. I just looked at him and thought *how could he bring me all this way to do this?*

He stayed up all-night and so did I, not because I was doing drugs but because there were so many people coming in and out getting high. I was really scared that night. My dog was my only comfort. I did not know any of these people and they kept coming up to me asking if I wanted to get high with them in the back. I would say, "No, not tonight." I certainly did not want to make them mad or think I was a nark. Every once in a while he would show up, and say we would be leaving in a minute. I tried to tell him how scared I was. He looked at me and handed me his knife. He said, "If anyone tries to hurt you use this." Then I would not see him for an hour or so. I was so scared and mad at myself for falling into the same old trap.

Finally the morning came and it was time to go. He had come down off his high and wanted to stay to get some sleep. I looked at him and said, "You can stay, but I've had all I can take. It is morning and I can see now how to get out of here. I'm leaving." He struggled with it for a minute and then got into the car. He would not let me drive at first and then I convinced him he could sleep.

I drove most of the day. When he woke up, he was mad at me for giving him such a hard time about the night before. I do not know why I kept this up with him. I knew it was wrong. The closer we got to his trailer, the more convinced I had become that I had clearly made the wrong choice. Late that night, we pulled up and got my things out of the car. The only comfort I had was that my grandma did not live far from me.

The next morning came and everything looked better except for this trailer. Someone had cleaned it, but it was still a bachelor pad. He told me when he left to go to work at the Marina to fix the place up however I wanted. I went straight to a good friend of mine that just lived down the road, and asked for her help. She gave me some curtains, sheets, and

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some decorations. I went back to the trailer and spent all day cleaning it and decorating it. Everything I opened needed to be cleaned.

By that night I was ready to celebrate. Everything looked so good. We invited a few people over and then a few more showed up and they kept coming until there were people everywhere. The party grew and grew as the night went on and it got later and later and nobody wanted to leave. I got really tired and begged him to tell everyone to go home but he wanted to party still. He did convince everyone to go outside and build a bonfire. By then the trailer had already been trashed. I went to bed wondering what I was doing there.

The next morning my grandma and Aunt Joe showed up to check on me. I heard a knock at the door and I got up to answer it. My Grandma said, "We wanted to see where you live." They came in and sat down. There were beer cans everywhere and there was marijuana in the ashtrays. I'm sure if they had checked in the bathroom they would have seen a needle or two. I was so ashamed of the way I was living. I could not deny that I had gotten into some trouble and was not sure how to get out. My poor grandma - I could see the disappointment in her eyes. She was wondering what I was doing.

I thought about her visit all day. It hurt me knowing I hurt my grandma and was worrying her so much. That night I did not party because I did not want to. I wanted to figure out my life but I did not know where to start. I did pray that God would show me the way.

The next day his mom showed up and brought us some groceries. She told me how to cook some of it and left. That night I made us dinner. He said he could not eat with me because he had to watch the Marina. He asked me to bring him a plate after I got done eating.

I did that for a few nights and then I got to thinking about how my life was going to be with him. I was so lonely because he was working at the Marina and I was just sitting there at that trailer with my dog and my thoughts. I tried to talk to him about this but he would just say, "This is my job." That night I was visiting him at his job and he said, "Why don't you go back to the trailer and wait for me? We can have a good talk and figure this all out." So that is what I did. As I was waiting, a girlfriend of ours came by. It was the girl he had introduced me to when he and I just met, his school buddy. She wanted to know where he was. I told her at

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the Marina and she said she was having marriage problems and needed to talk to him. She was married to my boyfriend's best friend and they had a little boy. I waited and waited for him to come home. I could see the Marina from our trailer. I could see him and our friend playing pool but I did not think anything about it. I finally fell asleep with my dog. I heard the door open about two o'clock in the morning. When I looked up it was he. He said, "I need to use your car to take a friend home." I was sound asleep so I said, "Okay. Hurry back." He smiled.

I lay there waiting for him to come back so I could find out what happened to him. I waited and waited and he never came back. About six o'clock there was a guy knocking at the door. When I answered it, he said that my boyfriend said that he would do some work for him. I told him that he was not home. I was starting to get worried so I took off to his mother's lake house. It was not that far, about one mile. I was so upset I didn't even get dressed. I threw a robe on and took off. When I got to her house she looked puzzled to see me. She really did not like me. When he and I would have a fight, she would call me and ask me what I did to her son to make him so mad. She thought everything was my fault and that I was the one who introduced him to drugs. I told her what had happened and that he was gone with my car and I did not know where he was. I think she called the police. We both thought something bad had happened to him.

We went to get into her car and she noticed someone had tried to take it or get something out of it but they ended up locking her keys in it. Now, neither one of us had a car. We both walked down to the Marina. She told me he was okay. She thought the reason he took my car was because he couldn't take hers. She would still call around to the hospitals. Hours went by and I was really scared for him. Then I turned around and noticed my little yellow and brown Pinto Station wagon coming down the hill. He was fine, and I could hardly wait for him to tell me what happened. He walked right past me and went into the trailer and got into bed.

I let him sleep and then I wanted some answers, but he would not say. I begged him to tell me what was going on. His reply was nothing; nothing was wrong, forget about it. I couldn't. Something was telling me he was hiding something and I was not going to forget t. As a matter of

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fact, I was determined to find out everything he had done that night. I had a good idea it was drugs. What I was going to find out was far beyond what I could have imagined.

That night, I was sitting outside on a bench in front of the Marina and a guy came up to me. He said, "Your name is Michele isn't it?" I looked at him and said, "Yes." Then he said, "I do not know you very well just what your boyfriend has told me, but I think you need to get away from him." I asked him, "Do you know something I need to know?" He said, "I know what happened last night", and I asked him to tell me. Then he asked me if I was sure I wanted to know, and I told him that I was very sure.

He said, "He came and got your car so he and that girl he had gone to school with could mess around."

"She's married to his best friend," I said. He went on to inform me that this had been going on the whole time we were seeing each other and the whole time we had been engaged. As if that were not enough he also told me that her baby might be his. Also he gave me at least 10 other girls he had been seeing. I asked him how he knew about last night. He said he drove by and saw them in my car. He also said this guy would brag on all his flings.

I sat there for a long time. I knew he would shoot up and lie about it, but I never could prove he cheated on me. Now looking back, everything made sense. All the times that she was around us, there was eye contact between them. People would tell me he was not faithful to me, but I was either on drugs and did not care or I was sober and did not want to believe it. Now I had proof, and I was finally going to confront him I walked into the Marina and looked right at him and asked, "Do you love her?"

He denied everything for a while and then he said, "I don't know." At the time I probably could have handled any answer, but for him to say he did not know if he loved another woman was more than I could not deal with. I asked him how long all this had been going on and he told me the whole time we had been dating and even after we had gotten engaged. I knew God sent that stranger to me on that hot summer night. I praise the Lord that I was spared the grief of what it would have meant to be his wife. My faith in God was getting stronger. I knew God was the only one who could have delivered me from the path I was taking. Even though I

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closed my mind towards God a few times I never closed my heart. God sees and hears your heart. My heart was saying, "Save me, from me."

We fought most of the night. The poor guy who told me all this stuff got his truck almost destroyed. My ex- boyfriend went berserk that night. I don't know why unless he was upset that he couldn't play both ends against the middle anymore. I confronted the girl but she did not have much to say. The next morning I called my grandma and asked her to come over and bring me some boxes and help me pack. I was moving back to Missouri with my mom and her husband. I needed to get as far away as possible from this guy before I ruined my life. It did not take long for my blessed grandma to get there. We started packing and within the hour we were done. I went up to the Marina asked him to step outside with me. His mother was there. She walked over to me and gave me a hug then whispered in my ear may God bless you. I think she had finally realized that I was not the sole cause for her son's actions. I told him goodbye, gave him a hug, and walked away. I felt as if a thousand pounds had been removed from my existence. I held my head a little higher, my shoulders a little straighter my mind was a little sharper, and my smile had been return. I was finally released from the man made prison that I had created and held myself in. Up to this point I had placed an invisible electrical fence around myself made up of my past hurts, rejections, and disappointments. I had only allowed myself to be served the food of this world to inhale the crumbs off of someone else's plate. I accepted the fate of who ever I connected myself with. But now I am free. I am a live and I have made my choice to live.

Chapter Nine

A MOMENT AWAY

*The laughter's here, just a moment away...
The empty hole is not here to stay...
The tears are fading, the heart's on a mend...
My spirit smiling once again...
You are so faithful and you will always be,
While I lay in your arms, you're watching over me...
The angels calling out my name,
Listen closely; you can hear them sing...
The laughter's here, just a moment away...
Thank You Lord for the words to say...*

WE WENT BACK TO GRANDMA'S house and had a very pleasant evening. I told her how much I loved her and I thanked her for all the prayers she had prayed for me. I knew God was intervening through prayers. This was no exception. He had a plan for my life, which was a lot more important than what I had planned. Thank God for that.

I woke up to a bright sunny day and my grandma made a wonderful breakfast, as always, and packed me a lunch. She gave me some extra money and I grabbed a can of *fix-it flat* just in case. I felt different that day, like I was doing something to better my life. I was sad that I was leaving my grandma but I knew she understood, and it was probably what she had been praying for anyway. I waved goodbye and as I drove down the

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dusty, bumpy road I knew I would never come back the same way I left. I had been set free.

I drove and drove, and all I could think about was what my new life was going to be like. With everything happening so fast I did not have time to call Marty and let him know what had happened. Also, I was not sure he cared to know. The last time I left, I believe I heard him say something about joining the military. I had really hurt him and he was really mad at me for what I had done. I stopped at a hotel to check in for the night. I called my mom and asked her if she had talked to him. She said, "No, not yet. We will wait until you get here." I wanted to call him, but I was scared he would not want to talk to me. I tossed and turned that night-I was so excited about the possibilities.

Morning came and I headed out. I arrived late that afternoon. I came flying in and I will never forget my mom's open arms welcoming me home. We hugged and cried. There was nothing like the feeling of being safe. Then the big moment arrived: I asked where the phone was. I dialed Marty's phone number and his mother answered. I said, "Hello, this is Michele, and I have moved back to Missouri and I was wondering if Marty was home?"

She was quiet for a minute. I know they were not happy that I hurt their son. Anyway, she said, "No, he is not home. He has joined the United States Marine Corps and he is at boot camp." I asked her if she had a number but she said she did not, but she did have his address and gave me that. An address was not going to be quick enough for me. I was impatient and I wanted to talk to him as soon as possible.

I hung up the phone and my heart had dropped a mile. I looked at my mom and told her he had joined the Marine Corps. She said, "Did she have a number?" I told her that she didn't. My mom then said, "In the morning we will find him." I lay in bed that night thinking about what had I done to this guy and I cried until I fell asleep. Looking back on this now I can see this too was a part of God's plan for my life.

When morning came I was ready to find Marty. We called everywhere we knew to call and no one had any information on him. I was so upset. The more I could not reach him, the more I wanted to, and God knew this about me. I always wanted what I could not have. Waiting on him

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and not knowing where he was made me like him more. We never did get hold of him.

My stepsister came down the following weekend. She lived at the college dorm. We went out that night with her boyfriend and I started asking questions-then I found out Marty had been seeing someone else. I was crushed, but everyone told me he would leave her for me if he knew I was back. Still, no one knew how to get in touch with him. I tried to have a good time but I could not.

Weeks had gone by and not a word about when he was coming home, at least not a word anyone was telling me. My sister would come down every other weekend and we would go out. One weekend we went out and we heard about this swimming party so we decided to check it out. We walked in and everyone just stared at us. I knew something was not right and then I noticed Marty's girlfriend. I did not say anything. I turned around, and there he was in the swimming pool. I hardly recognized him. He was bald from boot camp. I did not say anything but I was going to stay to see how things worked out. Later in the evening, Marty's friend came up to me and I told him to tell him that I moved back and I was staying for good this time. I also asked that he tell him that I still liked him and I was hoping we could start over again. We did this silly stuff back and forth most of the night. Then he had to go and his girlfriend took him back to the city to catch his plane. I knew we would be back together.

I went home that night knowing there was a plan. It was not my plan, but there was a plan for my life. I'm not sure how long it was before he came back, but he did come back and he did break up with the other girl. We started seeing each other again. We went out almost every night. One night he introduced me to a high school buddy and his girlfriend. We hit it off. She was from Arizona, her name was also Michelle with two L's, and I was from Texas, our boyfriends were from Missouri. We were all about the same age and she was visiting for the summer. We would all go out to the man made beach, and to the movies. It was a great summer. I remember she had to go back to Arizona and her boyfriend, Steve was miserable. We all missed her. Marty had gone to school with him.

Marty and I started getting serious, one thing led to another and we began living together. I know now this was not God's plan for us

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to live together before we were married, but I did not have that close a relationship with God to know what He wanted for my life yet. One night we were over at his mom and dad's house. I think my parents were there also. We were having dinner together.

After dinner, his dad asked, "So when are you two going to get married?" We were sitting in the other room, and we just looked at each other and shrugged our shoulders. His dad asked again, and we told him that we didn't know. He said, "Well, you need to come up with a date." We sat there for a minute, and he said, "Now." As I was sitting there I was thinking *I hope I'm doing the right thing*. Someone walked in and gave us a calendar. I took that as a sign, so we looked at it and decided on July the 17th of 1987. That gave us about three months to get ready.

I could not believe I was getting married. I was working at the local donut shop saving our money so we could buy our own refrigerator. I remember thinking, "*everything is going well*." Marty and I went out that night and had a few drinks. I had a lot and we really did not get along that great when we both drank; he was jealous and I was flirty. We got home that night and he said something I did not like, so I picked up a lotion bottle and threw it at him. He got up, went around the corner where I was, then he turned and punched a big hole in the wall. I took off running to our bedroom crying, and he was hollering at me. I just stayed there, scared. Finally I came out and I told him I was going to call his dad. He begged me not to but I did. After he got off the phone I told him I was not going to marry him. I could not marry a violent man. I knew he had a temper because he would get into fights a lot. But I never thought he would use his temper against me.

I knew he did not understand where I was coming from so I explained some of my past. He cried that night and told me how sorry he was, and I also told him I was sorry for what I had done. We decided to go ahead and get married. I was twenty-two when we got married and he was twenty.

The closer the wedding date got, the more nervous I was. There were so many things that had to be done still and it was only a few weeks way. My cousin was coming from Corpus to be my maid of honor. The friend that I had met over the summer, Michelle, moved here. She was in our wedding and their wedding would be next. The day was coming and all the preparations were done. My mom worked hard pulling everything

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together in just three months. Marty's parents were a lot of help also. They hired the band and bought all the alcohol you could possibly drink.

Our wedding day was here and my step dad walked me down the aisle. I had asked my real dad but he said he did not have the money to come to Missouri. As I was walking down the aisle, I remember breathing really hard - almost panting. I was so scared. I looked at the end of the aisle and saw this great guy in his white tux with a big smile and I knew I would be okay. We stayed for a long time drinking, dancing and carrying on. We were not leaving on our honeymoon until the next day, and we did not live far from where we were. We were going to an amusement park in Kansas City and were going to stay at the honeymoon suite that our friends had paid for as a gift. The next morning when we got up, we headed for Kansas City to our hotel and we had a great time all day. The next day we went to the amusement park and as soon as we got in Marty said, "Let's go ride the roller coasters." I told him I would go with him but that I did not like them.

He begged me and begged me and finally I said, "Okay, but I really hate roller coasters." The closer we got the harder my heart was beating. Soon I would be sitting in the little chair clamped in and ready to go racing through the air at very high speeds. This was not attractive to me at all. We sat and as soon as the coaster started I put my head down on the bar and did not look up until it was over. I got off with my head pounding, looked at him and said, "Never again", and I never have.

Our honeymoon lasted the weekend then we went back to Warsaw to our house. Months went by and everything was going good. He was working for my step dad, making really good money. I should have been happy. I had a good man who loved me very much. He had a good job. We had a house on the lake. But I was not happy still. I was drinking too much and I just knew my mom, grandma, and aunt were praying because I had a hard time getting drunk and enjoying it. That did not stop me because I was drinking even more now. When we would go out we would stop and get me a fifth and I would drink the whole thing straight out of the bottle in one night. Every time I would get sick, but I would not stop.

I would not drink alone but only when we went out so I did not think I had a problem. This went on for a while. One weekend, one of Marty's friends called and told him about going into the reserves. This sounded

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good to us because we needed a change. We told our parents about it and let them know that we would be moving to Kansas City, which was only an hour and a half away. They thought it sounded like a good idea for us to try and start a career in the military.

We had to stay in a hotel with my dog for about 6 weeks until we found an apartment. We were on the waiting list to move into base housing. It was not so bad. Marty worked graveyard shift so he was home with me during the day. We had bought a little ice chest to keep in the room for milk and lunch meat. I would walk across the street to eat my dinner at the local restaurants then I would come back to the hotel room. Sometimes my friend, Michelle would invite me over, for dinner with her and her husband, Steve. I enjoyed just getting out of that hotel room for a while.

When we had enough money saved to get our apartment, we went looking and found a perfect one- bedroom. We felt like it was a mansion compared to living in that hotel room for so long. The apartment had a little patio fence for the dog. It was great. It was not long before we started going out dancing and drinking. Marty was working days now and that left our nights free. We did most of our going out on the weekend since we both worked. I had gotten a job at a Dentist office being a dental assistant, and they offered to train me. I worked for three different doctors.

I remember one night Marty and I and another couple went to a bar. The night started out good but the more I drank and the more Marty drank the more we clashed. I wanted to dance; he wanted to sit. I decided that I would go ask other people to dance. The more I drank the more people I would ask to dance and finally he had enough. He sat and watched this behavior for a while, and then he was ready for us to go home. By this time, I was really drunk and I had no business being there.

He approached me and said it was time to go. I threw a fit. I did not want to go because I was having fun, and I was mad at him because he wasn't. We got into a big fight. He was pulling my arm telling me, "Let's go," and I was pulling away. We did end up leaving, but I was not happy about it. The closer we got to the house the more we would fight. We both said some horrible things to each other and threatened each other with a divorce. By the time we got home I was so mad. We went into the

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apartment and started hollering at each other and I grabbed the dog, my keys, and his keys, and ran out the door. I took his keys so he could not follow me. I got in the car and I thought, *I'm going to go right back to that bar.* I sat there and decided it was too far for me to drive. I ended up down the street at a new bar. I walked in and ordered a drink. I started talking to the owner and asked him if I could bring my dog in. He said sure, he was only open for a few more minutes anyway. As I sat there nursing my beer, I thought about what had happened that evening and if I really wanted to be married. I asked why I was drinking so much and how come I could only be happy if I was drunk. How could I know if I was happy or not? I would not stay sober long enough to find out. The same man made prison I was so excited to be out of I found myself back in only eating the crumbs off a different persons plate. I desperately needed to find my portion in God.

I ended up sitting there until the bar closed and then I called Marty. When he answered you could tell he was upset and had been doing some thinking on his own. He asked me where I was and would I come home. I was only five minutes from the apartment. I walked in and we talked until morning, straightening out some things. The one thing we did not talk about was the drinking. After that night we never drank again. I guess in our hearts we knew we were not going to make it if we continued the road we were on.

I also believe with all my heart that God knew how close we were to giving Him our lives. Shortly after all this, Steve and Michelle invited us to church with our other friends who lived on base housing. We went and we liked it, but we did not go back very often. They kept on inviting us and we would go and then we wouldn't. This lasted for a while. We were still trying to hang around the same people who drank a lot but we found out quickly that we did not have much in common with them when we were not drinking. There was a lot of spiritual warfare going on also. This battle lasted about a year, but God won in the end.

One day we got a call from base housing and they said they had a house for us and we were so excited. That meant we got to move on base in a three-bedroom house with a fenced-in yard and two bathrooms. My friend, Michelle called me and said, "Guess what, the house they called you about is mine. We got orders to move to another house, because my

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husband got a promotion and we were qualified for a bigger house.” I thought that was so cool that we were going to be living in their old house. What a blessing to move on base. This is where the seeds were going to be watered. The church they attended was not far from where we lived. When they would ask us to go to church before we lived on base we would tell them that it was too far to drive, that was our excuse.

After we got all moved in and settled they started inviting us over for dinner, and that’s when I noticed something different about them. There was a peace they had that I could not explain, especially when they were living off one income. They were expecting their first baby and they only had about ten dollars left after paying their tithes and their bills. I did not know anything about tithing at this time but she had told me once in a conversation about giving 10%. At that time I did not have a clue about what that really meant. All I knew was that there was something about her that was real.

I remember one time I got off work and she called and asked if we would like to come down for some supper. We accepted. They were within walking distance from us. They only lived three blocks over. Anyway, we got there and went in I went into the kitchen to see if she needed some help. I could not help but notice as I was helping her that they did not have any food that I could see. I would open the cupboards and they were bare and the refrigerator was almost empty. I did not say anything at the time. We sat down and there was all this food. It was unbelievable how much food there was on the table. I remember thinking, “Where did all this food come from?” This ministered to me more than anything she could have ever said.

