

WHO AM I?

*Who am I
That You would love me so gently?
Who am I
That You would recognize my
name... Who am I?
- Watermark*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I dedicate this to the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, for giving me life, forgiveness, inspiration, gifts, guidance, answers, love, two families, your Word, and You. Thank you, Jesus, for not giving up on me for 37 years even when I gave up on You. You are truly my Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Thank you for sending your only begotten Son into the World so that I would not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16, for restoring me to sanity, and giving me songs of joy and a dream in my heart. I lay my life down to You as an offering of love.

*With you
I can go anywhere, I can do
anything Cause you are the
song I bring
With you
You are the air I
breathe Cause you are
my everything And I
am an offering
I may live and I may die, Either way
you're glorified
Bless the day I give my life
away
-Christy Nockels, Life Light Up.*

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INTRODUCTION

Who are you?

I hardly know,

Sir...

*I'm afraid I can't explain
myself, Sir Because I'm not
myself, you know...*

*I can't put it any more
clearly For it isn't clear
to me.*

*-Lewis Carroll, Alice in
Wonderland.¹*

Imagine growing up in a world, not knowing who you are and having no one to show you, and trying to find yourself in the “mirror” of other people in your life. Imagine being lost in a storm, with no one to protect you, and the storm lasting a long, long time—so long, that you stop believing in *almost anyone or anything*. You believed in a few people, but, one by one, they're gone. You turned to alcohol and drugs to cope, but they turned against you and nearly took your life. You know that there is One Person who can help you, but He's a Stranger and you're terrified of Him. You long to call to Him, but fear that if you let Him in, He will abandon you, punish you, or ask you to do things that you just cannot do. But, you are drowning. So, you call to Him, over and over again. Every time you call, He appears. Every time He appears, you run or shut the door and hide. You just cannot bring yourself to trust Him.

*Here I am! I stand at the door
and knock.*

*If anyone hears my
voice and opens the
door,*

*I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.
Revelation 3:20*

But you never stop believing that the storm will end someday and you'll have peace, love, and joy in your life. You never stop believing that you'll have a family and will no longer be alone. So, you set out on the world to find these things *on your own*. You have an incredible childhood dream that someday, you will be like the little dove in Noah's Ark, and help save the world, but you cannot even save yourself.

You travel a very long journey through a strange sort of wonderland, where things are how you want them to be, instead of how they really are. This place seems fantastic until it turns on you and becomes a prison of torment where you almost go mad. Imprisoned in this place, you conclude what you knew all along—only the Stranger can help you. He can, but will He still? You have rejected Him so many times and you have done everything He told you not to do. ~~He warned you so many~~ times. You just wouldn't listen. You had to see for yourself. So, He let you see. Yet, you still would not obey. Have you now seen too much? Will He still help you? He has to—because nobody else can. You are trapped in a self-constructed prison where nobody reach you because you will not let them in. Even you fail to understand the magnitude of your dilemma - you're lost.

*Well, when one's lost, I suppose it's good
advice to stay where you are until
someone finds you.
But who'd ever think to look for me here?
Good advice.
Maybe if I had listened earlier, I
wouldn't be here.
But that's just the trouble
with me. I give myself very
good advice, But I very
seldom follow it
That explains the trouble that I'm always
in...*

-Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

As you reach a point of hopelessness that you never imagined possible, God shatters your prison--with the simple act of a kind Stranger giving you a cough drop. And then you know without a shadow of a doubt that the Only One you knew could help you, Jesus, was standing there all along, waiting for you to open the door and let Him in. And so you finally do. As you stand there in awe, with the tears of 37 years flowing down your cheeks, He unravels the mystery of a lifetime of confusion and tells you that there's nothing wrong with you—you just need to grow up, learn to trust, know Him, and find out who you are.