As they said their blessing, I knew I wanted what they had. This happened more than once- it happened all the time. Every time they needed money it would be there. Their ten dollars would always last, and stretch like it was a hundred dollars. I do not remember that they ever did without. Looking back, they did not just have Marty and me for dinner; they were always inviting people to fellowship. They never had to say much because their lives were their testimony. You could not help but have a good feeling when you were in their presence, and now I know why. You were in the presence of Jesus, who was living in them.

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One night she had come down to visit, and there was a lot of talk about the end times on the radio and television. I believe this was in the early nineties when someone was trying to predict something was going to happen. Anyway, the subject came up in our conversation. I told her that I did not want to talk about it. As much as I loved her, I was scared and I did not want to know anything about the world coming to an end. Marty said, "I do. I want to learn more about it." I just jumped up and left the room. I tried to ignore them but I could hear her voice all over the house. The more they talked the more frightened I became.

I tried to ignore her as best I could but within the hour my husband had enough information and he was feeling good enough to go to bed. He left me there alone with her and my thoughts, and I do believe she was on a mission from God so she was not leaving until she shared some things about God with me.

That night, she sat there and listened to me, and then offered some sound advice I'll never forget. She said, "Michele, I've got to go. Read your Bible and pray and God will answer you." Then she got up and left. I thought, *how dare you leave me here scared and alone!* That night I opened my Bible, which my mom had given me years ago. I opened it to Matthew, which talks about Jesus' birth and started reading. I was so excited about God and all He had to offer, I could not get enough. That night I accepted Jesus. It was late and very quiet. I will never forget the peace that I felt. I had never known that feeling and I was so happy that Jesus had come to save the lost. I was preparing on the inside to be released from the prison I had accustomed myself to. I was ready for the papers to be signed and for the warden to release me. As I slowly walked away from the wreckage of my old life, I realized the electrical fence around the prison I chose to live in had no power connected to me any longer. The warden that seemed terrifying during my stay seemed fragile and weakened by my confession of Christ. It was at this time in my life when I was open to face the cross to accept my forgiveness as I forgave. It was time for me to consider those still left behind in their own prison with a warden who terrifies them every night.

I went to work and shared the good news about our Lord. One of the dentists that I worked for was into Scientology and until I began to know Jesus, I did not see anything wrong with his opinion. As time went on, he

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tested my faith and me by making me go to meetings on Scientology and taking tests. He would call me in his office and question me about my beliefs. He would try to convince me that he had read the Bible and there was no truth to it. I worked there for as long as I could, then I finally had to quit. One Saturday morning while I was doing some housework my phone rang. I answered it and the man asked me if I would do a survey. He said that I could get some free groceries for answering his questions. I said okay. He started out confirming my home phone number and address, and then he said he needed to confirm my work phone and work address. He began with his questions, and he started out with standard questions then the phone conversation went in another direction. He started asking me if I was married and if I was happy. Then he asked me what size bra I wore. I can't tell you all the things that he asked after that but I hung up on him. He called right back and I told him to leave me alone, and then I hung up again. He called right back but this time his voice was different. He said in a low voice, "Answer my questions and I will leave you alone."

I said, "Why are you doing this?" He said because he liked me and he liked what I was wearing. He told me he could see me and if I did not answer all of his questions he was going to send his guys over to my house, {then he repeated my address to me} to kill me. I dropped the phone and ran out of the house screaming and crying.

Marty was at the base gym working out when I went down there to get him and tell him what happened. We went back to our house and called the police. A horrible thought crossed my mind. I was wondering if it could have been the man who had molested me when I was eleven. I thought that he might have gotten out of jail and found me. When the police got there I told them everything. They took their report and said if I heard any more from him to let them know. We got out our shotgun and walked around our house for a couple of days in fear. Marty went back to work and I was there all alone. When he got up, I got up. I could not even take a shower without the shotgun. Whoever it was that called me, had my home phone and my work phone and both addresses that was the other reason I quit my job. Now it was time to build my faith in God-another *faith builder*.

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I was so scared that someone was going to come break in and get me. Every time the phone rang I thought it was he. I would pick it up but I would not talk until someone would say something first so I would know it wasn't him. This went on for weeks. The more scared I got, the more I would pray and soon I was back to normal. I stopped walking around my house with a gun. God did a lot of work in me concerning fear. He showed me that it was not from God. It was from Satan.



Isaiah: 35:4

*Say to those' with fearful hearts,
'Be' strong do not fear.*

Isaiah: 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you.

Psalms: 34:4

*I sought the' Lord, and he' answered me;
He' delivered me' from all my fears.*



Also, God was showing how he could use something bad and turn it around to Glorify Him. I was glad that God was getting me out of that job. I was being hassled almost everyday for what I believed. I stood firm on the Word. He was certainly trying to tempt me into believing what the people of Scientology believe in. The Lord said we would be tempted with the things of this world. I was no exception to His Word. When we first started going to church we lost all of our existing friends. The friends we thought liked us for who we were turned out not to like us if we were not going to remain who we were. If we were going to become Christians then we were out of the club. It did not take us long to figure out that sometimes your walk with Jesus was just that. Your walk with Jesus and that was okay with us. We had done things our way for long enough.

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We started thinking about trying to have a baby. So we prayed and thought the timing was right. Every month we waited to see if I was pregnant, and every month I was not. By this time, our friends Steve and Michelle who lived on base had one little girl and another on the way. I was real happy for her, but we were wondering why it was taking so long for us. They were not even trying and they were getting blessed. Month after month would go by and still no baby. Another *faith builder* in my life. I prayed and prayed that God would send us a baby.

I remember going up front one time to get prayed for and the Pastor prayed. Then he turned to Marty and prophesied over him and said, "You will have a son when you become a son." God knew our walk with him was a little off and sometimes indecisive.

I cannot tell you the pain we were feeling for not being able to have a baby. I was beginning to cry every month. None of my pregnant friends wanted to tell me they were pregnant. My stepsister had one child and she was pregnant with her second one. Seven months went by before I found out she was having another baby.

I finally went to the doctor to see if anything was medically wrong. They tested Marty first and found nothing wrong. Then they started testing me. They could not find anything except for some scarring I had from the toxic syndrome I had when I was younger. The doctors told me I should have my tubes blown out to clear them. So Marty took off work and went with me to have this procedure done. I have never felt anything that hurt this badly-I guess because of all the scarring I had.

A few months later we had to move again to another house on base so someone else could move in. We had just received a promotion so we were in line for a bigger house. We moved one street over. This house had three bedrooms, also, and two bathrooms plus a basement and hardwood floors throughout. It was nice and very big, and the park was right behind our house.

We were all settled in and enjoying our new home and waiting to get pregnant. We were going to church almost every Sunday by this point in our marriage. Marty had been struggling with his bad temper throughout our whole marriage and it seemed to be getting worse. When he would get mad he would lose control. It was getting to the point where I would go hide in the bathroom and lock the door. He was always sorry

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for whatever would happen, but I did not want to live in fear anymore. My husband was also raised around violence and alcohol abuse. He was only acting out what he had learned at home. I was not sure if we should continue trying to get pregnant anymore until I knew he was going to change. There were times I thought the only thing that was between my face and his fist was God.

When I was a child I did not have a choice in the way I lived or who I lived with, but now I was an adult and I wanted more. I sat with him one night and told him exactly that. I also said that if he did not get help that I was leaving. There was not going to be a marriage and there was not going to be any baby. I just could not do this to myself. That night he called one of our Pastors and asked for help. From that point on God was working in my husband. God did not want him to be so full of anger. His word says:



Slow to anger, abounding in love. Psalm: 86; 15

A fool gives full vent to anger. Proverbs: 29:11

But I tell you anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Matthew: 5:22



I knew He did not want him suffering with those feelings anymore. Another *faith builder* in my life and I knew God could change this in our lives. I was so happy that we were getting along so good. My mom and step dad were being sent to Florida on a job in a few months. I was going to miss them. We had gotten spoiled going to the lake where they lived to go fishing and skiing. They had a great house that sat about 30 feet from the lake. My mom would make us these fabulous meals when we would visit.

When we had moved into the new house, I had taken a job at the courthouse as a court clerk. I did not have any experience, but I had the gift of gab, and that is what I did. I sat down on my interview and began to talk about Jesus and how wonderful He was, and my future boss agreed.

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She had gotten off on the wrong track and I guess she appreciated my genuine love for God. It felt so good to tell someone how good God is. I was hired on the spot. I started the next day.

God was so good to us and we loved Him so much. I had never felt something so right. I could see all the great things He was doing in our lives.

The Lord's hands were mending our marriage. He was watching over us. God loved us unconditionally. No matter what we did or how bad we messed up, He still loved us. I had never experienced anything like this before. It seemed like my whole life I was trying to get this. I loved my God so much.

Chapter Ten

YOUR HEART

*Oh Lord when everything around us is in such a mess...
That's when our faith is put to the test...
My eyes are focused, but my heart went astray...
Oh Lord be my strength, this is what I pray...
Find my heart Lord and return it to me...
I need my eyes, but only to see, I need my heart so I can be...
My faith has been weakened, but not for long...
You are my Lord and You are strong...
I look up to heaven with those eyes I can see...
You found my heart Lord, It's Yours beating in me...*

MY JOB WAS GOING GREAT and God was using me to witness to people. It felt so good to be used by God. It was such an honor for me to think that God could use me because my heart's desire is to please him. Marty and I were still trying to have a baby. At times my faith was tested and it was hard to continue believing for a baby I could not see but desperately wanted. I knew it would happen and it would be in God's timing. As we were waiting to be blessed with a baby, our relationship with each other and God was getting stronger. I'm not saying that it was easy or that I did not cry at times because I wanted to be pregnant. What I am saying is trusting in God and his timing made it bearable. Marty still had a battle with his temper and there were times I wasn't sure if I could hold on. I was believing God to deliver him. I did not know a lot

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about faith, but I did know that my God loved me and He was going to take care of me. His will was going to be done.

I remember one time Marty was at a baseball game and I had taken a pregnancy test and the results said I was pregnant. I called my friend to see if I was reading it right. She said that I was. It was faded but you could see the results. I tried to have my husband paged at the game because I was so excited. They could not do it for me so I waited for him to get home to tell him. It was late when he got home and I told him what I had done. He was so happy we jumped up and down and hugged each other and praised the Lord. My friend said she would make an appointment for me with her doctor the next day. We went to sleep that night thinking it couldn't get much better than this. How faithful our God is.

The next morning, I got up and got ready to go see the doctor. Marty had to go to work so my friend came with me. I was so nervous because I could not wait to get confirmation about this pregnancy. The nurse came in and asked me to give a urine sample. They also took a blood sample because if I were pregnant, I was only a week or so along. They wanted to make sure that they got an accurate reading. I waited with my friend as patiently as I could. The nurse came back and said, "I'm sorry. The results indicate that you are not pregnant." I almost fell to the floor. I tried to be strong but I lost it and I cried and cried. The poor nurse did not know what to say except that she was sorry. When I got home I called Marty and told him what had happened. He did not understand why one test would say one thing and another say something else. He handled it better than I did. I still believed I was pregnant. I believed the first test. I do not know why but I had peace about it and I told my friend that I was pregnant. Maybe this was peace, maybe this was faith, or maybe this was I wanting it so bad.

Mom called from Florida and said their job was almost over and they would be coming home soon. The first weekend they came in we went down to see them. It was time for my monthly cycle again and my back was hurting really bad. I had a different feeling this month than any other months. I still believed I was pregnant from the previous month.

I knew this time. There was a peace I could not explain it but I knew God's hands were on me. It was the same peace that I had felt the month before. The next morning we went to the clinic and took

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the test. While I was waiting I prayed that whatever the results were, that it would be God's will. Within minutes the nurse came out and said, "Congratulations". I yelled as loud as I could, *Praise the Lord* and *Thank You Jesus*, over and over again. I could not say it enough. I knew where all the glory went and I wanted to make sure God knew how thankful I was. I did not have proof right then that I was pregnant the month before, but I would soon know just how powerful the Lord is.

Marty was not there with me. He did not want to be disappointed so he didn't go. As soon as we were finished there we went looking for Marty all over town but we could not find him. I was about to explode. We must have driven up and down Main Street a hundred times. Finally, we decided to go back to my mom's and see if he was there. I walked in and he wasn't there either. I really wanted to tell him in person but I could not wait so I tried calling him at his parents. He answered the phone. I said, "Marty, guess what - I'm pregnant." He was shocked. He hardly said anything but, we are really pregnant? I can't believe we are pregnant!" That was a wonderful day for Marty and I our faith really grew. This was another *faith builder* in my life. It was always about God's timing and not our timing. You see, if I had become pregnant when I wanted to, my mom and step dad would not have been there to share in the miracle of the birth. Also, Marty had to straighten out some things in his past. There was also a growing time we needed to have.

I was so excited about being pregnant that I tried to look pregnant as soon as I could. I would bring a grocery bag full of food to work with me so I could fatten up some. It worked, as I had gained about ten pounds the first month. I told the doctor, "I sure am showing fast." He said there was no way that was the baby so soon. He told me that was just weight gain. I didn't care. I was not fitting in my clothes anymore for whatever reason and I wanted to wear maternity clothes. In my second month I was wearing nothing but maternity clothes, due to the weight gain. Marty just loved me being pregnant. He thought I was so pretty. I was thankful for that because a lot of men don't think like that. I asked my doctor when my due date was and he said April the 9th.

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One morning when I woke up, I noticed some spotting and I called the doctor. He told me to lie down and call my husband to come get me and take me for some tests. They wanted to test me for a tubule pregnancy. They also told me to drink a lot of water, 8 ounces every half hour so they could see the baby on the sonogram better. I told them that I had a small bladder and I did not think I needed that much water but they insisted. When I got off the phone I started drinking the water but I did not drink as much as they said because I knew I could not hold it.

As Marty and I sat out in the lobby waiting to see the doctor, we prayed. I asked God to please let this baby be okay and in the right place. I was about to explode with all this water in me and I was so glad I didn't drink every bit that they wanted me to. We waited and waited. Finally, they called me and told me to get undressed and as I was doing that, I could feel my faith slipping. I started to cry and plead with God, *please don't take my baby*. It was then that I knew it was not our baby at all; it was God's baby.

They came in and did the sonogram and they could not see anything. My bladder was too full, so they told me to go empty it some and come back, so I did. They tried again but it was still too full so they had me go and do the same thing again. When I got back they asked me how much water had I drank. I told them that I had not even drunk the amount they wanted me to. I told them that I had a small bladder. Finally on the third time they could see the baby's position. I asked, "How is my baby?" They said, "We will have to go get the doctor because we are not allowed to disclose that information." As I sat there for what seemed like forever, the doctor finally came in. He put the cold piece of metal on my stomach and started looking around. I looked up at him and asked, "Is my baby going to be all right?" The doctor looked at me and said, "Yes, the baby is fine." All I could do at that very moment was Thank God and cry.

We went back home and we had an even deeper faith in God that day. I had morning sickness really bad and I didn't know why they called it morning sickness because it seemed like I was sick all the time; morning, noon, and night. Even as I was getting so sick all I could think was it did

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not matter. This was God's baby and the sickness was well worth it. As sick as I was, I couldn't have been happier.



When I was about into my sixth month, I remember my dog was so jealous of the baby. She would jump into my lap and lay her head on my stomach and whine. She had been the baby for so long and I was hoping she could handle it when the real baby came. I loved my dog because she was there at times when nobody else was. She comforted me when I was living with the guy who abused me. There was definitely a bond between us. I also prayed that my dog, Trisha, would find her place in the family after the baby was born.



The time was getting closer and we were ready for the baby. I was getting tired and I had gained 50 pounds. It was time to deliver and I was ready. I got up one morning and went to work. I was sitting at my desk around nine o'clock and I felt a slight pain. My boss had walked by and found me just sitting there and she said, "Are you okay?" I told her I was fine. As I was sitting there, another pain came. This went on for a while. My boss came by again and said, "Is everything okay? Why are you just sitting there? You have a lot of work to be doing." I told her I was having pains. She had two kids of her own and asked me how often are the pains coming? I told her some would come every ten minutes, some every twenty minutes, and some every five. She told me I was in labor and that I should call my doctor and Marty. I called the doctor's office and they said to check a few things and call them back. Meanwhile, my office was trying to arrange my baby shower. They had planned on giving it to me that afternoon. They thought I would still be there for the shower as I was not due for another month.



I called the doctor's office and told them the results of the things they had me do and they said I needed to come in. This was about ten in the morning. I called Marty at work. He was at Physical Training but got my

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message and went straight to the doctor's. I was still at my baby shower and was having pretty regular contractions by this point. I went home and unloaded the car and went to the doctor.

When I got there, Marty said, "Where have you been?" I told him about my baby shower at work. You could tell he was a nervous wreck. The doctors called me in and checked me. They hooked me up to some monitors. Meanwhile, Marty called our parents in Warsaw. They were about two hours away so they got ready and drove up. The doctors kept me on the monitors for about an hour and I did not do anything else. The contractions stopped and the doctors were glad because I was not due until the 9th of April and it was only March 15th. The baby would have almost been a month early. I told them the baby was coming but the doctors decided to send me home anyway. Marty's mom was a nurse and she was on her way up with my mom.

Our mothers got to the hospital and they were told I had been sent me home. I was sitting in my chair when the doorbell rang. It was our moms. I told my mother-in-law that I was still having contractions and Marty was timing them for me. She took over and when she thought it was time, we went back to the hospital. This time they kept me. I was told to walk the hospital so I would dilate more. I could not believe the baby was almost here.

We had taken Lamaze and Marty was walking down the hall with me and he would say, "Breathe." Every few minutes he would say, "Breathe." The contractions were getting more intense and I was in a lot of pain. I looked at him and said, "You know Marty, if I was not breathing, I would be dead. I am breathing. Think of something else to say to me." That was all he could remember, and I could not remember how I was supposed to breathe. This went on for a long time. Finally, I went and got into bed. My friend was there from base, along with my husband, my mom, and my mother-in-law. We had all fallen asleep waiting on this baby. I would doze off between contractions.

The pain was increasing as it got closer to morning and the time was coming. Everyone was awake by now and the baby was on its way. I had an epidural and could not feel a thing. It was great! The excitement was building and we were ready to become parents. Finally, the doctors said it was time to push. I pushed about three times and there she was, our

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beautiful baby girl Whitney La Dawn Davenport weighing 6 pounds 2 ounces. She was born on March 16th almost a month early - or was it? I believed I was pregnant when I had gone to the doctor the month before and that is why I had a peace about everything. We were so happy. We thought she was the prettiest baby we had ever seen. After everyone went home, it was just Marty and I lying there, telling each other how much we loved each other and how great we thought life was. The hospital stay was perfect, the baby was perfect, but the time was coming when we had to go home. I called my mom and told her I did not want to go home until she was at my house. She had convinced me that I had to go home and she would be there soon. We were so nervous because we had never had a baby and were not sure about what to do. I was nursing her and I really did not know what I was doing.

Although the nurses helped me, and we had watched a lot of tapes during our hospital stay, we just did not have the confidence we needed. Nevertheless, we went home with her and everything was fine. When my mom and dad showed up, we sure were glad to see someone who had done this before. My mom planned on staying a week and then the baby and I would go to her house for a week because Marty had to go back to work and I did not want to be alone. Looking back on this, I would have done things a little differently. I would have had my mom stay a little longer. I would not have gone to her house after Marty went back to work because he did miss out on some of his bonding time with her.



The first week, it was hard getting used to the idea of getting up every three hours to feed the baby. It was so exciting and tiring all in one. The bonding we did was wonderful. I loved my baby. My dog did not feel the same way ☺. Our lives were forever changed. The hopes and dreams that I had before were so much better and different after having a baby. What used to carry so much importance took the back burner now. The feelings I had towards this precious child were like no other feelings I had ever experienced. I was supposed to go back to work in 6 weeks and the closer it got the worse I felt. Finally, I talked to Marty and asked him how he felt. We both decided it took over two years for us to get pregnant and

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now that we had a baby, we wanted to stay home and raise her. I called my work and offered to come in and train someone for my position but they understood and let me stay home with my daughter.



Now I am a full time housewife and mom. I was not sure what all this detailed but I was sure I was up for the task. You see, God has blessed me all my life with an abundance of energy for which I am grateful. It was so neat that this baby depended on me. What was even greater was that God trusted us to take care of her. She was such a blessing in our lives. Neither one of us knew a thing about raising a child. Our childhoods were not good examples and we really had to depend on God to help us.



Months have gone by and I was enjoying this new experience. The transition for my husband had been a little harder though. He still wanted to keep his old life by going hunting or fishing every weekend playing softball two to three nights a week or going out with his friends to play pool. There was always something. I would have been okay with this if I wanted to raise this baby alone, but I did not.

I'll never forget this one time that he had hunting plans. The weekend was near and it was time for him to go but Whitney and I got the flu. It was a Friday and we had gone to the doctor and he called in a prescription. We went home and when Marty got home I told him that we had the flu. He said he was sorry. I could not help but notice that as he was saying how sorry he was, and he was still packing his clothes to go away for the weekend on a hunting trip. I mentioned that the doctor had called in a prescription and that it would be ready in about 30 minutes.

He kept on packing. I was getting really mad that he was still going. I started putting our coats and gloves back on. It was snowing outside and very cold. I could not believe he was going to go hunting for the whole weekend and leave me there sick, with our baby. The more I thought about this the madder I got. He did come up to me and ask, "Do you

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want me to go get the prescription for you.” By this time I was already so furious I did not want him doing anything for me. He gave us a kiss and left. I sat down and started crying. I must have cried for about 10 minutes. Then I heard the truck pull up in our driveway and it was Marty. I was so happy to see him. He walked in the door and said, “I’m such an idiot. I forgot to get some money.” My heart dropped and so did my faith that he would make the right decision and come back. God says; *do not put your faith in men. They will disappoint you; put your faith in God.* That was what I had to do that day. I had to put my faith in God to change my husband. This did not happen over night but it did happen.

Again Marty called on the Pastor of our church to help him. He met with Marty about once a week and they discussed how to value your wife. When my husband was first asked that question he did not even know what that word meant, but within a few weeks he not only knew what that word meant, but how to do it. Our marriage was being healed and we were finally letting God do something in our lives. Marty didn’t know how to treat a wife and I really did not know how to treat a husband. God needed to teach us.

When Whitney was about six months old, we found out Marty’s mom had cancer. She had it in one of her lungs and some of her ribs. She was going to have surgery and extensive Chemotherapy. She did fine for a while and even went into remission. Marty and I knew that she would be healed because we prayed and God was going to heal her.

Marty and I were trying to have another baby and we thought it would take some time but within four months we were pregnant. At first I was so sick I ended up in the hospital dehydrated. I stayed there for a few days and then I went home. The first three months were hard. Marty thought this one would be a boy because he was God’s son now, and he never forgot the prophecy that was spoken over him about three years earlier. I had a feeling it was another girl, which was okay with me. The day came for me to have a sonogram to find out what we were having. Marty did not come because he was at work and I was supposed to come by after the exam.

As I was lying there waiting on the doctor I thought I really wanted a girl but I also wanted a boy for Marty. The doctor did the sonogram and said, “Well you’re going to have a healthy baby girl.” I was happy and

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I knew Marty would be to after the shock wore off. He was convinced that it was a boy for 5 months so this was going to be a surprise for him. I drove to his work and as I was pulling in he was pulling out. I rolled down my window. I did not know how to say it so I just said, "It's a girl." He looked right at me and said, "You're kidding right." I shook my head and said no. He shook it off within minutes and said that's great, he had to go, and that he would see me at home. I knew he was a little disappointed but I also knew he was going to love whatever we had no matter what. The next few months went by and we were getting ready for our new arrival. Marty had a school to go to and his mom told him that she would be okay; that he should go. We prayed a lot for her and had our church praying for her and we knew she was going to beat this. She was very tough. Marty left and everything was going pretty good.

A few weeks went by and I received a phone call from Marty's grandma. She said Patty (Marty's mom) had taken a turn for the worse and that we needed to get Marty home from the military training school he was attending. I called my husband's Commanding Officer and requested that he come home to be with his mother. He informed me that we needed to go through Red Cross and that they would contact Marty at his school and get him home. Red Cross reached Marty and he was on the next flight out. I picked him up at the airport and took him straight to his mother. By this time she was in the dying stage. She had quit eating and all the signs of death were there.

Marty and his brother tried to be strong but this was their mother and they were in a lot of pain. Not only did Marty have to deal with those emotions but he was also dealing with a lot of anger towards God. You see, he had complete faith that God would heal his mom and he did not see this happening. The boys went to Warsaw where their mom and dad lived to pick up her favorite nightgown and her wig for her burial. I went home with our daughter and tried to get some rest.

It was about eleven o'clock when the phone rang and it was Marty. He was crying and said, "Please come to grandma's. My mom is not doing well. She could pass away any minute." I hung up the phone and called my good friend and asked her if she could keep Whitney while I went to be with Marty. She came and got me and we drove back to her house to drop Whitney off with her husband.

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When I walked into the house, I could feel the spirit of death in the room. Marty had called our Pastor and he was there. When Marty and I first became believers we tried to share our faith with Patty but she did not want us talking about that stuff in her house because she was afraid. Of course I could respect that and I did not want to offend her, now I know better. I would rather offend someone and get them to heaven than to risk them going to hell. Something must have stuck in her mind because before she went into an unconscious state, she asked to speak to a Christian friend that she knew.

Her friend came to see her from Warsaw and that day Patty gave her life to Jesus. She even told her daughter that she could see Jesus and how beautiful everything was. As we sat there watching her every breath get shorter and shorter, the boys were starting to go into shock. Everyone's eyes were on her watching her breathe in and out. She would stop with the boys hollering, "No, No, No" and then she would start breathing again. She was a real fighter. It was at this point that our Pastor felt it was time to pray and let the Lord know that it was ok to take her. As soon as we said, "Amen", Patty took her last breath and went to be with Jesus. It was then that God healed her and took away the pain.

Her family had always tried to get her to stop smoking. The thing is, she did finally stop but not without having to pay the ultimate price – her life. I was also a smoker and was feeling the need to quit. Patty lived a rough life and she had a lot of pain at times, but now she was with God and she would not feel any more pain or sorrow. I could not tell you the pain my husband went through but I know this affected him in ways I could not have imagined. The funeral was three days later. She looked so pretty and peaceful. That was a hard day for everyone, but especially for her kids. As I looked around, I could recognize the pain that they were feeling. The only joy we had was knowing that she was with Jesus and she was not suffering anymore.

Several months had gone by now and I was about 2 weeks from my due date. I was cleaning my house one day when I noticed a pain in my stomach. I sat there and waited and there was another pain. This went on until Marty got home from work. When he walked in I told him what was happening and he started timing them. I wanted to take a shower just in case I was in labor. I got in and every time I would have a contraction,

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I would holler out, "I'm having one," and he would time them for me. We called my mom and let her know what was going on. I got dressed and I did my hair and paced the house waiting. I called Michelle down the street and let her know what was going on. An hour went by and we decided to go on to the hospital. Michelle had Steve watch Whitney so my friend and mom and dad went with us to the hospital. Marty's dad and brother were on their way.

When I got to the hospital, they admitted me and I was getting ready to have my second baby. I had an epidural the first time and I wanted to go natural this time. I was determined that I was going to pray my way through it. They got me hooked up to all the machines and I was dilated to 2 centimeters. Everything was going great; I was breathing through the contractions and it did not seem bad at all. I knew a little more this time around, so that helped also. Within an hour I had dilated to 3 and things were moving right along. I was ready and I was so happy everything was going so smoothly. Before I knew it I dilated to 4 and then 6 and then 7 centimeters, breathing in and out and trying to stay focused but the pain was getting a lot more intense. I tried telling the doctors that I felt something that did not feel right, and about the same time my friend said, "Did you see that? Did you see that?" I did not see anything but I sure did feel something that was so strange; like a bubble turning inside me. It felt like my whole stomach did a flip.

Once my stomach settled, everything stopped; even my contractions. I remember asking the doctors, "What is the matter, why did I just stop?" The doctor had 2 or 3 nurses pulling and pushing on my belly to move the baby; she had done a flip in my stomach. What I felt was real because she breach and they could not get her back to the right position in my stomach. Hours were going by and I decided to have an epidural. They told me everything was fine and that the baby was doing well.

I had been in labor for almost 24 hours and I was getting really tired. Finally the baby was ready and so were we. They told me to get ready to push. I pushed and nothing. I could barely feel anything so it was hard to know when to push. I tried to push again and she moved some, and again she moved some more but this did not feel right. Although I was numb, I could feel the extreme pressure of the baby. The doctor told me to push again and when I did she came out. She did not come out like the way

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you would have thought. She came out like a frog. Her legs were up on her shoulders and she was folded in half. We found out later that there were not many babies born in the United States in a frog position. Before I had given birth, my doctor had gone to a seminar on Frog deliveries. I thought that was amazing. Little did he know that he would be delivering my baby in this fashion. Dakota Patricia Davenport is what we decided to name her. She was named after her Grandma Patty who had passed away just months earlier. Dakota was just great! She was a healthy baby girl. She had a rough beginning but she was fine now. I was a little sore but I was fine also. We went home a few days later.

The first week my mom came to stay with us. This time it felt different than before. I was bleeding more and I did not have a good feeling at all. When the week was up we decided I would go home with my mom for another week. I just wasn't getting my strength back as fast as I had before. Marty was going with us. It was the weekend and he did not want to be away from his new baby for that long. This way he would be there with us the whole weekend and then he would go home to go to work and then come back and get us that next Friday.

When we got to my mom's, she was doing everything for me. I felt very weak. The baby had her two-week check up so we went. We used our family doctor. While I was standing there waiting to do some insurance stuff, I felt this awful feeling something was coming out of me. I told my mom something was wrong and I needed to go to the rest room. When I got in there I looked down and I had passed a blood clot the size of a large egg. I went back to my mom and told her. She said, "Make sure you tell the doctor when you get to see him." I was scared and did not know what was going on. When I got into the doctor's office I told him what had happened and he said, "That's normal, go back to your mom's and rub your uterus and everything should be fine." He did not even look at me. He checked the baby, gave her shots she needed and we left.

I thought how strange but everyone's delivery is different, including postpartum, so we went back home to my mom's. I told Marty what had happened and he said, "Do what the doctor said." I sat down and started rubbing my uterus. I was feeling really weak because of all the blood I was losing. I did this for about an hour and then I felt something that was not good at all. Blood started gushing out of me. My mom called the

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emergency phone number and the doctor was going to meet us up there. Marty picked me up and took me straight there. When we got there I was bleeding even more. It was everywhere. I was so weak. The doctor came in and examined me. He told Marty I needed to have an emergency DNC and that they were taking me to the next town where they were equipped to do this type of procedure.

They called my regular doctor to have him meet us there and I told Marty to go get some of my things and let my mom know what was going on. They were taking my vitals all the way there. It was about a 30-minute drive and I was losing a lot of blood. The doctors would hold up their fingers and ask me how many were there, and what my name was. They had me talking the whole trip. I tried to go to sleep but they kept me awake. We finally got to the hospital and they put me in a room where I waited to see my doctor. He came in and quickly did an exam on me and then he took me into surgery. Marty almost missed me because he had been behind us getting everything together.

I told Marty to pray for me and then they took me away. A couple of hours later I woke up and Marty was there. The doctor came in and said everything went well, that I just needed to be cleaned out. I was released before noon. I got back to my mom's and I sure was happy to see my kids. Once Marty knew I was going to be all right he went back home and went back to work. I did just fine that day but later that night I was still bleeding pretty badly. I called my doctor and he said, "Stop worrying. Everything will be all right. You just had a baby so give yourself some time to heal." I didn't have a good feeling about this because I was cramping and I did not feel right.

I went to bed but I did not get much sleep that night because of the cramps I was having and the discomfort. The next morning when I got up, I was feeling the same way and maybe even worse. I was running a fever, so I called the doctor again. He reassured me and told me I was going to be fine, to rest and be patient. By then he had convinced me that I was paranoid, so I tried to forget about it. I laid around all day long as my mom waited on me. I knew this was not normal because I remembered with Whitney that I was up and around doing things within a few days.

I went to bed that night and I started having some cramps in my stomach. I was lying there for a minute to see if they would go away, then

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Dakota started crying and I was trying to get to her but I could hardly move. I had to crawl off my bed and it was then I decided I needed to get help, so I crawled to my mom's room. I was lying against her door banging with my elbow. I didn't even have the strength to talk. My mom finally heard me. She came out and asked me, "What's wrong." I told her, "I'm having these awful cramps." She thought it was gas so she proceeded to try and give me an enema. When she attempted this, I let out a scream and she said my body started bouncing up and down. I had gone into shock. My mom called Marty's dad and told him she needed help because my dad was not there. Then she called Marty and told him to meet us at the military hospital in Knob Noster, MO. I remember lying on the couch shaking so badly. I tried to stop my body from shaking so hard, but I felt really cold and I had no control. Within minutes Marty's dad was there, and he rushed me to the emergency room.

When we got there Marty was already there waiting. They put me in a room and were going to do an exam, but I told them I could not have anything done until I was out of pain. I was crying and I had never felt anything like this before. Labor was nothing compared to this. They did give me something for the pain. The doctors did a lot of testing and admitted me that night. The next morning they did a sonogram and found a 9 by 9 centimeter infection between my uterus and rectum. They immediately started me on an antibiotic. They did not know if I would make it through this infection or not. If it ruptured, it would spread throughout my entire body and within minutes it could kill me. I had been there six days and the infection was not responding to the antibiotics. They did sonograms every day, and it seemed to be getting worse, so they suggested it was time to move me. I had to be sent to a hospital in Kansas that would be better equipped to take care of an infection of this magnitude. Marty called my mom and my mom called my grandma from Texas to let her know this infection was pretty bad and they could not get it under control. My grandmother came right away.

Within the hour I was in an ambulance being moved. I knew this was serious and I was getting a little scared. I did not know a lot about being healed other than by a doctor. I sure didn't have the faith, at this point in my walk with Jesus, to believe I would be healed miraculously. When I got there, I was in a lot of pain. The infection was clearly getting worse.

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They wanted to do another exam but I could not let them do that to me again without medication; it was just too painful.

I was put in a room and they started me on more antibiotics. The doctors did come in and try to explain to me what was happening. I did not understand why I was not getting better and seemed to be getting worse. I had now been in the hospital for a week. I was nursing Dakota before all this happened. I still wanted to nurse my baby when this was all over so my mom would call me and tell me when she was feeding her and that is when I would pump my milk. I could not keep any of it because of obvious reasons. I did not get to see my kids that much because the hospital was about three hours away. I had never felt so sad. Even when I did get to see them, I knew I would have to say good-bye. I prayed for God to save me and put me back with my family. God is so faithful and it was not my time to go yet. Marty had just lost his mom so he was drained from that emotion. He did not know how serious things were with me until they moved me this last time. He stayed at the hospital every night from then on.



It has been about 2 weeks now and the medication seems to be working. I am feeling a lot better but still very weak. One day a friend of ours came by and said what happened to me did not seem right. Something wasn't adding up. Marty and I talked about it and started wondering why this infection was not caught earlier. I had been in a doctor's office when all this started and was given the advice to go home and rub my uterus. Then again I was at another hospital getting an emergency DNC. We could not help but wonder why this infection was not caught before it almost killed me. We decided to hire a lawyer to find out some of these answers.



I will never forget the smell of the hospital. There was a strong odor of bleach in the towels, the bed linens, and the water. It was everywhere so strong that you could taste it. I tried having Marty bring me some of

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my soap from my house thinking that would help but the scent was so strong nothing covered it. The day came when I was finally released from the hospital. The infection was under control but it still wasn't completely gone. They sent me home with all kinds of medication to continue taking for a month. I also had to come back for another sonogram a week later to check the infection and make sure that it was still shrinking.

Marty took me to my mom's house where we stayed for a while. I still felt a lot of pain and I was still very weak but I was also very thankful for my life. Marty came to me one night and said, "I need to talk to you." He continued, "Michele, when you first got sick I was trying to take care of the girls and help your mom with some things. In addition, I was feeding Dakota every 3 hours around the clock. I entertained Whitney and came to see you in the hospital. I want you to know how sorry I am for all the times I didn't help you and the times that I was not there for you." He also told me that my job taking care of the children was to be respected, that his job was a lot easier and he would not want to trade with me. That night he became the best father and husband. I could tell he wanted to be there and he no longer acted like we were holding him back from something that seemed to be more important. He was putting us first. I guess we stayed another week or two with my mom. She was the biggest blessing to us. I do not know what we would have done if we had to worry about our kids and how they were through all of this. I knew they were being well taken care of and they had plenty of love and kindness.

We got home and Marty went back to work. The first day was an adjustment for me. I had not had the kids almost since Dakota was born. As the days went by, I had a lot of fun being a mom and a housewife again. It was great being able to cook my family a good meal. I was just glad to be alive and have my life back. I remember a friend once told me that having two kids was not much different than having one. Well I found that not to be true. You need to pray a lot more with two. ☺ God was so good he had me back on my feet in no time. My husband grew a lot through all of this and so did I. My friends and I joked a lot after this. I would say, "Well, I almost had to die to get my husband to help me but he finally saw the light." Marty really did change. He helped me more than I could ever have hoped for.

Mark 11:25 *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*

We had an attorney now who found out some interesting things about what happened the night I went in for the DNC. He found out that I was released from the hospital in less than 24 hours and that I had a 104-degree fever when they let me go home. A fever is a sign of infection and they should have kept me longer. They would have found the problem sooner when it was a lot smaller. The attorneys are still looking for more information. After a lot of research we finally agreed on a settlement.

I was happy to also be back in our church again. We were Sunday school teachers and we really loved it. The fellowship there was awesome. It seemed every time the doors were open the anointing was there. It was a nondenominational church and it was our home. I was trying to quit smoking and the whole church would pray for me. Some of them would come by and check on me. People would call me on the phone to encourage me. It was great but it was not God's timing. He was working on other areas in my life; mainly what was inside. I went through a lot of counseling from my past and I was delivered from a hard heart that I had towards my mom. I learned how to forgive the men who raped me and all the other men who had hurt me physically and mentally. This took about a year of meeting with one of our Pastors and his wife. When I was healed I was truly set free from many fears and the inferiorities I had in my life.

Six months later I went up front to receive the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues. Ever since then God has used that in my life. I find it to be so peaceful knowing that when I am speaking in my prayer language, God knows my heart and He gives me the words to say. I cannot describe the peace that I feel when it is just God and I. He has been so faithful to me. Our life was complete. We knew God and we were growing. Our kids were blessed and Marty had a good career with the military. He received a promotion and we were saving some money. What happened next in our lives was another *faith builder*.

One day Dakota got sick so I called her doctor and he called her in some medicine. She was congested and was having hard time breathing. I waited about an hour and then I picked up her medicine. When I got home Marty was there. We talked and I told him what was going on with Dakota. He ran a bath for Whitney. I opened the medicine and gave Dakota 2 teaspoons of it and went to lay her in her crib. I walked out of

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her room and went back into the kitchen. I was invited to a Michelle's house for tea and I was waiting to tell Marty what he needed to do with Dakota after I left.

As I was sitting there waiting, the Holy Spirit told me to look at the box the medicine came in. The directions were on the bottle I had thrown away. God told me to get it out of the trash and look at it, so I did. I started reading and in small print it said, "*Do not take this medication by mouth it is for inhaler use only.*" Immediately I called poison control and hollered at Marty to come here. As I was waiting for them to answer I told Marty what I knew. Poison control answered and said, "How can I help you?" I proceeded to tell them what had happened. They asked me exactly what the medicine said. I read it to them and I was repeating everything they said so Marty could hear. The lady on the phone said, "You need to get her to the nearest hospital." Marty picked her up and ran out of the house. The lady on the phone told us that her heart rate could speed up and her heart could explode. She would die if she were not seen immediately. I started praying right away. I went to get Whitney out of the tub and jumped into the car and headed straight to the hospital, which was about 10 minutes away. I have never prayed so hard in all my life; I prayed in tongues; I prayed every way I knew how and I knew she would be okay. The peace was coming.

When Whitney and I got there, Dakota was already having her stomach pumped. She had these tubes going down into her and my heart just fell. She was so little, only about six months old, but I was so happy I knew God and His voice. God saved my baby that day! The doctors said she would be just fine and that they had to keep her on a heart monitor for a couple of hours. We felt so blessed that God had touched our lives again. I went over that day in my mind several times. Without a doubt, if I would have put her to bed and left her there she would have not been alive the next morning and God knew this. We serve a great and powerful, loving God who came to save us.

Chapter Eleven

FAITH

*When God speaks to you, and reveals his will,
It is up to you to climb the hill...
You must trust in Him in all you do,
What are your choices to get you through?
Faith is the answer to the believer's who believe,
Jesus is your witness, He is the key...
Stay focused on Him and whatever He says,
Only He knows what lies ahead...
In times like this, I know what to do'
I'll put my faith in only you...*

OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS everything was back to normal. We were all healthy. You see, since I was about 15 years old I had been smoking. When I wasn't saved it didn't bother me, but it had really been a strong hold in my life. I believe what the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* What didn't bother me before; now bothered me because I was learning the Word of God. When we know better we will do better. I had bronchitis all the time and I was always fighting a cold. I also had a bad cough most of the time. I spent a lot of time in prayer about this and my church stood in agreement with me on several occasions. As hard as we prayed, I still was not delivered. Satan had a hold on my health and he had me convinced that I could never

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quit this habit. I know you won't go to hell for smoking but you sure will smell like you've been there. I was just tired of hurting my body and smelling horrible. I had gone back to school to get my degree in interior design and nobody smoked there. It was so embarrassing because I did. I went to school four nights a week and you could not smoke there and I did not smoke in my house. I tried to make it as hard as I could on myself to smoke.

Months would go by and I would not think about it, but then I would try to quit again. It was awful. I never had any peace about it, not even when I prayed. What I did not know, was you had to believe you would be delivered and I never thought God could deliver me. This was a *faith builder* that would last a long time. I was very stubborn in this area of my life. I thought, "Its only one little sin why can't I just keep it?" The reason why I could not hold onto this one little sin was because one sin leads to another, not to mention worshipping any other God is committing adultery on the one true God. Smoking always kept me in Egypt; it held me hostage and tormented me day and night.