He turns your world upside down, shows you that almost everything you believed in was a lie and that “your world” didn't exist. He shows you that many of the people you trusted were untrustworthy, people you failed to trust could have helped you, the things in which you trusted were destroying you, and the things that you failed to trust could have helped you. He shows you that there is goodness in the World and solutions for your problems. And then He says, “Let's start over. I'll show you who you are and what went wrong. I'll teach you all of the things you didn't learn as a child and show you how to be a wife, mother, sister, friend, and most importantly—a daughter. Come, follow me. The storm is over and everything is going to be alright.” And then you realize that this is the first Person you've ever *really* trusted. So, you follow Him.

KINDNESS AND COUGH DROPS

*I cried a tear, you wiped
it dry
I was confused, you cleared
my mind
I sold my soul, you bought it back
for me And held me up and gave
me dignity...
-Anne Murray, You
needed me.*

Not long ago, I was sitting at my desk suffering with a severe cough and bronchitis, when God decided to challenge my two core beliefs that neither no one nor nothing could help me. I had come to believe that only addictive medications worked, yet could not escape the trap of addiction in which I found myself. I also believed that no one could help me and few people cared to try any longer. I tried what seemed to be everything to regain my health, but remained physically and spiritually sick. My two stubborn beliefs effectively trapped me in a place where almost no one could reach me—or so I thought. As I sat at my desk, coughing, a kind stranger walked over, smiled, and dropped a bag of cough drops on my desk. The quintessential skeptic, my immediate thought was “I need some codeine, these don’t work.” In an effort to indulge her, I tried one. To my complete and utter amazement, it worked! Cough drops work! People do care! She just smiled and said “get better.”

That one small gesture rocked my whole world and shattered the lies I believed for so long. Kindness and cough drops....imagine that! That one small gesture meant everything to me and changed my whole world. I knew that the Stranger was God’s way of gently showing me that there is kindness in the world and solutions for my problems. That day, he graciously put me back on the right path—reality, where I was forced to examine my life and deal with my problems. This brought up so many unanswered questions, but most of all—WHO AM I?

A LONELY LITTLE GIRL

*Have you seen my
Childhood?*

*I'm searching for the world that I
come from Cause I've been looking
around*

*In the lost and found of my
heart...*

-Childhood, Michael Jackson

Have you seen my childhood? I remember very little of it--just a few snap shots here and there. Most of the pictures in my mind are photographs that were shown to me by others, rather than memories of my own. In the pictures, everyone looks happy, yet I feel sad. I feel sad because most of the things that I remember were sad, but also because I seemed to have disassociated during much of my early childhood and have few memories. My memories seem to be lost in the dark recesses of my mind and I am unable to retrieve them. I'm sure not whether it is harder to not have a childhood, to have a bad childhood, or not remember your childhood. Maybe it feels the same way—loss. However, as I reflect on what I do remember, I think that maybe it does not matter whether I remember most things. You see, amidst the storms, I recall living in a world of my own, where life was sometimes fun.

My imaginary world seems to have emerged when I was about two or three years old and was forced to find a place of comfort and solace for myself due the terror I felt about not understanding what was happening around me. I have an image in my mind of playing in the living room while watching my Mother work in the kitchen out of the corner of my eye. I recall needing to see that she was there, but not wanting for her to come near me. I think that I was afraid for several reasons. My mother was frequently raging, I was very sensitive, and at some point between infancy and two years of age, I seem to have lost my hearing for a short period of time—without anyone knowing it.

My Mother said that I used to lie in my bed silent for hours and even when it was time for me to eat, I didn't cry. She said that I was the "best baby". I do not specifically remember being deaf, but our neighbors nicknamed me "the Dutchman" because I sounded like a Dutch girl when I talked, my mother told that I talked very late as a child, and I remain deaf in my left ear, so I tend to believe that it's true. Also, I recently experienced an intense episode of frustration in attempting to communicate with some friends that felt like "déjà vu"—as if I had felt this way many times before. I was so completely frustrated because they did not seem to understand me, that I cried. The feeling was so incredibly familiar, it seems to confirm that I was indeed, deaf.