Every time something would come up I would say, *Well I can't quit now.* This is happening and then something else would happen. You know, life happens and it was never going to be the right time. I was never going to do this in my own strength. There were a lot of things God had to teach me first. I did not know this when I was trying so hard. I was getting mad about this situation in my life and wanted to know why I was still smoking. Every time I would go to God I never really got an answer. Looking back I believe even if God would have given me an answer I would not have believed it. I did not have the faith that it was going to take to stop this habit. I did have a lot on my mind I was trying to finish a two-year class in one year. I had two kids and a house to run. My load was heavy and I thought this gave me a reason to keep smoking. I can tell you this for sure; if you are looking for an excuse to keep on smoking you are not serious about quitting. *Remember this the time it takes for you to look for an excuse is all the time the enemy needs to give you one.* Satan will give you as many excuses as you need. He also tormented me with my health a lot because he knew where my fear was. Here is an example:

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I had this growth on the bottom of my foot for about a year and it seemed to be getting worse and growing. It was the size of a dime and stuck out about a quarter of an inch. I could not walk flat-footed. I let it go thinking it would go away. I put some corn medicine on it and it would feel better for a while, but it never went away and it got so bad that I could hardly walk. Finally, I went to the doctor and he told me that it was a bone growing through the bottom of my foot. He also said that I needed surgery. He looked at the other foot and said I needed surgery on that foot as well for preventive reasons. He told me he would go in there and cut about 2 centimeters off the bone of my middle and baby toes. I talked to Marty about it and he said he just wanted me out of pain and able to walk correctly, so we decided this would probably be the best thing to do. Besides, I was still going to school and I could not afford to miss much.

The day I went in for surgery, I prayed that God would heal me, but I still had doubt about the power of healing. I knew God wanted to heal us but I was not sure He always wanted me healed. I felt so much guilt for still smoking that at times I thought he was punishing me. I didn't know this at that time, but God was teaching me how to trust Him and His word. I had been hurt so many times by men, and although I had a lot of counseling God was a man and I had a hard time in the beginning of our relationship trusting Him.

We scheduled the surgery and planned for the kids to stay with my mother for a few days while I was healing. Marty took me to the hospital and he was there when I came out of surgery. I was so dizzy from the anesthesia that it looked like there was five of him. We had to wait for a while until some of it wore off. I was on walking crutches and a walking shoe for six weeks. Those of you who have kids know this took a certain amount of faith to try and take care of two kids in this predicament. My mom was great and she helped a lot. As a matter of fact, I stayed with her for the first week. I went back to the doctor and he said I was doing fine and wanted to schedule me for my other foot to be done. I said, "Okay, we can get this all done before summer. That way I can go on walks and chase my kids and play tag

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and duck-duck goose with them.” It sounded like a good plan. It was not affecting my schooling because I was sitting in class so I did not miss much work.



I went back and had the same thing done to my left foot, but it hurt worse. It did not feel right; nothing like the right foot did when I had it done, so Marty and I prayed. We did not know what the problem was, so I called the doctor, and he said it would be fine; that there was no need to worry. I had heard that before and I was a little worried. My left foot hurt a lot and it looked different. It was more swollen than the right one was when I had the same surgery. I went back to see him and he examined it and said it was just fine.

My foot did heal okay but it looked a lot different than the right. One toe was a lot shorter than the rest. About a month went by and I was off crutches now and just had a surgical shoe to wear. I started noticing my right foot hurting again. This went on for a couple of weeks and I decided to go back to the doctor. The growth had come back so he suggested another surgery when my left foot was completely healed. I could not believe this was happening. I had the church pray over my foot and Marty and I prayed. We knew that I needed prayer to be healed.

I limped around for another month and decided it was time to do something. I went back and saw the doctor again. He told me it was scar tissue that had built up after the surgery and he needed to go back in and remove it. I left there with an appointment for the next day. When I arrived, he told me everything he was going to do and then he put me under and did the surgery. I came out about one hour later and was fine. I was in a surgical shoe for 6 weeks this time.

I was believing for a healing and I knew God had his hand on me. The weeks went by so slowly and finally the day came to have the bandages removed. The doctor looked at my foot and said I was fine. I went home and I still walked with a limp because it was still very sore. As time went on I noticed that the pain was not going away. I called my doctor again and he said come back that he wanted to try something new. He told me it was more scar tissue that had built up and if he operated on it again,

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more scar tissue would grow back. I was wondering why he did the second surgery in the first place. He said he would like to cut it out of the bottom of my foot. I went home and told Marty. He was starting to not trust the doctor with my foot. By this time he was not charging me and he was willing to keep working on me until it was right. We agreed and Marty took me in. It was an outpatient surgery this time. When we got there he numbed my foot and cut the growth out. I went home again with a surgical shoe on. I had a check up in two weeks to see if that resolved the problem. We were still praying and believing God would touch my foot.

I found myself sitting in his office in two weeks! He had me take off the shoe so he could check my foot. At this time he did not sound as confident as I would have liked. The doctor said I hope this works for you this time. If it doesn't, call me and we will try something else until we get it fixed. I went home a little disappointed that day. It was obvious I was putting my trust in that doctor instead of in the Lord at this point. Whose report do you believe? I chose the wrong answer. I believed the report of the doctor.

I went to church with a hurt foot and I continued to have them pray for it. I could not understand the problem. Why wasn't I being healed? I was praying and I had the church praying but I still had a messed up foot. I did not know this at the time, but I was walking around with unbelief in my heart. I would take one step forward in faith and then take two steps backwards in unbelief. I was not making up my mind to believe God. I was going on what I could see, and I could see that my foot looked bad. I was also going on what I felt, and I knew my foot felt bad. The Lord says, *Walk by faith, not by sight.* That does not mean we deny that something is there, we just deny that it has a right to be there.

About a month went by and the problem returned. The growth was worse than before we started on all the surgeries. It was bigger and it hurt a lot more. I called the doctor one more time and told him what was going on. He told me to come back. When I got into his office he said, "How's your other foot?" I told him, "Just fine but it was just fine before you operated on it." I think he was trying to make me feel better that I had one good foot. The reason I went to him in the first place was that I wanted and needed to have two good feet. He looked at my

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right foot and said he had one more thing we could try and that was laser surgery, an in-and-out patient procedure. I agreed and we set up the appointment for the following week. I prayed to God again and again over the next week.

I thought I believed in God when I was praying. I bet if I would have had a tape recorder I could have heard all the unbelief in my voice and my heart. It was time for us to go to the doctor to see what he could do and that was my problem. I was going to put my faith in the doctor instead of putting my faith in God. He could have given the doctor wisdom about my feet since God was the one who created me and knew every hair on my head. I can assume that he knew exactly what the problem was with my foot. I was not praying like that, and when I was praying I had a lot of doubt and unbelief in my heart. It does not glorify God when we don't trust and believe in His word. He will not honor that.



Proverbs: 12-18

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

I was reckless when I prayed for my healing because I had so many doubts.

Isaiah: 53-5

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.



We are healed, we just have to believe and walk by faith. It is that simple, there are no special tricks. You do not need to stand on your head and do three flips to get a healing. It is as simple as believing in what you pray for. No matter what, without a doubt in your mind, your God will

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supply all your needs including and not excluding a healing for you and anyone else you pray for. Do not limit God by the lack of your own faith. I could have been healed four surgeries ago if I would have bothered to learn more about God's promises on healing. He wants us healthy and well so we can do His work and get people saved. We cannot do this crawling around practically dying and telling everyone how great Jesus is. People have to want what you have and be able to see a difference in your life.

I was sitting in his office once again waiting on my final surgery. The doctor called me in. He was ready to do the laser surgery on my foot. He gave me a series of shots to numb my foot and then he proceeded. When he finished I told him that I would call him if there were any problems. I left thinking *I hope this works*. That was another mistake. We cannot hope things work; we have to know things are going to work. If we pray and we believe, then we know. I went home and it was shortly after this we received orders to go to California. First, Marty had to go to a special school for some training for this new job. I had six more weeks of school until I graduated and Marty was leaving. My grandma offered to come and help me. Grandpa had died a few years before this and she started coming to Missouri for the summers. I only lived about an hour and a half away from my mom and grandma's health was good so I accepted. She was such a blessing once again in my life. Grandma really loved our kids and she was good with them. They adored her too. I could not believe we were being moved this far away. I remember telling Marty we would move to California, but someday the Lord said we were going to move to Tennessee. I felt that in my spirit and shared this with a few other people.

I remember watching Marty pack for his trip. The girls were crying because they did not understand what was happening and why their daddy was leaving. I tried to explain it to them but they were too young. The next morning we watched him drive off and we cried and cried. I did not want to be away from my friend that long. There was a lot of stuff to do to get ready for this move and I did not want to go through it alone. When you're in the military there is a certain amount of time you are going to be apart and we knew this when we made it our career. The girls and I spent the whole day thinking about daddy and talking about what

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we were going to do while he was gone. I tried to plan some fun things to keep their minds off their sadness. It was very hard to be strong. I was already missing him.

It was time to go back to the doctor to have him check my foot again. I went in and he took the gauze off and shook his head. He said, "I don't know why your foot won't heal." Then he proceeded to tell me there was nothing else he could do. It was scar tissue and there was nothing that could fix that. He also said it would not be a bad idea to go have a second opinion. I took his advice and I made an appointment with the best foot specialist in Kansas City. I walked into his office and I just knew he was going to tell me everything was going to be fine. He took some X-rays of my foot and then returned to the room with his opinion. He explained to me that there was nothing that could be done at this point because of all the scar tissue from all the other surgeries. He told me if he did any more surgery on my foot it would not correct the problem and it could make it worse.

I left that office feeling hopeless and fearful that I would never be able to walk without a limp. The option of being able to run again looked bleak. I did not realize how important my foot was until it was jeopardized. I think we do the same thing in our walk with God. We do not realize what a difference He makes in our lives until we exclude him. As for Christians and non-Christians, it may be too late one day for them to realize what an important role God plays in their lives. *Choices are for the living after your gone the choice will be made for you.* If I had kept the faith it took to be healed, then I would have been healed. I am not saying that we don't need doctors from time to time but what I am saying is that our main resource comes from the Lord. *Faith has a mouth.*

I went home and when Marty called I told him what the doctor had said, but he did not know what to say and neither did I. His trip went fine and he was all checked in. I cannot explain how I felt but I can say I wish I knew then what I know now. All I had to do was believe in what I prayed without wavering and stand in faith on God's word. Anyway, I accepted this news for now and needed to move on and get ready for my graduation and our move to California.

I called the Chamber of Commerce to send some information about rental homes, schools and apartments. I started to pray that God would

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find us a place 3000 miles away over the phone. Then I needed to have a garage sale to get rid of some of the things we would know longer need. I made 400 dollars on that garage sale and when Marty called I told him.

He said, "What all did you sell to make that much money?" I began to tell him all the things I sold and then I said, "Remember that old golf set we had tried to sell in all our other garage sales and it never sold?"

He said, "Tell me you didn't."

I said, "Yes we finally sold it."

Marty said, "For how much."

I said, "25.00 dollars."

He then said, "I cannot believe you sold my golf set. Those were the Pings that my dad gave me. I had just put them in my old bag." I apologized but he was too upset and he hung up on me. I thought, "*Well if he would have told me about the clubs and if he had cleaned out the shed like I asked then none of this would have happened.*" I had actually convinced myself it was his fault and I began to get mad at him for hanging up on me. Marty did forgive me. Weeks had gone by and I was almost ready to graduate. Finals were here and I was studying a lot. I was a little upset that my husband was not going to be here for my graduation, but my mom, the kids, and my grandma were so that was great. When my teacher gave me my diploma I could not believe how far God had taken me and I was truly thankful. I knew I was serving a powerful God. As I was standing in front of those people I thought to myself they don't know what it cost me to be here or where I came from or how God had delivered me but they did know that I loved God with all my heart. My teacher told me that night that not too many people have ever graduated from her two-year class in only one year with honors. I thanked her and gave all the glory to God.

A few more weeks went by and Marty was on his way home. We had 10 days to finish the final preparations and move out. We had planned to go to my mom's house and stay a few days before heading to California. God had found us a resort to live in; a place called Aliso Viejo, CA. We found out later that it was a new community in southern California. The time that we spent with my mom and our family was fantastic. We had a lot of heart to hearts and mended a lot of old wounds. Two days before we were supposed to leave, the girls and I got really sick with the flu and

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stomach virus. We had two vehicles so we had to follow each other. I prayed to God that we would not get separated. The only communication tool we had at this time was a child's magna doodle and if we needed something we would write it down then speed up to the other vehicle to show them what we needed, it was pretty comical.

We left around twelve in the afternoon and it was one of the hardest things I ever had to do. I'll never forget my mom standing on her porch waving good-bye I was crying saying, "Goodbye Mom, Goodbye Mom," just as if I were eight years old again. That was how I felt, like I was a little girl being taken away from my mom. I cried and cried that day. I was so scared to be moving all the way across the country. Marty tried to cheer us up but between being sick and sad, it was a hard task for him and he felt like this was all his fault. All these people were so unhappy because his job was moving us. The first day went okay until we stopped for the night and got something to eat. As soon as we were done I got sick. The girls would not even eat at all. We went to our hotel room and went to bed. The next morning we were still sick but we had a deadline to meet to get to California.

I tried to look at the bright side of all this but I couldn't imagine what it was. I had depended on my mom so much after we had kids. At least once a month my dad would come by and get them for the weekend. In the summer my mom would offer to keep them for a week or so to let Marty and I have some time together. I was so used to having family around that I wasn't sure I could make it without them or their advice. God had a plan.

That day we drove a little farther than the day before and we all were tired. The girls and I still had the stomach flu. I would call my mom every night to let her know we were okay and where we were staying. I knew deep down inside that God had his hand on us, and that he had a plan, but I was not sure what that plan was and if I would like it. I did find out that in your walk with God you have to be able to say, no matter what your plan is, "Lord, I am willing to follow you." There is a lot to be said for obedience. On the last day I was feeling a little better but the girls were not. It seemed they were getting sicker, and at this point, I still did not know enough about healing to really pray for them. I mean, I did pray

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but I did not stand solid on what I prayed for. I did not know enough to teach them how to stand solid either.

We arrived in California. It was a sunny and beautiful day with the mountains on one side and the ocean on the other. I could not believe we were finally here and we were getting ready to start our new lives as a family. It was going to be just us for a while until we could find a church home. That day we got our hotel and went to see our new home. It was a resort and it had a lot of amenities. It was very nice and very expensive to me but not for Southern California. It took a few days for our furniture to get there. We just hung out and checked out California. I could not believe all the Mercedes and BMW's that people were driving and all the cell phones. They were everywhere, in the grocery stores and at the pools. I soon felt like we may not fit in. I didn't realize the area that we were in was a rich part of town.

I drove a 1990 White Dodge Shadow with a missing hubcap. I did not have a cell phone and I wore sweat pants to the grocery store. I did not work outside the home, and Marty and I still believed in staying home and raising our children. I did not have my lips, hips or a nose job done and so I didn't quite fit in. I was not wanting to either. I knew I was different but I was glad. Our search for a church was on. We prayed and asked God to lead us to where we were supposed to be. It didn't take long, just a few months. The pastor of this church was great. He was on fire and had a passion about God and his people. His sermons were always full of life and he was excited about teaching us. We loved our church. The people seemed to have a clique though. We had a hard time finding couples to fellowship with. I went to God and asked several times to send us some new friends. This never happened. Sometimes there is a time to be with just the Lord; a growing time, a healing time, and a learning time, and I believe this was one of those times.

Before we left Kansas City, our Pastor's wife prayed a prayer of prophecy over me. She said that a woman would be waiting there for me. She would be like a mother figure and a person who would encourage my family and me. About a week after we had moved in, I saw this lady walking down the sidewalk where we lived. She was going to move into the empty apartment next to us. I was talking with her and her husband and I soon found out they were Christians. I told her what had been

Mark 11:25 *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*

prophesied over me and that I thought she was the lady waiting for me. She just gave me a big hug. I only knew her for a few minutes but through Jesus we were forever connected. I was beginning to realize there was a higher purpose for us being here than just Marty's job. My mom had told us we were being sent here to do something for God's kingdom. Meeting this lady made me recognize that God had a plan.

Over the next few months I did not see her very often but when I did she always had a kind word for me. I took up watching the cooking channel and a Christian network called TBN. I was still limping around on my foot and I was in and out of pain. I was lost in my faith when it came to my foot and did not know how to find it. One night we were watching TBN and an Evangelist that was known to work in the gift of healing. It was at the end of one of his services and he was offering up prayer requests for healing. He started telling the people in the audience to come and receive their healing. Then he looked at the TV and said, "Anybody at home who needs a healing close your eyes and say this prayer with me." At that very moment my husband reached over and put his hand on my foot and started praying for me. I joined him in agreement and we said a prayer and believed what we were praying.

We did not talk about what we prayed; we just went to sleep. The next morning I woke up and began my day just like any other day. I had gone all day long and realized I was not in any pain. I was walking flat-footed without limping. I did not want to lose my faith, I believe I wasn't suppose to look at my foot for three days, therefore when I bathed and I didn't turn my foot over where I could see anything. I knew if I saw the growth still there that I would deny that I had received my healing from God. God knew this about me. This was another *faith builder* in my life. On the third day I was taking a bath and knew that it was time for me to look at my foot. When I looked down there was nothing there, not a scar, not a growth, nothing. This was a true miracle! I had gone to two different doctors who said I would always walk with a limp, and that my foot would never be normal again. It was then that I learned about faith and how to receive a healing from God. This was just the beginning for me and how my faith would be tested. I knew that everything God's Word said about healing was the truth and I could stand solid on it. I

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would not waiver on what I believed was the Word of God. This did not mean I would not be tested.

I shared this story with anyone who would listen. It was my testimony that God heals. I walked, I ran, and I praised my God for my healthy foot. When God does a miracle in our lives we need to tell people. It may be a *faith builder* in someone else's life. God hardly ever gives us something that we are supposed to keep to ourselves. It should not be kept a secret how powerful God is if you believe in His Word. Several years later I was sharing my testimony with the vacation Bible school. I was sharing what had happened to my foot and the Lord told me to look at the bottom of my foot. I looked down and He had left a memory for me of what He had done. A silhouette of a cross was embedded onto my foot.

Now, I thought the time had come to trust God to help me to quit smoking. I told Marty I was going to get the patches and I was going to quit. Of course he was happy but a little skeptical. I had tried so many times before and never did it for more than a couple of weeks. I went to the store and found the right patch for me and set a date to quit. I prayed and asked God to help me. I asked him to please not let me go through any withdrawals. I did not want any sign that I ever smoked before. I just wanted to wake up and be done. The time was approaching and I was starting to get anxious about the whole idea. I woke up one morning and the day was here. I put my patch on and went about my business for the day. I got the kids up and off to school. It was a day like any other day except I decided to trust God to deliver me from my seventeen-year addiction.

Hours passed and I still had not had a cigarette. When you are addicted to something you usually go one day at a time, or in some cases, one hour at a time. I was so excited that this stronghold was going to be lifted that I could hardly see straight. I praised God and trusted him. Day after day went by and I had been blessed. God had sent us there for a reason to witness to people. That's why he sends us anywhere. He wants us to witness. I had met three women while I was there and one was very insecure. One was very unhappy in her marriage. One was trying to sit on the fence between God and the world. These women all had one thing in common, they were not very happy. Every time I approached them about God and where I stood, it offended them. I don't think they knew what

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true happiness was or how to find it. I ministered to these women only to be politely dismissed except for one. The one on the fence listened and even commented on several occasions. Her husband was not a believer but his mind was open. She was trying to raise two kids and live in a state of confusion. Her heart wanted all that God had to offer but her flesh did not want to be different. I grew close to this lady and I still pray for her and her family today.

I remember she was always so disorganized and I was thinking if she would get her life right with God everything else would fall into place. That is what our lives represent when we choose to walk in our own will. There cannot be any order that can last. I would go over to her house and try to help her get more organized. Sometimes I would work over there for 7 or 8 hours. The next time I would go over it would be worse than before. I couldn't understand this until God gave it to me biblically. The harder we try to clean our own lives the messier things get. If we give our lives to God, then when He cleans it is eternal.

The lady that seemed so insecure always had a complaint about something or somebody. She never seemed to get tired of her own voice mocking everything around her. Every time I talked to her she was negative. Nothing ever seemed to go the way she wanted it to. I would try to say positive things and she would turn them into something bad. She would pick apart anything going good in my life. I remember one time my husband brought something up in front of one of her sons about Jesus and being saved. The little boy went home and told his parents. They got mad at my husband and told him that they would rather us not tell him anything about Jesus without their approval. They wanted to teach their kids what they wanted them to know about Jesus. This friendship was always unstable because I never knew where I stood. I tried to understand this woman and I prayed that God would help me to be sensitive to her needs and he did. I learned how to talk to her and I realized she had been hurt and did not trust God. Her husband had gone through some things and he wasn't even sure there was a God.

He had said if there was a God why did He let so many bad things happen to him. There are so many people out there who think this way. We all have a purpose in our lives and it is up to us to seek God and find out what it is. A lot of times God uses the very thing that we fear to

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Glorify Him. That is what we are here for; to get people saved and Glorify Him. I know how bad it feels to be hurt and I also know that we need to forgive in order to be healed of that pain. I cannot sit here and pretend that I have all the answers as to why things happen but I do know that you can either dwell in self pity or you can move on and trust that God has a master plan for you and your life.

The lady who was miserable in her marriage used to have a relationship with Jesus but then she took another path. The Bible clearly states: *It's better to not ever know me, than to have known me and walk away.* This lady's life was an example of this. Her marriage was falling apart and her husband had moved out. She started dating and in her mind she did not see anything wrong with this. I talked to her many times. I really liked her. She had a lot of good qualities but she had not found true happiness, which is only found in the Lord. What she had found was an escape from her reality. God was not the master of her life; she was. From the time that I first met her until now I had watched her life go from bad to worse. I knew it was because she was getting farther away from God.

I know it may sound like I'm judging these women, but I am not. I am telling you how easy it is to become deceived. They are lost and if someone doesn't tell them, how are they to know. God's word says, His Word will not come back void. Satan has come to steal, kill, and destroy. If we are not telling everyone we can about how God has changed our lives and what he can do for them, then the door is left open for Satan. Satan will come in and tell his lies about how unhappy they are. Satan is still offering the same fruit he offered in the garden. He does not have any new tricks. His famous punch line is "Did God really say?"

There were days I felt like I was alone and there were days when I questioned God about our purpose for being there. I was still watching TBN and going to church and I was getting blessed. It was only a matter of months before Satan tried to come back and steal my healing with my foot but I rebuked him and he fled as fast as he came. Praise God!

Chapter Twelve

MILES AWAY AND LETTERS FEW

*As I sit here thinking of you, with tears in my eyes, not knowing what to do...
We lived our lives apart, Miles Away, sometimes not knowing what to say...
The calls were limited, the Letters Few,
but you were my dad and that, I always knew...
There is emptiness, I can't explain,
When I look in the mirror what do I see;
my dad's chin and eyes looking back at me...
This is God's way of letting me know, you'll always be living in my soul...
Miles Away and Letters Few, I love you daddy I hope you knew...*

AS I WAS SEEKING GOD He came to me and told me He wanted me to write my autobiography. I believed He was going to use it to finish healing me of past wounds. I was eager to get started and as I was writing, God revealed to me a name; it was "Faith Builder". I kept hearing this name over and over while I was writing. I was not sure what He meant so I asked and I believed God was telling me to start a group called "Faith Builders". I was not sure, though, and wanted more confirmation so I prayed about it some more. I told God I would do anything He asked, but I needed to be sure it was He. One day Marty and I and the kids - Whitney was in Kindergarten and Dakota had not started school yet - were at the Christian bookstore. I went one way and the girls went

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another and Marty another. As I was looking at the books, Whitney came up to me and said, "Here, Mom, I found a book for you." I took the book and read the title. It was called *Now What Do I Do?* By V. Elaine Strawn and at the top of the book it said, *I Said I Would Do It*. At the bottom it said, *Programs for women's groups*.

I said, "Okay God I heard that loud and clear." I started pressing in to see when He wanted this group to take place and He said on Sunday nights. I told my husband, "I'm not hearing from God." He told me to have these meetings on Sunday nights and our church meets on Sunday nights. I knew God did not want me taking people out of church so I just kept praying on the matter; this was on a Thursday. We walked into church Sunday morning and there was a memo in our seats that said, *we are no longer having Sunday night services. We want you to take what you learn on Sunday mornings and teach it to others*. I could not believe this was happening.

I was so sure this was God that I was willing to do anything to get this off the ground. I put an ad in the resort's bulletin and waited to see what was going to happen. The next Sunday a man came to Marty and said he had a word for him from God. Marty did not know him. He told Marty that he was going to be in the ministry and he and his family were going to make a move that year sometime. Marty knew how the military worked and he knew that our orders were for at least three years and possibly five. He thought it was great that God had a word for him but that this man must have misunderstood. Marty did not tell me this for two weeks.

One night at the dinner table Marty told me what had happened and what the man said to him. I jumped up and praised God I was so excited. Marty said, "Calm down we don't know anything yet." I told him we did know; if God said it, then we were leaving. Another month went by and Marty had to call Headquarters Marine Corps to get some information on one of his Marines. While he was on the phone the guy said, "By the way, would you like to make a move?" Marty about fell over. He said, "Yes - where to?" He said, "I need an Administration Chief in Chicago or in Tennessee." We had been stationed where we currently were for 21 months at this point.

Marty came home that night and told me what was happening I told him we were going to Tennessee. I reminded him about when

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God had told me this before we were sent to California. He was still not convinced that this all could take place because he had been in the military and knew how it worked. The tables were turning and God was going to battle for us. I was not sure anymore about the women's group. I did not know if God had told me this for another time in my life or if He still wanted me to pursue this now. I prayed and then decided that I already had the ad out there so I would just see what the Lord wanted to do from here.

I got a few phone calls on it and then met with a lady. I explained what had happened with my husband's job and that we were going to be moving soon. She stated that she wanted to take it over and have the group at her house. We talked about it and she said she would pray about it. I still believed that God wanted me to start a women's group and I believed that when the time was God's timing, it would happen. The paper work was getting ready for our move and they were sending us to Tennessee. We were so excited. We had called all of our family and let them know we would be moving closer to home. Here came another *faith builder* in our lives. One of the Marty's bosses was trying to fight the orders. He was determined not to let us out of there. Marty would call everyday and let me know what was going on. At first, I was very positive, but Marty started to lose his faith. I'm sure it was hard to keep working around a group of people determined to keep you there. I would tell Marty that if God says it, it is going to happen. There is no man on earth who can go against God and win. Almost everyday we would have a faith talk. He would get all built up and then those men would try to tear his faith down. I remember when he had just had enough. He went straight to the man who was trying to keep him there and told him that he was prophesied over. He was moving and they could fight it but they were not going to win.

Faith fought the battle and God won! I do not believe we would be here today if Marty wouldn't have walked into that man's office and confessed his faith in the word that was given to him. He was saying, "I choose to believe God no matter what you say or do to stop me from going. I choose to believe God and we are leaving." Marty found out that the same thing had happened to the man who was trying to stop us. He had been prophesied over in a different situation. As soon

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as that man heard it was a word from the Lord, I assume he knew it wasn't worth fighting. He was not going up against God. All restraints were released and we were free to leave. They were not going to fight it anymore.

It was going to take a few months for everything to be put in order. We were so happy and excited about what God was doing in our lives. We had been serving God for about eight years but we felt like we were really getting to know him out there. It was similar to being dropped off in the desert. Even though California is very crowded we felt like it was only God and us. We were isolated from everyone. If we did not drink or curse or carry on, nobody really wanted to be around us. When they found out you went to church they admired you. They would always say, "I need to go to church but Sunday is my only day to sleep in," or "I would, but my husband does not want to and I do not want to offend him." I never did understand all of that. Statistically most marriages end in divorce, so I can't see that not going to church has saved any of them.



One night after dinner the phone rang and my husband answered it. I heard him say, "Oh okay, yes, okay," and then handed me the phone. I could hear him tell the girls to go upstairs. I knew something wasn't right. I said hello. It was my step mom she said, "Hi, Michele, how are you?" I said, "Fine, everything is going real good." I kept talking because I figured if I did she couldn't tell me anything bad that I didn't want to hear. Finally she said, "Something happened last night to your dad; he died." I screamed and dropped the phone then fell to my knees. I could not believe it. I sat there and sobbed for a few minutes then I picked the phone up and said, "How, what happened? I did not know he was even sick." She said, "He was having chest pains and we took him to the hospital to have them checked out. They hooked him to a machine to check his heart and everything was okay. Then they realized after looking further into this that he had an aneurysm in his stomach. The doctors were going to try to remove it, but it burst and killed him before they had the chance."

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I asked her if he was in any pain and she said, "Not that she could tell." He did tell her if God would spare him he would stop smoking and drinking and start taking care of himself, but shortly after that, she said he died. I was devastated. I could not believe my dad was gone. We never did get to know each other. I was okay with this when he was alive because I always thought that we had time. I did not realize that the last time I saw him would be my last. He had begged me to spend the night but I had to get up early and go home so I told him we would do it the next time. I know you've probably heard this before from many other people. Please don't wait until it is too late to take time with someone or to give a loving hand to someone in need. We are not promised tomorrow and there is only one guarantee for today, and that is, God is God and He has a plan. I was very upset that I did not get to see my dad again, and I wish I had done things differently. The grief in my heart was overwhelming. At times, I think I was grieving for a father whom I never had; as well as a father who was dead. In my mind I would never have the chance to have a real father. God was so good to me through all of my emotions. He showed Himself to me in so many different ways. The day that I found out about my dad, God came to me with a poem and told me to write it down. The next day He came to me again with another poem and everyday after that for about thirteen days. I kept writing them and thanking Him for the beautiful words and the inspiration it was giving me to deal with my pain and express my feelings.

Each chapter in this book begins with a poem that God gave me. The name of this chapter is a poem God wrote using my hands to my dad to be read at his funeral. The poem describes some of my face and how it resembled my dad's. He had a big dimple in his chin, which he passed on to me. He also had big blue eyes. I did not understand this gift God had given me but I was thankful for it and anytime God said get a pen and write, I did. I'll never forget when I was in the shower one evening God asked me a question. If my life had to be looked at in colors what colors would He see? The words came to my mind instantly.

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The Colors of My Life



The colors of my life are red, white, and blue...
Red for the blood that was shed for you and me.
White for the angels looking down from above...
Blue, for the sky that we look to for love...



As I was writing I knew in comparison that whatever I would go through or had been through in my life would not even come close to the pain Jesus went through for my sins and the sins of my children. Just as God had a purpose for Jesus dying on the cross, so we can be forgiven and He also has a purpose for us. There is really no need to get caught up with the things you want to do in life. If you're truly serving God, He will give you your marching orders. Our desire should be to have one plan and that is God's plan. If we do not know what His plan is for us, it is also our job to seek Him and find out.

Over the next few weeks it was a healing time for me, and a forgiving time as well. I had to forgive my dad for some of the things he said and did the last time I saw him. The only way I could put him to rest was to forgive him and love him like the Lord loved him. I stopped writing my book, and the poems were gone now. We were trying hard to get ready for this move and I was getting a little worried; I let Satan influence me for a minute. He convinced me to go ahead and start smoking again; that it would calm my nerves. I was so ashamed that I listened to him and I hid it from my girls for weeks.

I could not believe I fell back into the same old trap I knew better but could not resist. That was my weak point and Satan knew it. It was not because I liked to smoke that much because I didn't. It was because I was convinced that it soothed me. I found out a lot about the tobacco companies and cigarettes. Did you know they are made up of 17% sugar? And although it only takes three days for the nicotine to leave your body, it is the sugar that your body still craves. If you quit you need to eat five

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pieces of fruit a day; two of which should be citrus and the other three whatever you want. The fruit will give you the natural sugar that your body craves without the fat.



I had been working with a Realtor from Tennessee, which is the exact lady God sent me because of prayer. She had been sending me pictures of houses for a month or so. I was having a hard time trying to decide on a house over the phone and through the mail. This Realtor was great. She would take videos for us to view and call me daily with new information. We became friends before we ever met. I let her know that I was going to fly to Missouri to get my mother and then we would drive down to meet her to look for a house, and that I only had about 2 days to find our house. She thought I was nuts. She said, "Nobody finds and buys a house in two days, Michele." But I had faith and I knew God would find a new home for us.

We flew to Missouri with our girls. We decided that the girls would stay at my mom's house even after I left to go back to California. They needed to start school. While we were there, I went out one day with my step dad and bought the girls a Shih-Tzu puppy. I thought it might cheer them up. They did not want us to be split up at anytime during this move. It was scary but knowing God was in complete charge gave us peace.

Marty's flight was on time and he had to board. It was a sad time and a happy time all wrapped into one emotion. This move meant we would be closer to home and closer to the south. It also meant God had another plan for us and we were looking forward to His direction. We knew Marty had a word from God about our move so we knew God had a special plan. It did not matter to us what the plan was as long as it was God's. We had been in California under God's wing and we established a better and more personal relationship with him. The one thing about moving to different places is that you don't know anybody and you really learn to completely rely on God in everything.

I remember praying to God about Him sending us some friends, asking him to help us find a church and a good school. When you don't know anyone, God becomes your sole information line. I believe our

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family needed to learn this lesson about how to let God be the ruler of our lives, to completely trust in Him. We also learned how to listen more carefully to what He had to say and not be so quick to interrupt Him with our own ideas and thoughts. This was a learning experience for all of us, because we are a family who likes to talk. 😊

Marty got home safely and mom and I were getting ready for our trip to Tennessee. My grandma was at my mom's where she spent every summer. She offered to stay home and watch the girls. I thought that was a good idea. I kissed the girls good-bye and told them that when I got back we would have a house. We had a good time on the trip. We listened to Joyce Meyers all the way there. I always appreciate her teaching. She is so real and I think everybody can relate to her and the different situations you can get into. When you get to the point in your life where you can laugh and be happy in spite of your past, then you know God has been there in your soul healing and mending you for His ministry.

When we arrived there it was late. We stopped and got a bite to eat and checked into a hotel. I was so excited about what God was doing. The first day, the Realtor came to our hotel room and picked my mom and me up. Everything went okay but I was not finding anything and I did not feel God pointing out anything either. As we were driving around I told my Realtor that God was going to find us a house in two days -she just looked at me. I also told her I only had thirty-four dollars in my checking account. Looking back now I bet she was wondering what she was doing showing me houses with only thirty-four dollars in the bank. I believed God and I had faith that He would do what needed to be done. Since this was His plan I knew He would not send us somewhere and have us live on the streets. I knew He had a better plan than that. That would be one of my plans, to go off on a whim without thinking and get us into a mess. I trusted God and I guess the realtor had to also.

At the end of the day my mom was not feeling well and she had us take her back to the hotel room. I did not want to quit. I had another Realtor I was working with at the time. I needed as many Realtors that would work for me. I called him and he had a 1950's style home that I was very interested in. My mom decided to go with me. The lady did not want to show her house because she was not feeling well. I talked my Realtor into asking her again and she agreed. When I walked in I

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fell in love with the character and architecture of this house. It had all hard wood floors, a bedroom on the first level and three bedrooms on the second level. This house was a Cape Cod design. There were a few problems with this house and the Realtor advised me against it. The heating system was under ground oil heat, and the paint had lead in it behind the fresh paint. The back yard was torn up and the driveway had large cracks in it. I still wanted this house. It was old and had a lot of character but I knew if for no other reason, I could not live in it because of the lead paint. Although my kids were old enough not to eat the paint, I still did not feel good about it. I knew it must be pretty bad if a Realtor was advising against it.

When we got back to the hotel room I was upset that I could not have that house. My mom assured me that there was another house for me. The next day my other Realtor came by and got us. We went to look at about twenty more houses and did not find one. We were going to leave the next morning and I was beginning to think that we would not find a house. We were going down this street to look at another house when I saw it. I did not like it either, but my mom noticed the one that was next door to it. I liked how it looked from the outside. When we got out of the car my mom said, "I feel something about this house. It feels right." The Realtor let me in and I looked around but I was not crazy about it. My mom was though. We went in the back yard and there was a peach tree. My mom picked a peach from it and said, look, we can make peach preserves. I still wanted the other house and I was not happy that I was not going to get it. I trusted God but I still really wanted that house. I knew deep down that God had another plan and another house for us.

I even got mad at my mom for liking this house. We gave the house a name. It was called the blue house. That was because it was really blue. We went back to the hotel room and I called Marty to let him know. There was only one house that even came close to what we wanted. I also told him that my mom really felt like it was the house for us and that she had peace about it. I prayed also and told Marty all about the house. He said, "Make sure that before you leave you fill out all the paper work to get everything going to buy the house." The next morning I called my Realtor and we filled out the necessary paperwork so the Realtor could get the ball rolling for us. I knew God wanted us to have this house. It just wasn't

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the house I would have picked. Sometimes we don't know what is best and we need to just trust God. He knew there was something wrong with the house I wanted and that it was going to need a lot of work.

All the way home I talked myself into liking that house. I thought about what could be done to make it more livable. Although this was not my idea of a great house, it was obvious that this was the house God wanted us to have. I loved God and I wanted to do what he wanted me to do. I prayed a lot about this house and God's will. When we got back I let the girls know that we had a house and it had three bedrooms and a big back yard with woods behind the back fence. I told them about the great peach tree it had and all about how we could make peach preserves.

They were really excited about this. We had been living in a two-bedroom town house with a very small cement patio, which was their yard. There were no pets allowed. God had been so good to us, helping us find our home in two days. This really ministered to my Realtor. A few days later I had to go back to California to help Marty. I told the girls' good-bye and my step dad took me to the airport. When we got there I was a little afraid of flying. I prayed and asked God to give me peace about it. When I got to the gate and gave them my ticket they sent me back to get my boarding pass. I was not happy about this because I had already asked if I needed to do that and they said, "No." I started walking back towards the gate and out of nowhere these two nuns got in front of me. I just looked up to heaven and thanked God for the peace he gave me. He is so good and faithful to hear our prayers. He even cares about the small things. I remember one time our TV went out and I called around to see how much it would cost us to fix it. When they told me, I knew it was not financially possible to have it fixed. I decided to step out in faith and pray over it. I laid hands on that TV and I said a prayer for it, and then I walked off and got busy with something else. When Marty got home he turned the TV on. He turned to me and asked, "Did you have someone out here to fix the TV?" I said, "Yes, the greatest mechanic around and it did not cost us anything." He said, "Who?" I told him, "Jesus fixed our TV. It did not cost us any money, just a little faith." You see God didn't really care about our TV being fixed. He cared about building our faith. The next time something broke we prayed over it first before we did anything

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and God would fix it. Some examples are: our computer and our dryer, a refrigerator, my foot and many more things. He was building our faith.

When I finally got on the plane, I sat next to a man who had his clothes in a trash bag. I thought *I am going to minister to him*. But before I could even get my mouth open, he proceeded to tell me how good God is. He was living on the street and something had told him to call his dad. When he did, his dad asked him to stay with him and take care of him. They had not been communicating for years and now they had a chance to get to know each other again.



I began to open up to him and I told this man that I had a fear of flying. He told me he could see me doing a lot of flying in the future so I needed to be delivered from that fear. It was so funny that he said this. I had just told my step dad, "I am going to get on this plane. After this, we will be living close enough that I will never have to fly again." This stranger ministered to me more than I could have ever ministered to him. He was so full of the Lord and had many words of knowledge. He was living on the street, probably going hungry, with no shelter from the weather, and he was still trusting in God. His attitude towards life was better than mine at times and he had nothing. This was so amazing to me that while he had nothing he was thankful. I had plenty and there were times I was not thankful at all.

I was so consumed by this man that I had forgotten where I was. I knew that was God if I could forget for one minute I was thousands of feet in the air. I had complete peace. I felt like I was sitting in the lap of God. It just amazes me how wonderful my God is. There is no way you can have complete trust in God and have all the answers. If you had the answer you would not need God. I heard that from a wonderful lady named Joyce Meyers.

When I got home, I was ready to move forward with God's plans. I knew he had a good plan for my family and I and I didn't need to know all the answers. At this time I did not even need to ask any questions. I knew that God was in complete control and I could relax in His wisdom. The movers came and packed all our things. They finished around midnight.

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We spent the night with our wonderful neighbors who were such a blessing in our lives. They were Christians and when we needed someone to lean on or pray with, they were there.

The next morning we got up early and got into our separate cars and headed for Missouri. It was going to be a three-day drive for us. As we were driving through Utah, I was sitting in my car thinking this is the most beautiful state I had ever been in. It looked like the hand of God had painted a picture of this scenery. I was thinking how blessed we were to be alive and to witness some of the things we had witnessed. I was in awe of the beauty of this paramount land. I guess my husband was thinking the same thing. He had me pull over and we just stood quietly in the midst of all the beauty that this land had to offer. I am assuming this had the same affect on many other people. The word “Jesus” was everywhere. As I gazed out into the land, I could not help but wonder how it must have been two thousand years ago to have walked on such untouched land with so much beauty; such serenity. The open spaces could consume your soul. I do not know how anyone could ever deny there is a God with all the miracles that surround us.

As we drove off, my very soul had been touched by the beauty God’s world possessed. I knew I could look back on this experience and feel peace. What a powerful God we serve. To think he could make such enormous mountains with such grace. With the same hands he wipes our tears and is a comfort in our time of need. After that, we did not run into anything that compared to that experience. Two days later we reached my mom’s house. The kids looked great. They had been going to school and having a great time at Me Maw and Paw Paw’s house.