I can only imagine the isolation and fear I must have felt being deaf without anyone knowing it, and yet, the comfort of silence. I'm not sure how long this lasted, but I've read that children who regain their hearing after a period of loss suffer unbearable sensory overload. With my extremely sensitive nervous system, I can only imagine the sensory overload that I must have felt when I regained my hearing only to hear my Mother raging and screaming. It must have been the "perfect storm," sending me to run and hide from my Mother and disassociate from the World. This would explain why I withdrew from everyone as a child and played alone. My Sister used to cry and beg me to play with her, but I simply refused to even acknowledge her. I could have been deaf during this period of time or possibly, after being deaf, preferred the solitude of being alone. She ultimately found a friend in our trailer park. I had one friend who spoke little English. I'm sure this was probably by choice—so that I did not have to talk to her.

I believe that because my hearing was impaired as a child, I learned to perceive the world visually instead. I suppose that after I regained my hearing and noticed that what people said never quite matched with what they did, I stopped listening. An "I love you" followed by "I

wish you had never been born” did not make sense. No matter how much I longed to believe the “I love you’s”, actions truly speak louder than words. I concluded that if I were to learn much about the world, it would be through observation, rather than empty words. Because I would not allow anyone to get too close to me, I was very lonely as a child. My father used to tell me of a time when I would sit on the porch with a jar of coins, begging kids to come play with me, with the promise of money. He said that I would say, “Kids, kids, come play with me, I have money” and jingle my coin jar. I don’t remember anyone responding.

This is the story of a lost, lonely little girl’s search love, a “normal” family, God, and herself. It isn’t a pretty story and yet—it’s beautiful. There is a lot of heartache caused by a troubled childhood and poor choices. There are a lot of forks in the road, where she made the wrong turn over and over again—knowing it even then. It’s the story of a little girl who never learned to trust. Without the ability to trust, she spends most of her life running from people and God. She is lonely, afraid, confused, ashamed, frustrated, and angry, leading her to disown her family and herself, becoming a person that neither she, nor anyone else knew. She gets lost and there is only one Man who can show her the way back home—Jesus. But, to reach her, He has to break her because she just will not surrender. This shattered, broken little girl must retrace her steps with her Savior to find and reclaim the lost pieces of herself. As she journeys through musicals and fairytales, between fantasy and reality, dreams and nightmares, literature and songs, encounters God and the Devil, Jesus gently leads her home with the shattered pieces of herself to build something beautiful – a mosaic—that reflects Him. He gives her *beauty for ashes*, takes her home to the family she has always had, and gives her a second family as well. While her story appears to be fiction, reality is stranger than fiction. A happy ending? Definitely. But also, a new beginning.

A SHAKY FOUNDATION FOR TRUST

*Someday she'll trust Him And learn how to see Him
Someday He'll call her
And she will come running
Fall in His arms, the tears will fall down
And she'll pray
I want to fall in love with you
-Love Song for a Savior, Jars of Clay.*

I grew up trusting in and depending upon almost no one. I have read that infants view their caregivers as good or evil, depending on the circumstances occurring at particular moments in time. In seeking to determine who they are, children compartmentalize them. As trust and love grows, usually between the ages of two and three, compartmentalization disappears and one is able to perceive people along a continuum of being “human” – neither good nor evil, but sprinkles of both. Then, children are able to realize that while a parent may leave or occasionally fail to fulfill their needs, they are ultimately trustworthy. That never happened for me.