We were going to stay a few days and visit our church away from home. It was my mom and step dad’s church. They had been going ever since Marty and I moved to California. My step dad gave his life to the Lord for the first time while we were gone. To this day he is still serving the Lord and being His witness. He is a construction worker and I’m sure heads have turned and hearts have been changed. My step dad used to cuss, tell dirty jokes and drink with the best of them. He also used to be depressed and he had a lonely feeling that could not be filled with any amount of alcohol. He tried it his way for many years and I believe he finally thought, “Why not give God a try.” He had tried everything else

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and it had only left him empty. He lost his son in a car accident and he was the same age as my brother when he died.

While at my parents in Warsaw, the Pastor of their church and his wife asked Marty and I if we would minister to their youth. We said of course we would. We found that to be an honor and a privilege to minister to anyone. We were so nervous that day we prayed to God about what he wanted us to share and God said, "Be honest." We began telling this group of kids about some of our experiences and the mistakes that we made. As Marty was speaking I could see the guys listening and hanging on to his every word. It was inspirational to hear my husband give his testimony about how much God had changed his life. Marty was about 6'2, 225 lbs, a United States Marine and a weight trainer. To hear such a man tell how he was hurt and to talk about his feelings was definitely ministering to these young men.

When it was my turn, I told the girls how I got off on the wrong road and what I had done. Some of them looked shocked and some of them did not look at me at all. I knew what I was saying was getting through to them. I was mostly telling them how peer pressure could get you into more trouble than you're ready to deal with. I let them know that drugs did not solve any of my problems. In fact, they were intensified and looked a lot worse. We also shared the cost and effects of losing your purity. That night I think we reached a few of the kids who needed to hear and see someone who had taken the wrong road. They needed to know how to stay on the right track and to see the advantages in doing God's will. They also needed to know if they go on the wrong path that God is a forgiving God. It is not the end of the world. They could repent and start over right where they were. Forgiveness is for the living.



After that night I wanted to teach some more. It felt so good helping someone else and sharing what God has taught me, sometimes through my mistakes and sometimes through someone else's. I preferred someone else's but I could be stubborn. Most of what God has taught me I learned by doing the wrong thing first. Do not try this at home. You could get seriously hurt and go through more pain than necessary and it could affect your mental well being.

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The next few days were exciting. Our family was so thankful that the Lord had brought us closer to home. The kids were very happy with their new house and their new puppy. It was time to load up and head towards our purpose; whatever that might be. Tennessee would be our new home.

Chapter Thirteen

ANGELS IN FLIGHT

*I heard Jesus knock, but I did not open...
My ways have not been His ways, therefore I have forsaken...
He waits quietly outside my door...
Because I have known Him I cannot ignore...
The silence is tender, as I stand all-alone...
I open the door and Jesus said, "Come Home".
I've waited for you to see My light...
I called the angels, and put them to flight...
Draw closer to me, to hear My will...
My wisdom I'll share, your purpose revealed...
Take what I've taught you and don't go astray...
My people there need to know I Am The Way.
Show them the light that you have seen...
Let them know, the way is through Me.
Gather your sword, there will be a fight...
Trust in Me and I'll put the angels to flight...*

WE WERE READY TO DO what we were called to do. We did not know what that was but we were ready. We thought that it might have something to do with youth. The trip went okay. Dakota got carsick and a twelve-hour trip took us fifteen but praise God. We were walking by faith and we knew that this too should pass. I'm not saying that we were perfect through this experience. We did learn to lean on God even

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more and that is always a good thing. We got to our hotel around 3:00 am. We had meetings with the Realtor in a few hours so sleep was very important at that time.

The next morning we called our Realtor, and she came over to have us sign a few more papers. Then we went to go see the house. I had waited 10 years for a house. We really never thought we had God's blessing to buy until now. This was so exciting for us. At first I could not remember where the house was and Marty had never been there. All he had seen were pictures up to this point which took a lot of faith on his part to know this was from God. He was buying a house that he had never seen outside of a few pictures I had shown him. I would like to think that it was because he trusted me so much, but I'm sure it was because his faith was secure in God.

Finally, after going around for about 30 minutes, we found the house. Later, we found out that there were two streets in our addition that had the same name. Marty got out and I could see that he was pleased. Then the girls got out and I could see that they loved the wide-open space that they had to play in. We were waiting for our Realtor to come by to let us in. We had not closed yet. The VA was still checking on some last minute details. The Realtor showed up and we all got to go inside the house. I had not seen it except for once. We all walked in and it looked a lot bigger than I remembered, but also a lot dirtier. As Marty walked around looking at everything, the girls ran up stairs and started picking out their bedrooms. I was just wandering around thinking about where everything will go.

We had bought some laminated wood flooring before we left California. Marty said he could lay it. I was trying to design this house like a farmhouse. I knew in my mind what I wanted and how to achieve this look. This house was fifteen years old and it still had its original wallpaper and light fixtures. They had painted some but it was still lacking in character. It was a good thing that we were going to lay wood flooring. The whole downstairs carpet had a strong urine smell and stains all over it. I was looking around and noticed the fireplace was full of cigarette butts. Even though I smoked I did not smoke in the house out of respect for my family. I realized that there needed to be a deep cleaning of the entire house.

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The closing date was approaching and my Realtor let us in the house again to do some cleaning. It was so bad that it took two days to make a dent. Everything was filthy. One day while we were working, our Realtor came by and said there was going to be a delay in closing. The guttering was bad and there was rotten wood in some places. We asked them to fix this as soon as possible. Our furniture was on its way and if we weren't there, they could not deliver it. We had to close on the house by a certain date. If they could not deliver then they would go ahead to their next destination. They would try again or they would charge us for their attempt to deliver our things up to \$500 .00.

They did get that problem fixed for us and then another problem came up. The VA did not want to let us close because the windows needed to be resealed and the screens needed to be replaced. We asked how long this would take and they said up to two weeks. There was no way. That meant our furniture would come here and then be unloaded and put into storage. Then in two weeks loaded and unloaded again.

We asked the man who was selling the house if we could go ahead and move in while these adjustments were going on and he said no. We did the only thing we knew to do, pray.

We went back to our hotel room and waited to hear from God. Our Realtor called and said if we could be responsible for the windows that the VA would cancel the order to have it fixed. We said, okay, what ever it takes to get into the house with our furniture. She said, in that case we could close in a few days. The only problem with that was we were supposed to close on the seventeenth and that was when our furniture was coming. Now they were saying it was going to take two more days than expected. We decided to call the trucking guy who was in charge of our stuff. When he got on the phone he said, "I have some bad news about your things; I am going to be two days late. I know you close on the seventeenth but I will not be able to make it until the nineteenth." I don't know why we were surprised. God was in control and He had shown us once again how faithful He is.

On the nineteenth we closed and our furniture arrived. We were ready to move in. Marty had to lay the hard wood floor before we did this so all our downstairs furniture had to sit in our garage. Over the next few weeks we did a lot of work on the house. The floors got laid, we

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wall papered and painted. Marty also finished fencing in the back yard. I started noticing there was a strange odor coming from the upstairs. It smelled like mold and mildew. There was also a urine smell when the wind was blowing. The girls were sick a lot and very congested. I told Marty that we were going to have to replace the carpet up stairs. It was making the girls sick.

I called around for prices and found out that was not a cheap thing to do. It would cost anywhere from 1,000 to 3,000 dollars and that was all we had left for our repair jobs on the house. I have to say I did not pray about this. I just hated the smell, and we did end up getting new carpet. When they pulled up the old carpet there were a lot of stains and mold underneath. I was glad I decided to get it replaced. About two days after the new carpet was brought in the girls started feeling better.

After we got all the work done on the house, we really started to like it. We started looking for a church. Every week we would visit churches. We were waiting to hear from God and make sure we were where He needed us. Month after month was going by and we had not found a church that we felt like God wanted us in. Meanwhile, Satan was planning his attack. One day we got up and got the kids off to school and when I got home the washing machine was leaking. I called some repair shops and told them how old it was and what the problem was. They recommended a new one. They said that it was probably rusted out. The next thing that happened that day was the TV broke. I remember thinking that we had that TV for about ten years and it was probably time for it to quit. I went downstairs where Marty was working on our stove and it shorted out so now it was broke. We had not been steady tithers. The devourer was knocking at our door just like he had done so many times before in our walk. We always thought that we were in charge of our money. It took a long time to realize that God had to be in charge of everything in our lives including our money. Because of our poor choices, and our lack of faith, the enemy came to devour. We had spent all our money on other things for the house so when these things broke, we ended up charging them. Soon after this happened, our refrigerator started leaking. The one that came with the house was very old. The one we had brought with us would not fit in our house so we had to sell it.

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This was not the first time that Satan came in and took what did not belong to him. In the meantime, we had to learn that it did not belong to us either. That was why we had a lot of problems with tithing; we thought we had a choice. When I got sick with Dakota, we had gotten a settlement, but because we did not seek God on how to use it, we ended up blowing most of it on frivolous stuff. I did not have a lot of faith when it came to tithing. My strong faith was in healing. I had been healed so many times that I was a believer. I was learning that wherever you're weak, that's where you can find Satan.



What a blessing that you always know whatever area you're being attacked in, that is the area that needs improving. That's the way I like to look at it. Marty and I talked about tithing again. We had heard many sermons on it but we were not ready to step out in faith, the kind of faith it took to do that. We were praying that God would give us the strength to become better tithers.



One day we got a phone call from my mom. She said that John Jacobs and the Power Team was coming to Warsaw to her church and she wanted to know if we could come for a week and help with it. I told her that I would talk to Marty and see if he could take some time off. Marty said he could take some time off. The idea of taking the girls out of school for a whole week bothered me but God worked it out. When the girls got home from school they had a note reminding the parents that they would be out of school for two days for teacher's conferences. They only had to miss three days. God is good.

We packed and we were in Warsaw by that night. We were so excited to be there and to be a part of something so powerful. We had seen the Power Team one other time when we first got saved. They were awesome. Mom and I were counselors and we also did some cooking. Marty was a counselor and he also helped set up the stage and do the assemblies all

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week. There was one Power Team member that Marty got real close to. As the week went on, we were so blessed by the hundreds of people getting saved every night. It was amazing to be a witness to all these people giving their lives to Christ for the first time or rededicating their lives.

On the last night they were breaking blocks of ice, running through fire, and tearing phone books in half. One of the guys who were breaking baseball bats got to the last one, which seemed to be the hardest one. Everyone had tried it and nobody broke it. They asked if there was anybody in the audience who thought they could break it. My husband was moving the broken ice off the stage and helping clean up and I heard him say, "I can." They had him come up there and they said a few things and then started the music. Marty pushed down a couple of times on his leg and it snapped right in half. After the show that night Marty talked to the guy he had become friends with and said if you ever need anybody on the team give me a call. They took his number and left. That experience for us was such a blessing. It is always better to serve others and the kingdom of God rather than ourselves. You will be blessed because it can't be helped.

We went home feeling like the Lord had planted another seed in our lives. Marty and I agreed if it was God's will then everything would work out and we would hear from them. We were home for about three weeks and the phone rang one morning around ten o'clock. I said, "Hello" A voice said, "Is Marty there?" I said, "No he is not, he's at work. May I ask who is calling?" The man said, "I'm from John Jacobs and the Power Team." I about fell over. I could not believe they were calling. I went on to ask if he wanted Marty's work phone number. He said, "Yes I would." I told him he would need to ask for Staff Sergeant Davenport. He then replied, "I didn't know he was still in the military." I thought I needed to say something to help him know that he could get out. I told him that he had a bad knee and that they would probably let him out if they knew about it. I realized how this must have sounded so I said it's not like he is lying to them. He doesn't have that bad a knee.

The conversation seemed to be getting worse the more I talked. The man took the phone number and said that he would call him. I hung up the phone and called Marty as fast as I could. He answered and I told him that they had called. I did not tell him everything I said. He waited

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all day for them to call him and they never did. The next day he waited and he kept waiting and still no phone call. I knew that they would call him but I did not know when. I told Marty how I tried to help and he said that might explain why they hadn't called. I felt real bad that I had put my foot in my mouth.



A few weeks after this had happened I went to bed and the next morning when I woke up I could hardly walk. I limped all the way down stairs and got the kids ready for school. When Marty got up I told him that there was something wrong with my foot. We started to look at it and realized there was a growth on the back of my right heel. We looked at my other foot to compare them and it had the same growth on it. The only difference was that the left foot did not hurt. The pain was almost unbearable on the right foot. Marty took the girls to school and then me to the doctor. She said she would need to send me to a foot specialist to see what the problem was. She thought it was a bone spur. I made an appointment to see the other doctor. I knew to pray and to stand on the Word of God. I was healed in the name of Jesus. When I got to the doctor's office he took some x-rays. He told me that it was not a bone spur and that he was not sure what it was. He said that he could give me a shot in the bone and that should relieve some of the pain. I told him that I would, but I believed that God was going to heal my foot. Even as I was sitting there it was already feeling better. By the words of my mouth I was being healed. He told me to return in a few weeks and he would give me another shot and drain the fluid. I told him I was healed and that I would not have to come back. He said, "Okay but in case you need to, come on back in."

My foot was a little sore for a few days, mainly because of the shot. I cannot explain what happened next. It must have been six months later. I was thinking about all the wonderful healings God had done in my body and I remembered my foot. God not only healed me, but He took it completely away from me as if it never happened. When Marty got home I asked him if he remembered anything about my foot and the growth. He said, "Now that you mention it, I do." We were both in

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shock that it had been forgotten about until now. We looked at my foot and there was no growth at all on either foot. Praise God! I knew God could heal me, and the words that came out of my mouth lined up with what I believed.

My faith had reached a new level. I was letting God do the work he needed to do to change me. It seems like sometimes as soon as you get done with one battle another one comes at you. The difference is that I just keep getting stronger with every punch because I knew God was on my side. I knew this was a learning time for me and the harvest would come later from all of my experiences. I appreciate the opportunity to grow, but not always the process. I am learning how to praise God in everything that happens to me or around me. I'm learning that He is God and He is in complete control of every situation if I will let Him.

It all started about two months after the foot incident. I started to have a monthly cycle twice a month. At first I thought it was just stress so I did not go to the doctor. Then it was happening every month no matter what. I decided to go to my doctor. It was time for a yearly exam anyway and maybe we would see what the problem was. She came in and asked me what was happening and if I was hurting at all. I answered the questions and then she did her exam. While she was doing the exam she said, "Something doesn't seem right." She also said she was very interested in how the test results were going to come back. I asked her if there was anything to worry about, if this could be cancer. She said, "Try not to worry. It won't do you any good until we find out what is wrong." I asked her how long it was going to be before I found out the test results." She said, "About seven to ten days." I was still smoking and I was so ashamed. I did not know how to quit. I had asked God several times to deliver me and I had a lot of people praying for me, but I was still a smoker. I did not understand this and wouldn't for a little while longer.

I went home and Marty had taken off early that day so I could go to the doctor. The kids were out of school. When I came in, I told the girls I needed to talk to daddy. I guess the look on my face told him that everything did not go very well at the doctor's office. He asked me what was wrong and I told him what the doctor had said. Cancer was a possibility but not to worry until all the results were back. I will never

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forget how white he turned as we sat quietly before the Lord and prayed a prayer of faith.

We called my mom in Corpus Christi because she was visiting my aunt. They prayed in faith and stood in belief with us. When I got off the phone, we decided to call our church in Warsaw to have them pray and put the angels into flight. I put the phone down and realized we may be up against a pretty big battle. We could either choose to believe what God's Word said or believe the lies of Satan. The choices were not hard but standing in faith was. God had healed me many times and I knew He could heal me again if I would just stay focused on Him and His Word. I believe many times we fall short when we choose to listen to Satan. Believe me, he will have you convinced you are dying and ready for burial if you give him a minute of your time.

Within the hour my faith had been restored and I was ready for the fight. The prayer angels were all around us. The peace that I was feeling could only have come from God. The next morning Satan came knocking and I just reminded him of how many times God had healed me. He did not stay for the discussion. One day at a time is how we handled the waiting. Some days were better than others. I have heard people say that waiting is the hardest part and that is so true. That is when God was building my faith. If we never had to wait, what would we need faith for? While I was waiting I received an interesting piece of mail. We did not have a church yet so we did not have a church family close by, but let me tell you how great our God is. I went to our mailbox and pulled out a post card from Aliso Viejo, California. It was from our Pastor. It said, "And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of him... 1 John 5:15. On the left hand corner it said, "We have prayed prayers of agreement with you. Now we stand with you knowing that God has heard our prayers." As if that was not enough on the back it said, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to his will, He hears us. 1 John 5:14." The amazing thing about this was that nobody had told them I was sick.

I remember that day distinctly because I was having a hard time standing in faith. God could see I was struggling and He sent me an encouraging post card. After I had gone to the mailbox I shared that story

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with anybody who had ears to hear. My faith was where it needed to be. A couple more days passed and it was finally time to call my doctor for the results of the test. I picked up the phone and said a little prayer, then asked to speak with the doctor. She picked up the phone. I said, "What are the results?" She said, "You will need to go see a specialist. There was something showing that was abnormal." She gave me a few names and I hung up.

I could have gone either way at this point. But because I had to wait for the results of the test, God had time to build my faith and it was stronger because of it. Through it all I still believed that I was healed. I called my husband and let him know what was happening. I'm not saying I walked in perfect faith. Cancer was my biggest fear and it had been for years. That was one of the reasons I wanted to quit smoking, not to mention it was not glorifying God at all. We made the appointment for the next day. Marty took off work and the kids were there as well. I walked in, sat down, and decided that no matter what they said I was going to believe God. I heard my name called. I went to this very cold and sterile room. The nurse handed me a gown and told me the doctor would be in to see me in a few minutes. I sat there in this room and prayed to God that He would give me the strength for whatever happened. The doctor walked in, introduced himself and explained the procedure and why they had to do it. Something was showing on the pap exam and they needed more information. He told me that if he did not see anything that looked out of place he would not clip some of my cervix. I said, "Fair enough but if you have to, I will have to sing the song *Jesus Loves Me*." He laughed but I was serious. The chair they had me in had me practically standing on my head. They could see anything they wanted to from this view. About 5 minutes into the exam the doctor said, "I do need to clip a piece of your cervix." I said, "Go ahead but I am going to have to sing *Jesus Loves Me* now." So I started singing and he started clipping. It took some time and it really did hurt. The tears were flowing down my cheek as I kept singing my song. I knew God was watching over me and healing my body. He sat me up and told me that he would send this sample to the lab. I asked him what it looked like. He did not have a straight answer for me. He did not know. He said he would call me with the results in about a week. I told

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him that I was healed. He looked at me and said with sincerity, "I hope so." And I said, "I don't hope, I know. That is my faith."

I went home. I was really sore and worn out. I believed that God was there and he did heal me. During the next few days I struggled every now and again with doubt, but every time, I would remind myself how many times He was faithful. I would remind myself of all the *faith builders* God had already given me in my life. One night around 9 o'clock the phone rang. It was my doctor. He had the results from the biopsy. He said, "We have looked over everything and we cannot find anything wrong with you. You do not need to be seen again until your next yearly exam." I said, "Praise the Lord!" and at that time I heard a voice say, "Praise the Lord." It was my husband. He had picked up on the other line. The doctor said, "That's right" and wished us well. I told the doctor that I believed in what I prayed. I ran upstairs to hug my husband and thank God.

The doctor told me I could take the pill to keep me regular but I did not feel like God wanted me to. I trusted him and he took away all the symptoms. I still have not taken any medication. I was in awe of my God and His power. As many times as He has healed me, the miracle still amazes me. When this was all over I learned so much about God and walking in divine healing.



Do not wait to get sick to pray for your health. Pray over your health everyday. Thank the Lord for your healing and for keeping you healthy. Do not leave the door open for Satan to come in and torment you in an area you are weak in. If you're not tithing, your finances are within Satan's reach. If you are not taking care of your body, your health is within his reach. If you are not being faithful in your marriage, your marriage is within reach. This can apply to any area of your life. I'm not saying that we need to be perfect. No, I'm saying the area you are weak in is the very place where the devourer is going to attempt to attack you. We need to pray and be strengthened in that area of our lives.



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Marty and I were still looking for a church. A friend told me about one but I was not sure where it was. We had tried several and never felt like we had found the one God wanted us at. We were on the way to a church that we had already tried. They did not believe in the same things we did and God had not confirmed with us that this was our new church home. As we were driving, I looked over and noticed this church, Knoxville Christian Center. Marty and I thought that this might be the church that my friend told us about. We had already passed it but Marty turned the car around and we went back. We had already missed praise and worship but we decided to go in anyway. As soon as we walked in we knew this would be home. We felt something. We sat with the kids and it was Building Fund Sunday. We did not know what this meant. We heard the pastor talking about how they were raising money for the new building. He also mentioned a man who had given the church a million and a half dollars to go towards the fund. When it was getting close to twelve I noticed he was not concerned about the time. He was more concerned about the people getting the message and being fed. I was pleased with that. I know you need to finish the sermon at a regular time but that should not be your main focus in my opinion. I just don't think that should be the most important thing on everybody's mind. He asked, "Does anyone mind if I go over a little bit today to finish my lesson?" and everyone said, "No." I respected that. After listening to his sermon, Marty and I looked at each other and we knew God had placed us in our new home. The girls were really happy because they were getting tired of not having a steady church to go to. Every time we would try a new church they would come out of their classes asking, "Is this our new church?" We would say, "We don't think so." It was good for them to see us seeking God about where He wanted us to be without giving up or settling.

A few weeks after we found this church I was ready to stop smoking again. I went to God one night as I was smoking outside and I asked him to deliver me from this habit. I told him that in a few weeks it was going to be Easter. He had given up so much for me and for my sins. He was tortured, beaten, spit on, laughed at, ridiculed and hung on a cross to die for me. I wanted to give one of my sins to him. I did not care if I had to go through withdrawals, getting sick, having the shakes, or gaining weight, all I wanted was to please him. I said, "After all you have given me on this

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day the least I can give you was one of my sins that you died for.” I went back inside and set the date for Easter. I had gotten some Zyban (it was supposed to help you stop smoking), but the closer the day was getting, the more I was smoking. I just prayed to God and walked by faith that He would deliver me. Easter morning came around and I got up and got ready for church. I did not want a cigarette. We went to church and came home to hide Easter eggs for the girls and I still didn’t want a cigarette.



Each day went by and still no cigarette. I did not go through any withdrawals. God delivered me from an eighteen-year old habit supernaturally! I say that because I had tried to quit so many times before and I really did not think it could be done until God healed me of the female problems I had earlier. I call these things that happen in our lives *faith builders* and we all go through them. It is just a matter of whether or not you want to use these things to build your faith or tear it down. I have done both in my life and I have found it is a whole lot easier walking with God and having a little faith, than walking alone with no faith. Eventually, the little faith that you have will turn into a mighty faith. God told me that he had restored my body and it was as if I had never smoked. Now when Satan comes in and attacks me in the area of my health, I have enough faith in God and His ability to heal me. That was my weak area and now it is where I am strong. Because of a decision to trust God, and not to just believe the parts of the Bible that I chose to believe, or what made me feel comfortable but to choose to believe the entire Bible I was set free.



It has been several months now and I have never had any withdrawals. I had heard people say over the years that you never stop wanting a cigarette after you have quit. I am here to tell you, this is not true. I have not had any cravings at all. In my opinion, you need to pray to be delivered completely from this habit. If you are still having cravings, then you need to ask God to deliver you from that. He will. The devil does not mind us being Christians as long as we do not use

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any of the power that God has given to us. The minute that you do, he is right there to try to disarm you.

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free; Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery.



Several months later my mom called and told me that my grandmother was in the hospital in Corpus Christi. She was getting ready to come spend the summer with my mom and she started having breathing problems so they admitted her. My grandmother was already on a breathing machine at home four times a day. She had emphysema. My mom gave me her number and I called her. When she answered she was whispering. I could hardly understand her. I said, "Grandma what are you doing in the hospital. You are supposed to be on your way to Mom's so I can see you." I laughed and so did she. I told her to hurry and get better so I could see her. I hung up and I said a prayer for her.

That next night we were in bed and it was getting late when my phone rang. It was my mom. She said grandma was getting worse, that she was not breathing well and her family needed to come see her. I got off the phone and started calling airlines to get a flight out. I got one out of Nashville. It was the most affordable one but it was three hours away. The other airlines were about eight hundred dollars and we did not have the money. We woke the kids at around four in the morning and started for the airport. I was going alone. Marty thought it might be better and so did I. I thought I would go and cheer her up, pray with her, and then come back home. I got onto the plane and I felt so empty. I did not have my husband or my kids. I was left alone with my thoughts and my thoughts were trying to prepare me for what might happen. As I sat there I could not even entertain the idea of losing my grandma. When the plane landed my cousin and his wife were there. I asked them how she was and they told me that she went into a coma. I started to cry. My heart was breaking. I chose not to listen. I walked into her hospital room and there she was, limp and helpless. You could see that life was leaving her but the spirit in that room was amazingly peaceful.

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I walked over to the side of her bed and sat down. I gave her a big kiss and I said, "I'm here grandma, please don't leave me. I love you so much; you are my special angel." I struggled with every word that left my mouth. I told her that we were looking forward to her visit. I also said, "Grandma if you can hear me wiggle your foot" And she did. I called Marty and the girls and put the phone up to my grandma's ear and she wiggled her toes again. The doctor said to talk really positive around her because even though she was in a coma she could still hear us. I told her some jokes and loved on her for hours. Grandma was not responding to any of the medications. When she went in there, she had bronchitis and they treated her for that. She was better, but there is no treatment for emphysema; it is a lung disease. The doctor came back in to check on her. They took her off several of her medicines and when they did my aunt questioned that decision. The doctor told her that he cured everything she had come in with, but the emphysema could not be cured. There was no medicine that could help her now.

Grandma's breathing was getting a lot more labored and a lot shallower. Several hours before, her breathing was coming from her stomach but now it seemed to be closer to her ribs. As I sat there and watched her spirit preparing to leave I just cried. She had been my personal cheerleader all my life. Although I knew she would be going to a better place, I was not ready to be without her. I began to read the Bible to my special angel. I wanted her to be able to hear my voice when it was time for her to leave. I begged for her to open her eyes. She tried several times for me but she just couldn't. She had the most beautiful eyes that I had ever seen and I wanted to see them just one more time.

I noticed that her breathing had moved all the way up into her chest. She was taking very short breaths and the time was near. I looked at my aunt and I remember saying to her "Is she going to die? Is she going to die? I don't want her to die. Oh please save her." Everyone was coming in taking a turn lying beside her to say his or her last words. I had told her earlier when I noticed her struggling to breathe that if she was ready to go that she could. Now all of her family was there to say their good-byes. The doctors were amazed that she had held on this long. When my mom and I first heard that we needed to come, we were almost twenty-four hours away. The doctors believed that she was waiting for us. That was

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just like my grandma, always caring about someone else even in her dying moments. When it was my turn to say my good-byes I lay beside her and told her that I changed my mind; that I was not ready to let her go. I begged her not to go. I told her how much she had meant to me, and I thanked her for all the encouraging words she had given me over the years. As I lay beside this awesome woman I knew the world would never be the same without her. She truly left her mark on everyone she knew.

I got up, and someone else came to rest beside her. Her spirit was so gentle and quiet. Our cousin came in and sang Amazing Grace and a few minutes later I watched my special angel go to heaven. I could almost hear the Lord saying to my grandma, "Good job my faithful servant for with you I am well pleased." I felt like God had given me a poem to read at her funeral.



From my Heart to Heaven...

*From the depths of my heart, to the heavens above,
My hope for you is that you knew how much you were loved...
My strength is in the Lord who sets me apart, from this unbearable pain I
feel in my heart...
You were my angel in my time of need, now you're gone but you have left
your seed.
Today is the day that we start anew, there's only one
Difference, it's without you.
The loved that you shared was not done in vain, the ones you have touch
are forever changed... I love you Grandma you will be missed.*



After we buried my grandma I went home to deal with the loss. At first I could hardly say her name without crying. As time went by, I got better. My mom and aunt and uncle were dealing with it in their own way. I did not have my mom to talk to. She was having such a hard time. When I talked to Marty I couldn't get the response that I needed. I was starting

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to get really upset and lonely. I went to Marty one night and explained to him what my grandma meant to me and how she understood me when nobody else did. She was always happy to hear from me and always had an encouraging word. When I lived with her, she let me make mistakes as she sat quietly and prayed for my salvation. Every time I went to her for advice she would not tell me what to do, but she would lead me to the way to find my answer. It was a gift for her to be able to understand without judging or being disappointed.

If I had to say anything about our relationship it would be she was always in my corner. I'll never forget her telling my kids when they were asking me to do this and that, "Girls, your mom works hard. Don't you think that she deserves a little break? Why don't you girls go play and let her rest a minute." I just thought that was the nicest thing in the world. The girls were mine and I always wanted to protect them, but my grandma always wanted to protect me. After I finished talking to Marty that night he had a deeper understanding of how I felt and why the loss was so great. The next few days I noticed Marty acting differently. He came to me one night and said, "I cannot do this anymore. I am not your grandma and I can't do things the way she did them. I've tried but I cannot be what she was to you." Bless his heart. He did try to say and do the things that she did, but it was impossible. He was my husband and he played a completely different role in my life. He was just as important but he was different.

Chapter Fourteen

RIPENED ON THE VINE

*As I approach the door to my new life...
How different things seem when your soul is alive...
Freshened is my spirit ripened on the vine...
Walking my walk with Jesus one day at a time...
The road is narrow that leads me to you...
My faith is stronger in everything I do...
I have been delivered from all my sins.
You washed them away, and now I am cleansed...
Thank You Lord for seeing the good in your people;
Who are so misunderstood?*

AFTER MY GRANDMOTHER'S DEATH I had a real hard time and I could not seem to stay focused on anything. I started having a lot of questions about my life and what I was really here for. I knew God wanted to use me but I did not know how. My childhood life was a prime example of how people ended up on the streets or in prison. The jails were full of people who used being raped, or abused, as an excuse to hurt others. God was the only difference in my life. He was the only thing that kept me from falling into the same trap. Even the man I chose to marry had come from an abusive home. Because of the conscious decision to follow God, we broke so many generational curses that would have been passed down to our kids.

Mark 11:25 *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*

While I've been writing this book I have come to realize more now than ever how great our God is, and how faithful he is to hear all of our prayers. At times I did not think the Lord was there in my life. Now that I have written this book I realize at times the Lord was the only one there. Now I am walking by faith in everything I do. I have learned to trust the Lord completely.

My life has been forever changed because of the work the Lord has done in me. The generational curses did not stop at violence. I came from a family of alcohol abuse, depression, cigarettes and drugs. God delivered me from all of them. I have been walking with the Lord for over ten years now and I am still amazed at how wonderful He is. You see, God sees something in us that is far more important than what has happened to us. He can take anything in our lives and turn it around to glorify Himself. My heart's desire is to glorify Him with my life and how I live it. I owe it all to Him, so He can have it all. I am here to serve Him. Can I tell you how good God is? In this last chapter I would like to reiterate all the miracles God has done in my life up to this point.

I would like to share how God has shown me His purpose for my life. It started when we were in California. God came to me one day and told me to write a book about my life. I thought he wanted to use it to do some more healing in me. I was so excited to be doing something that God had asked me to do. As I was writing, I kept hearing these two words *Faith Builder*. I began to seek God to find out what this meant. He told me that He wanted me to start a group and that it should be called *Faith Builders*. I questioned this because I had no training anywhere to have this group and no one to be a part of the group.

I started praying to God, telling Him that I wanted to be sure this was from Him. I did not want to get into anything that was not of Him. That night we went to the local Christian bookstore. As soon as we got in there my five year old took off, and moments later she returned with a book. She said, "Here, Mom, I found you a good book." It was a book on how to start a group. I just stood in awe of God and his power to use his people, even children, from the smallest to the biggest. I started pressing in to God and asking him questions about where and when he wanted this group to be held. He told me at my house and on Sunday nights. Well, I just could not believe He would want us meeting on Sunday

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nights. I told my husband that I must not have heard from God on what night I should have the group. We went to church the following Sunday and there was a memo in our chair that said, "There will no longer be Sunday night services, we want you to take what you learn on Sunday mornings and tell others on Sunday nights." This couldn't have been any clearer to me.

I did try to follow through with what the Lord had told me, but as soon as I started getting everything ready, we received our orders to move. All I could think of was that it was from God but I had the timing messed up. I know sometimes the Lord will give us something that He wants us to do but it may not come to pass for months or even years. I was just so excited I could hardly wait to do what He asked me to do. Soon after this, my dad died and I stopped writing in my book. God came to me everyday after I had heard the news about my dad and gave me a poem. I think there were about thirteen of them. I did not know why, at the time, He was giving these poems to me but I knew I was supposed to write them down and save them. Soon after this, we moved to Tennessee. We searched for a church for almost nine months and finally found Knoxville Christian Center. We had been going there several months when God came to me with another poem. I was reading a magazine and at the end of it was a poetry contest. The Lord told me to enter a poem in the contest. I said, "Okay" which poem do you want me to enter? The Lord said, "Write this." It was called "*Ripened On The Vine!*" I entered it and it got published in the National Library of Poetry. The publishers went on to say what a unique talent I had. When I read that I had to thank the Lord because I knew without Him I had no talent. He is the one who spoke His words into me. Several weeks later I received another letter from the National Library of Poetry notifying me that my poem won Editor's choice award. What an honor it is to serve God.

It was about a month after this happened that our Pastor called for twenty-one days fasting and prayer. That was the way they started out the beginning of every New Year. Marty and I prayed about it because we had never fasted before and we did not know what God wanted us to do. God told us to be a part of this and we obeyed. About two days into the fast the Lord came back to me and reminded me of the book that He wanted me to write. He asked me to start writing again and I did. One morning

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I got up early before church and as I was praying, I asked God about the chapters in the book. I asked Him how He wanted me to represent each chapter. It was quiet and then the Lord reminded me of the poems that He had given me in California. He told me that each poem represented a new chapter. I was so excited that I ran upstairs and woke my husband up and told him what God had said. He was excited for me.

I was jumping up and down. I thought this was so great! I went to church and I felt like my whole body was lit up. As I was praising the Lord and singing He came to me again and told me that the last chapter in my book would be called "*Ripened On The Vine*." I just smiled I was about to burst. I felt like the power of the Lord was all over me. I literally couldn't contain my joy. It was the first time in my life that I felt so loved by the Lord that He would use me, and my life to bring Him honor and to glorify His name. To me, that meant my childhood and life had a purpose. The only way that I could possibly explain the feelings that were going through me was that it was more than I could have ever hoped or dreamed for. Later that day I called a friend of mine, Michelle and told her what was going on. I told her about the last chapter and what God had told me to call it. Then she said that it sounded like a great name for the book as well. I believe God spoke through my friend that day. I prayed about it, and I believe also the book was to be called "*Ripened on the Vine*."

God has done so many miracles in my life. It is truly astonishing to me when I think back on all of them. I do wonder how many other times he intervened on my behalf that I was not even aware of. I have a strong belief in the power of healing. I know God still heals and that he wants His people to believe and walk by faith that they can receive healing in their lives. I also believe He wants us to know that there are no works we can do to earn our healing. We cannot give enough hours to the homeless shelter; we cannot pay enough alms to the elderly, and we cannot do enough good deeds. He died on the cross over two thousand years ago and by His stripes we are healed. God's desire is for us to be whole and by faith we receive what we ask for according to His Word. His promises are for all who believe. We serve a God who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. All we need to do is walk by faith. Watch the words that come out of our mouths so they don't contradict the words of the Lord.

Mark 11:25 *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*

Stand on his promises and believe until the end. *Faith has a mouth* and what you confess has power.

One miracle that God did in my life was the birth of my youngest daughter, Dakota. You may recall that I talked about this earlier. What a wonderful example of God's compassion and faithfulness and a testimony of His healing power. She was born in a "frog delivery". At that time there were not many women in the United States who had given birth in that way. This means she would be coming out in half with her feet over her shoulders. God's hands were all around us that day.

God healed the nine by nine centimeter infection that I had after the birth of my second daughter. God had saved my life. After being in the hospital a total of almost 5 weeks God saved my milk for me so I could still nurse my baby. I had known of women who lost their milk over a little stress. It happened all the time. I knew this was another miracle from God. He saved me for a higher purpose. These things that happen in our lives are called *Faith Builders*.

The Lord healed my feet when nobody else could. God stepped in and healed me completely. I had four surgeries and a lot of scars. It was not enough for God to heal me but He even took away the scars. He did in seconds what doctors tried to do for years. Another *Faith Builder*. Satan tried to keep putting sickness and pain in my life. God was strengthening me. I was being built up in faith. The next time Satan tried to make me sick I would have enough faith to believe God and rebuke it. I am not saying that we should deny something is there; we just need to learn to deny that it has a right to stay there.

God's miracles kept happening in my life. I had a lot of female problems and was sent to a specialist to confirm that there was a problem and God turned that into a miracle they could not find anything. They did a lot of testing for cancer and they couldn't find any cervical cancer. I was healed and God received all the glory. Shortly after this, God told me to stop smoking. He delivered me from an eighteen-year habit on Easter in 1998. This was such a victory in my life. Satan had convinced me that I could never do it and he was right, but God could. I was completely delivered. I did not go through any withdrawals and I did not want a cigarette at all. I have not had any cravings for cigarettes for ten years. I was set free with no strings attached. Another *Faith Builder* in my life.

Mark 11:25 *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*

God was so good. He was teaching me what He needed me to know and that was how to trust him. I was abused by men most of my life. When I first became a believer I realized I was having some trouble with the Lord. I could not get close to Him no matter how hard I tried. A part of me would withdraw from Him. I found out later that I did not trust Him because He was a man and I did not trust men. God was ripening me for His use. He was teaching me how to trust in people and in men. Someone once asked me what I thought about faith. Did I think that when you gave your life to God you received a certain amount of faith or did you learn through using your faith? I have learned to believe in both. I think when you decide to give your life to God that it takes a certain amount of faith to dedicate your life to someone you cannot see or touch. On the other hand I also think as you walk your walk with Jesus and trust Him with your life that through some of your experiences you learn a certain amount of faith. The amount we learn is completely up to us. The amount we receive is a gift from God. (Romans 12:3) *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: 'Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

I remember standing in the shower one night and God telling me my people limit me by the lack of their own faith. I jumped out and told my husband what God had said. A few months later God told me to finish my book. I used that message from God the whole time I was writing. I knew I did not know anything about writing. I did not even know anything about the computer that I was writing on. What I did know was I trusted God and if He said, "Write a book," that was what I was going to do.

One day I went to church - I had been struggling with a problem I had in my life for sometime and I was having a hard time getting the victory. I was confused and I was seeking the Lord and asking Him to show me the way. When I walked in they gave me a bulletin. The scripture for that week was, *the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to hear their cry. The righteous cry and the Lord heard and delivered them out of all their troubles.* I was so blessed to be serving the Lord. He loved me so much and He has been so faithful to hear my cries. It was so cool to get a love letter from heaven that day.

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I would like to share with you a story about tithing or I should say a story about how we learned to tithe. We had been living in our house for several months when we discovered that we had termites. We had not been steady tithers. We tithed if we thought that we had it; big mistake. The devourer was “eating” our money. The money that we thought was ours for years; we soon found out that it was God’s. If you’re not tithing it is like having a termite problem. You can’t see them, but you know they are there. If you do not treat your house for termites it will eventually fall down around you. This is what happens when you don’t tithe. Satan is the termite and he is eating away inch by inch at your money, either by expensive car repairs, expensive house repairs, doctor bills; this could go on and on. Every time you think you are going to get ahead, you get farther behind. That is because you are not being protected from the devourer. Here is a scripture that I found that made a lot of sense to me. 2 Corinthians 8:7



But just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge; in complete earnestness and in your love for us- see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

I had grown in many areas in my life with the Lord and He was ready to take me to the next level of faith in our walk.



I do not know what happens from here, but I know that I am going to follow God. He started something in me in California; He was giving me purpose. He revealed it to me in Tennessee. I believe sometimes God starts something in us and because He does not finish it as quickly as we would like, we become discouraged and think that He is not listening, delivering, or healing us. In reality, He is giving us what we need when we need it. As you can see, my life has not been uneventful. I had been held prisoner of this world for so long that I did not know how to be a child of God. It was like someone abducted me when I was four abused me until I was nineteen then gave me back to my parents. I did not know

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how to be God's daughter because all I had really known was the abuse. With His love and His patience, He has walked with me and taught me how to be a daughter of His. He has taught me how to trust again, how to love again, how to receive His peace. I eventually learned how to relax in my Father's presence.

I have learned the art of being still before my God. In Psalms 46:10 (a) "*Be still, and know that I am God*"; The word "still" in the Hebrew is "Rafaw"; it means healing, mending, making whole, restoring, and stitching us back together. Wow! As I pondered the meaning behind this simple word I thought about what happens when a doctor performs surgery on his patients. What is the first thing done before the doctor performs the surgery? The anesthesiologist comes in and puts you under. Why? Because of the pain you would feel if you were awake. Could you imagine having Open Heart surgery awake with no medication? The trauma it would cause and the unforgettable pain you would feel. Sometimes what we need to do is simply get before God and be "Rafaw" so He can mend, heal, stitch and restore our brokenness. Some of us are running around saying, "Fix me, fix me, if you can but I won't stop I'm the gingerbread man, catch me if you can."

The most important thing I have learned in my life is to be in love with being still, and to love and forgive people. I have learned this from the greatest teacher in the world; Jesus Christ my Savior and protector, and through my life's experiences I have now been *Ripened on the Vine*. I am not saying *perfected* on the vine, I am saying *ripened* and the fruit in my life is useable because I have been redeemed and I am being periodically pruned.

I have learned many lessons from writing my story one lesson I learned is you can visit your past and even write about your pass, but do not live there. Share with a purpose, pray with a passion, and forgive with a spirit of love. I have had many people ask me, and I have even asked myself, "Do you regret where you have been, and what you have walked through?" My answer is "No". How can I regret my past? It has only brought me to where I am at today. I would not have met my husband and I wouldn't have had my two wonderful, beautiful, spirit-filled girls. So looking back on it all, I can honestly say, what a testimony my life has been for God and His kingdom."