My mother was my primary caretaker and exhibited the extreme polar opposites of bad and good, leaving me to create “good” and “bad” boxes—into which people were placed as I perceived them. Living with my mother created insanity where I was constantly switching the box that she was in because she was constantly shifting from very bad to very good. I think the confusion of this caused me to look elsewhere for love. The only problem was that any relationships that I built with others were broken because we moved so much. That left me constantly shaken and unable to trust and depend on people. There were a handful of people that I trusted as much as I was capable of doing so, but I could not consistently depend on them. These people include my Father, Nanny, Sister, Aunt Dawn, Lou and Bob, and George Wilmont. I loved them all dearly, but one by one, they were gone and I was left alone again

with my Mother. My Mother taught me not to trust, so I chose not to depend on anyone, as far as I could do so.

Nanny was probably the first person that I trusted because I bonded with her as a baby. I was absolutely precious to Nanny and she was wonderful to me. There has never been one moment in my life in which I have doubted her absolute love and devotion. She has never let me down. When I was a baby, we lived in a trailer in her backyard. She worked days as a nurse and came home at midnight, at which time she would come to our trailer and take me back to her house. Though my dad protested, Nanny usually won and picked me up almost every night. She told me that she would prepare eggs, oatmeal, and cream of wheat and feed me “like a little bird.” She actually asked my Father if she could have me to raise and he said no. I remember only one time in my entire life that Nanny raised her voice at me and she ended up apologizing when I started to cry! I loved Nanny deeply. Unfortunately, my parents took me from her when I was about two years old to move to Lubbock for my Father to attend Law School. I was devastated.

While I loved my sister dearly, she was only eighteen months older than me when my Mother gave her the duty of supervising me and becoming my “Mini-Mom.” She watched over me, made sandwiches, and tried to keep me out of trouble for fear of her life. Despite her valiant efforts, I still managed to almost die at least five times. Kellie was a loving sister, yet I feared that she had few more answers than I did, so I was reluctant to listen to her. She is still my “Mini-mom” in some ways and I thank God I finally listen to her—sometimes. She has a lot of wisdom and is the best sister a girl could ever have. My Aunt Dawn was another significant person in my life when I was a young child. Aunt Dawn alternated with Nanny taking care of Kellie and I during the summer months that we spent in Tyler. We spent almost every summer in Tyler until I was about twelve years old. While Dawn was sane, her husband

was not. Dean was an alcoholic and was occasionally physically abusive to her. Despite her troubles, Dawn has always been a bright light in my life. She is hilarious and taught me the art of laughter through tears. Dawn doted on us until we moved to Lubbock. Moving to Lubbock was sad in so many ways. As we drove off for Lubbock, the scene was reminiscent of “*Terms of Endearment*.” Nanny and I were clutching each other’s arms out of the car window, screaming and crying as if we would never see each other again. Ofcourse, we would see each other, but it wouldn’t be the same. I was terrified of being alone and there I was with “Mother.”

In my childlike thinking, Nanny was good and Nanny was old, so naturally, old people were “good.” Almost as soon as we pulled into Lubbock, I found an old couple close by, Lou and Bob, to serve as my surrogate grandparents. They lived next door and their trailer was my safe place, where I could play with my Barbies, eat my favorite foods, and be cherished. Lou made my favorite foods, macaroni and tomatoes and fresh homemade biscuits! Bob spoiled me with candy!! Lou and Bob were one of the most loving couples I have ever met. They had lots of grandchildren, and still, room for me. When my Mother would look for me, she would always find me at Lou and Bob’s—eating dinner. They called me “Dutchman,” which I hated! But, I loved them and was very attached to them until we moved back to Houston after my Father’s graduation. It was very traumatic and sad—another attachment, broken.

During the summers that we spent in Tyler, we met a Christian man named George Wilmont. He was a kind old man, who gave me a bible and a dream. He bought a bible for me, with my name engraved in gold and slipped a birthday note in it, which included the story of how the dove in Noah’s ark found the olive branch and said “Let this story always remind you that small creatures can do great things.” This note left an indelible mark on my heart and has helped to dream big dreams. Mr. Wilmont was like a grandfather to me and for some reason, I knew I was “special” to Him. I don’t know if I’ll ever understand why—other than, maybe

God saw that I needed him. Every summer, he took us shopping for school clothes and toys. He came to my grandmother's home often to prepare meals for us.