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Shortly after my husband had a rough copy made of my book I prayed and God told me to have two copies circulating around our church in Knoxville Tennessee.

About two weeks later I took my oldest daughter to the orthodontist to have braces put on. While we were there, they took an x-ray and noticed that her adenoids were enlarged and they needed to be taken out. I went home and called around to find an ear, nose, and throat specialist. We set up an appointment for her to be seen. The doctor looked at her and confirmed what the dentist had seen. He told us to come back the following Monday and have some blood work done. We did and then we went home, and started to prepare for the surgery. Wednesday the phone rang and it was the nurse. She said that Whitney's blood came back abnormal and that we needed to be seen by our family doctor. I called our doctor and over the next four days my daughter had blood taken from her to be tested. The results kept coming back abnormal and at one point they said the results from the blood work indicated that Whitney should be in total kidney failure and that she should be on her death-bed. This is what they were saying, as I was watching her in the back yard swinging on an old tire swing she did not look like a child who was dying. They could not explain this and wanted to send her to a hematologist; a blood specialist. They set up the appointment and when we got there the devil was waiting. The first thing they asked was if our girls were sick. I told them they were not. But they asked again because they needed to be sure since we were going into the cancer side of the hospital where a lot of kids were really sick.

I felt my heart fall. I did not realize until that very moment how serious this was becoming. And the devil was ready to let me have it. The whole time the receptionist was asking me questions about my child, my spirit was fighting the devil for her life. There was more at stake than I could ever imagine and all my life God had been strengthening me for this all the other *faith builders* were paying off. You see, God will not give you more than you can handle. If this would have happen at any other time in our lives, we would not have been strong enough to handle it.

I went into the waiting room to join my husband and kids. Within moments a lady came by and sat down to explain everything that would be going on and what they would be doing. She left and hours went by.

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Finally, the doctor called us back she tried to explain a few things to us. She was telling us everything she would be checking for and one word came up that caused my heart (not my faith) to fall to the floor– Lupus. I could not believe all of this was happening over taking my daughter to the orthodontist. I praised God for the knowledge He was revealing to us. After talking for a while they finally took ten vials of blood from her to send to a lab in California. The doctor said that for now she could not play any contact sports or participate in gym. The doctor said the results should be back on Monday or Tuesday and this was a Thursday so we had plenty of time for God to build up our faith. Another *faith builder*. Thursday came and went and we were not showing too many emotions. Whitney asked us several times, “Am I going to be okay?” “Do I have cancer?” We would reassure her that she was healed by Jesus stripes. We told her that over and over until she could say it and believe it herself. Praise God for child-like faith. She had it now and no one was going to take it away. Whitney was having her own *Faith builder* experience. I am sure it will follow her for the rest of her life. She has a powerful testimony for God. When we went to church Sunday night we were late. As we walked in there was a line being formed in the front. Whitney looked at me and said that God was telling her to go through that line. So we went up there and told the pastor what was going on. He said that this was a prayer line and that we needed to go through it and let the people pray. She left there knowing she was healed. Her daddy prayed over her every night. Monday came around and after I had gotten everyone off to school and to work, the devil and I had it out. I went to war with Satan for my daughter. I marched around my house for hours rebuking him off her and our lives, I was crying, quoting scripture, and stomping my feet. I was telling him, “Come on. It’s me and you buddy, and I will tell you one thing you are not going to win because I have Jesus Christ backing me”. As I was crying, God reminded me of a couple of scriptures, God said, “Michele, Satan has come to kill, steal, and destroy if you let him. I have come to give life and give it more abundantly if you will let me”. I held on to that piece of truth. It was my life preserver in the sea of emotion that I had found myself in.

I called my mother and cried. I told her that I had faith that God was going to heal my daughter, but I really did not want to walk through it this

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time. I just wanted to be on the other side. All the other times in my life I had to walk through the Jordan to get to the other side. I just wanted this once not to walk through but just to be miraculously on the other side. I did not think that I was up for the fight, and I was right. My flesh wasn't but my spirit was and the support of my family and the faith they were standing in, uplifted me. Of course, all that my mom needed to hear was that I needed her and she was on her way. The very next day the phone rang and it was the doctor. She said they had the results on the blood work they had done. Factors eight through eleven were normal and I said, "Praise God". She said her fibrinogen was on its way back to normal and her PTT was normal. The doctor also said that she tested positive for an inhibitor in her body. Something was inhibiting her blood from clotting. She told us to not let her participate in any contact sport or trampoline or climbing because she could bleed to death if she were to get hit hard enough. I said, "Okay. What is next?"

She replied, "It appears that Whitney's blood is healing itself." She did not want to do anything at that time and suggested we have her retested in two weeks. I told the doctor that we had over a thousand people praying for her and it did not just appear Whitney's blood was healing itself; Jesus was healing her blood through the faith of His saints. She said, "Okay." I called my mom on her car phone and shared the good news with her. She was so happy. Mom got here around eight o'clock that night and she was tired because it was a long drive. But of course she came in bearing gifts and encouragement. She said to stand firm in what we knew. She blessed us with her peace. She took us shopping, out to eat; she was doing a good job of keeping our minds busy.

Thursday came around and about ten o'clock in the morning the phone rang. It was the doctor from hematology. She said that they had finally got the results back from the Lupus test and that Whitney tested negative. She did not have Lupus. "Praise God," I said, and the doctor said, "Oh, Okay." I knew she did not believe, but I also knew that before this was all over she would be curious about the God I served. It was several days later that all the tests were finally in. They could not find a reason as to why Whitney's blood had such a bad reading. They could not find anything wrong with her. The doctor said with the readings they were getting she should have been really sick, yet she had no signs of

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illness at all. The doctor also said this was very unusual. I count it all as a blessing and there is nothing unusual about God healing a child that He loves and gave His only Son for. I hope that sharing this story about my daughter will minister to you. When you are out there trying to witness to souls with your testimony, the devil may come in and try to attack you, your family, or one of your children. Just know that your God is more powerful than the devil and the battle has already been won at Calvary. You stand in faith and let God do the rest.



I wrote a poem for my daughter while I was being still, being “Rafaw” and waiting on the Lord for our miracle:



Faith

*As I sit here reaching for the answers that look so far away...
I'm fighting to keep my focus on what your word has to say...
With my body weakened, and my spirit needing to pray...
Dear Lord I am your child, and I give it all to you...
Your word says we are healed, there's nothing else to do...
Each step that I take in faith gets me closer to the end...
Closer to the one who has died for our sins...
The blood that you have shed was not done in vain...
Your word was true then, and remains the same...
Thank you for your faithfulness, for never leaving us alone...
We never were meant to walk through this on our own...*

*The wisdom that we need is found in your book,
But it's up to us take a look...
It says, "It is written". Now we need to believe that you will meet us in the
middle to take care of our needs.*

Mark 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

Faithful are You, God, who leads us by Your infinite wisdom.
Faithful are You, who trim back our branches so we can grow.
The process of being ripened is a process of being pruned
by the hand of God.



We stayed in Tennessee for a while longer until I received a phone call from my husband while he was attending an eight-week school. Marty called and said, "Well, its time to start packing. We are receiving orders to go to Omaha Nebraska and we will be moving in about four months." I said, "Okay I will put the house up for sale tomorrow." The next day the house went up for sale and within a few of months we had a contract on our house. God always ordered our footsteps and we obeyed. You might be thinking, "It cannot be that simple." It is if you are listening to God and not everyone around you. We had peace about the move because we knew God had a plan.

Soon after we moved into base housing, I had a chance to meet our neighbor. I talk to her for a few minutes and then told her about the book I had written about my life. I told her that if she ever wanted to read it to just let me know. Days would pass and I would not see her or talk to her. I would be standing in my kitchen, which was connected to her house wondering about my little neighbor lady. The Lord put it on my heart to make her some cookies, so I did. I proudly walked over with cookies in hand only to be dismissed with a short thank you and a door shut in my face.

Weeks went by and the Lord had me make a pie. I went over there again with my pie in hand only to be dismissed with another short thank you. I went back to my house feeling a little rejected and asked the Lord, "Why do you keep sending me over there?" It was as if I knew the answer before I even asked. I am only here to be an extension of my father. It is not about me. It is not about my plan, nor is it about what I want. It is all about serving God. A few more weeks went by and the Lord spoke again, all I needed to know was what recipe He wanted me to get out. As you probably have guessed by now, my house was filled with the sweet smell of a New York bakery. It seemed to me I was making something from

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each category of deserts. First there were cookies, and then there was a pie, now there was a blueberry buckle, which was like a blueberry cake. Sooner or later I was bound to make someone's favorite desert and the door would stay open, longer than it took to say thank you. I was right. It wasn't long after the baking fest that my neighbor lady asked to read my testimony. I gave her the book and prayed to God it would minister to her in some small way. Little did I know of the pain she was in. Little did I know what was behind the shut door? Days had passed and she came over to my house. She gave me the book back and said, "I thought when you wanted me to read your book it was going to be about a rich, spoon fed, brat that always got her way." I said, "Well, I think you may have been wrong."

Over a period of months my neighbor and I became good friends. She called me her little preacher woman and called my husband her Marine. I grew very fond of her and her family. As we were standing outside in her half of our back yard, she started asking me questions about God, life and death. As she watered her lawn, we talked and talked. As her lawn became a pond, she gave her life to the Lord. God has a plan. He orders our footsteps and we need to obey. Why were we sent to Omaha Nebraska? For a family in need of a Savior. The United States Marine Corps would most likely have a different opinion, but we know better. God orders our footsteps.

I will never forget the phone call I received while living in Omaha. My dad called and said, "Michele you better come quickly. Your mom has been put in the hospital with pneumonia. We do not know if she is going to make it. She is in ICU." My family and I jumped in the car headed for Missouri. When we arrived, I was introduced to the doctor immediately. The very first thing I said was, "So tell me, doctor. How does it feel to be the man God uses to heal my mom?" His reply was less than desirable, but let me tell you something, what you choose to say and how you choose to act in the first few minutes of a bad situation will determine the outcome of the situation. I lived at the hospital for days praying, believing, and trusting in my God. When everything around me spoke death, I spoke life. I still believed in my God; the God who heals. As I lived in the waiting, my faith grew. As I read my bible, my faith grew. As my mom kept living, my faith grew. My mom survived again against

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all odds. I was so proud of my God. He did it again! My mom returned home and later that year we received new orders to move again due to being in the military.

Here we go again, we are moving to Fort Worth, Texas. Praise God! I am very excited for many reasons, one of which is that Texas is where I am from and this is where our friends, Steve and Michelle and their four girls live. As a matter of fact, Steve pulled some strings to get us orders to move to Fort Worth. God is awesome. I will never forget the night we drove in. It was my oldest daughter Whitney's birthday and she was turning twelve. Our friends had a cake, party favors, presents, and dinner waiting for us when we arrived. It felt like it was all of our birthdays. They had a unique way of making people feel so special in their home. The reunion had begun! This was by far one of our favorite tours. The Davenport and the O'Days back together. We all started our careers together in the Marines stationed in Kansas City, Missouri.

As you know, God has a plan and our trip to Fort Worth was full of surprises. The first surprise was we bought a house only about 20 minutes from the Copeland's Ministry, Eagle Mountain International. Of course we decided to attend this church since we had heard so many positive reports from our friends and many other people. We absolutely fell in love with Eagle Mountain Church. I got involved immediately. I taught in the Women's Ministry many times. Marty and I were altar prayer ministers, and we attended the Ministers' conference they held there every year. God is awesome and complete.

As the seasons changed from summer to fall, I became innately aware of the call of God on my life to become a minister of His Word. I discussed this with some Pastors and they agreed. In October 2002, I was licensed and ordained at "Our Father's House," in Sandia, Texas. I will never forget the night before I was ordained. I must have stayed up half the night preparing my message. I would pray then I would write; I would pray then I would write. My text was out of Ephesians 6:10-20 based on the armor of God. I taught on the five fiery darts. I was so excited and I could not wait to deliver the Word of God. I had never felt so alive, so in tune, so grateful, so honored as I did in that very moment. My light was finally going to shine for my Jesus. The time had come where all the seeds that had been planted over the years were going to produce a harvest.

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Throughout my life there had been people who planted, there had been people who watered, but now God was making my garden grow, not just with normal fruit, but with exceeding, abundant, useable fruit. You see, you can go to the grocery store and buy all the fruit you want but if it is not ripe, you will not use it. The fruit must stay connected to the vine in order to receive the nutrients it needs to be ripened.



I preached my first message. I had my first altar call. I realized for the first time what it meant to live my life alive for Christ. I left there with a feeling that was forever embedded into the depths of my soul. The feeling could not be imitated, it could not be duplicated, it could not be exaggerated - it was eternal. I was forever changed through the experience of obedience. We went home and my life has never been the same. I no longer wondered what I was here for, I knew. The biggest challenge for my husband and I was that I was now a woman minister; a position typically held by a man. Challenges have come and gone and God is still sitting on the throne directing my footsteps. I listen and obey. Sometimes I miss Him, but not from the lack of trying to hear Him.

While living in Fort Worth, my husband was sent to Iraq. God has a plan. He orders our footsteps and we obey. It will never escape my mind the day Marty left. As I waved good-bye and held my girls, all I could say was, "I trust you Lord." "I trust you." I remember one night in particular. Marty had been gone for several weeks and I made it a point not to watch television. But on this night I was flipping through the channels and a report came on which said, "Five Admin chiefs killed in a bombing." The first thing I thought of was that my husband was an admin chief. I turned off the television, jumped up in my bed and started putting the devil in his place. I said, "Oh no you don't; not my husband. He will live and not die." I prayed a burning hedge of protection around him. No weapon formed against him would prosper. "You have no right, or authority over him, he is a child of God." I had peace and a revelation that the same God who ordered Marty's footsteps would bring him back. Marty was returned home safely with the peace of God, nothing missing and nothing broken.

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We spent three years in Fort Worth. We had grown very close to our friends, Steve and Michelle and the kids. We became each other's family. We did everything together - we were inseparable. Our kids went to youth together, to the movies together, to the bowling alley together. It was one of the funniest times in our life. But as with all military families the time had come for us to part we received orders to New Windsor, New York. After praying, Marty tried to negotiate the orders. He put in a request that he not be looked at for promotion but instead stay on station in Fort Worth and retire. To our surprise, they turned his request down. We put our house up for sale but again to our surprise the house did not sell. Marty had to move to New York without us. We kept working with the realtor. She found a loophole with the benefits for military families who had received orders to move. The benefit was, if you could not sell your house you could lower the price and they would make up the difference. Shortly after we took advantage of this benefit our house sold.

We were on our way to New York. I called my mom when I was on the Washington Bridge and I said, "Guess where I am at? "I am on the Washington Bridge." For as long as I could remember, I told my mom I wanted to go to New York City. Well here I am, right in the middle of the big apple living one of my oldest dreams. Although we wanted to stay in Fort Worth, Texas, God had a plan and we obeyed. Every time we responded with obedience, someone was blessed and as a result we were blessed. We had learned to expect blessings because God had trained us to trust in Him. God told me that we would not be in New York long, so we moved into base housing again.

Several months after being there, I started feeling very lonely. I would call my mom often and cry out of pure loneliness of the heart. I missed my mother. Even though I did not live by her in Fort Worth she was only a day's drive away and I could go visit when I wanted. Everything in me yearned to be with her. This tour was not like the others. This tour was different on many levels. First, we were getting older; therefore my mom was getting older. My mom was still quite young in age, but her body had been through more than a body should go through in a lifetime. When I would talk to her, she sounded so weak, so fragile, not at all like my mom. I tried to put certain thoughts out of my mind. I tried to have faith in the God of Abraham. I tried to

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ignore the ever-changing tone in her voice. I tried to be strong, and put on a front that everything was okay, and it worked as long as I ignored my spirit. I would talk to my mom at least three times a week. I trusted God would keep her until I could return home.

I met my neighbors immediately. Once again God used us to be a light in someone's life. We were able to be a witness to an unsaved young family with three kids. God gave us the honor of bringing them to the Lord. We first asked them to go to church with us, which in the beginning they denied but within a few months, they were sitting in the same pew as we were. Praise the Lord! Another families' name was written in the "Lambs Book of Life." God used us in the churches we attended, in the community we lived in, and in the lives of those who lived around us. The changes we saw in other people's lives were no surprise to us because God had a plan. He ordered our footsteps and we obeyed even when we did not understand His plan. The seasons came and went again; winter, spring, and then summer and God kept His word. We received orders to retire back to where we started from twenty years ago - Kansas City, Missouri. Let me tell you how good God is. Along with our orders, our dear friends of more than twenty years received their orders as well; to where else but to Kansas City, Missouri. My mom and dad lived there, Marty's family still lived there and now we would live there as well. We have traveled a long road in the military and we were extremely excited the road led us back home again. As for our friends, we were married together, had children together, were in the military together, moved around the United States together and now we would be retiring together. Life seemed complete now that we were being united with our family and friends.

Soon after we arrived in Missouri I realized how sick my mom was. It seemed as if she had aged on the inside about twenty years since I had seen her last. When I looked at her, I did not see her life flash before me, I saw mine. I saw the mom I had when I was a little girl. I saw the mom I had when I got married and when I got pregnant. I saw the mom I had when I gave birth, and when I needed to talk, when I needed to cry, and when I needed a friend. My life had been reconciled, my mother had been restored to motherhood, and the dreams of having a family had been realized and enjoyed. As I watched my mother deteriorate in front of my

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very eyes, the only memories I had were ones of appreciation. I appreciated my mom's willingness to fight. I appreciated her determination to live; if not for herself for me.

As I watched how every breath she took was an effort, I was convicted for wanting her to fight anymore. My mom had spent a lifetime fighting: a drug addiction, an alcohol addiction, a prescription drug addiction, a nicotine addiction, and self-loathing addition, and I could plainly see that not only was her body exhausted, but also her mind. Not only did my mom fight the addictions she also fought a lifetime of manic depression. For the next seven months, my mom was in and out of hospitals fighting to live while dying. I became a witness to how she lived life as well as how she faced death. Each day meant more than the last, each breath was honored as a will to fight, each smile was savored, and every laugh was captured in my mind. As I watched this woman that I called mom hold on to her fleeing life, I realized we did not have much time left together on this earth. Although I would not admit this in the midst of my surroundings, looking back I realize that I knew time was short.

There are few times in one's life that a memory becomes etched so deeply that it's like an artist has painted on the canvas of your heart with that particular moment and time. If I were to hang the painting on the wall of my mom's last hours, this is what you might have seen.

A grown woman sitting in a chair next to her mother singing her to sleep; a room full of people who love her; her grandchildren; her dedicated husband of twenty-one years; a loving sister and brother; her son-in-law; her Pastor; and other friends and family. You might have even seen a coke can with a straw hanging over the edge because mom loved diet coke. You probably noticed the cup of ice chips to keep her lips moist, and the missing life support machine. You might have seen mother in her blue hospital gown, and you may have noticed the empty coffee cups in fear of missing one moment of her life.

But as you stared at the painting you might have missed the grip the daughter had on her mother's hand. You might have missed her leaning over to whisper in her mother's ear, "It's okay, mom, if you want to let go now. I will be okay." You might have missed the look on the daughter's face after she said those words to her mother, the look of

Mark 11:25 *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*

devastation, the look of fear, fear of losing one of her best friends; her look of emptiness and desperation. You might have missed the untold story of how this mother was her daughter's hero. You also might have missed the daughter silently bowing her head as if to say, "I trust you Lord." But there is one thing I know you couldn't have miss, which is the love that filled the room where my mother lay. The peace that surpasses all understanding; the unity in letting go; the grace that abounds; and the hope in our living God.

Although a painting can speak volumes, the way one lives and dies speaks at a higher tone. As my mother was encompassed with the love of her family and her God, she took her last breath and went to meet Jesus on December 12th 2006.



It has almost been two years since my mother graduated to heaven and God has been faithful. To say we picked up the pieces and went on would be a lie, because my mother did not leave pieces behind. She left us whole; she left us strong in our faith; she left us peace in our hearts; she left us knowing her God would hold us together. We have continued on in our faith and our journey here on earth. Marty and I are standing united in *Faith Builders Ministry* where we preach the good news of our Savoir, Christ Jesus. "*Ripened on the 'Vine'*" has been recently written into a screenplay and is being considered for a movie.

We are members of "Church of the Harvest," in Olathe, Kansas. Marty will be retired in the summer of 2010 from the United States Marine Corp. after serving faithfully for 25 years. I am currently working on my Associates degree while writing my forth book based on Ephesians 6: 10-20.

Whitney, our oldest daughter, is eighteen now and going to college. Dakota, our youngest daughter, is seventeen and a senior who is being home schooled. As far as my dad goes, he married my Aunt, my mom's sister per my mother's request and with the families' blessing.

I pray that by letting you see a glimpse of my life, that it may witness God's mercy and grace on yours. My prayer for you also is that you will

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always walk in forgiveness, love from the heart of heaven, and tell your story with a purpose.



*I would like to end my testimony with this scripture:
Romans 15:13*



May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace, as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit?