He was a truly kind man who left my life way before I was ready. In 1982, when I was eleven years old, he died in front of my eyes in the Tyler Mall. Strangely, he died right in front of the gift shop from which he had sent me so many gifts. We were standing at a clock and when it struck, he fell back, grabbed my shoulder, and cracked his skull against the ground. My sister was screaming hysterically as my Nanny tried to revive him with blood spattered everywhere. I stood there in silence, unable to process what had just happened. Looking back, I believe that grabbing my shoulder was his way of saying "Goodbye." It was so incredibly hard to lose such a kind person too soon. It was especially hard on me. I couldn't believe he was dead. I screamed to God, "Why God? Why did you have to take him?" I still don't know the answer to that question, but it broke my heart. What I regret the most is that during this important stage of my life, I did not learn to trust and depend on others. Without passing this crucial developmental milestone, you had to be perfect for me to trust you. This placed unfair expectations on the imperfect people in my life. I also put myself in the bind of defining God by the imperfect human beings in my life. Because I did not learn to trust and depend on people, it was almost impossible for me to trust and depend on God. I thought God would abandon or punish me if I got close to Him. I suppose I just could not stand to be disappointed again. So, the thought of giving my life to someone I did not know and believed might abandon or punish me was unbearable. I knew that God had the utmost integrity and character, but I just could not bring myself to trust and rely upon Him. I did not understand the concept of trust, because in my world, people were not trustworthy or dependable. When you're three, you need this. That left God being the only One capable of reaching me.

Trust in the Lord with all of your heart

*And He will direct you and make your
paths straight.*

-Proverbs 3:5

RAGGEDY ANN

*I'm just a little girl I'm Raggedy Ann
Making believe I'm happy.
Hey, Raggedy Ann Falling apart at the seams...
When did I get so broken I wouldn't notice...
Everyday it gets a little harder
to believe in magic and people...
-Mindy Smith, Raggedy Ann*

Have you ever felt like a doll? Growing up, I relate most to Raggedy Ann. When I was three or four years old, my mother dressed my sister, Kellie, and I as Raggedy Ann and Andy. I remember being so happy to be Raggedy Ann because I was the girl. My mother seemed a bit obsessed with Raggedy Ann and Andy. She even made a Raggedy Andy costume for my first son's Halloween. Maybe the little girl in her loved Raggedy Ann. Or, maybe she felt like Raggedy Ann too, a little girl pretending to be happy, but falling apart at the seams. Her parents were pretty dysfunctional. My grandfather, Papa, was usually drunk and physically abusive to my grandmother, Nanny. So, I suspect that that Mother may not have had her emotional needs met by her parents. They were probably just trying to keep their family together. I loved Raggedy Ann dolls because you don't have to be careful with them! You can bang them around and hit them and they just bounce right back. If you rip them, they are easy to fix. You just sew up the tears. If you get them dirty, throw them in the washing machine. And they never stop smiling no matter what happens to them! I can relate to how Raggedy Ann must have felt. After all, she is—just a doll. Living with my Mother was like being a doll in a doll house. We looked perfect and couldn't touch anything.

Mother was a seamstress and hand-made most of our clothes. They were certainly the most adorable clothes any child could want. She learned to sew from Nanny and put a lot of love into making those clothes. I suppose she was just being a Mom. But I felt like a doll,

dressed up and almost put up on a shelf in being told afterwards to “be quiet, leave me alone, don’t get into any trouble, and “stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry about.” My mother also told me that everywhere we went, strangers would stop and ask to look at my huge green eyes, telling her what an incredibly beautiful child that I was—a little doll.

Our home was like a doll house. While it was meager due to the fact that we had little money, what we had was perfectly in its place and we almost could not touch anything. We were so used to not being able to touch anything that we knew better than to do so anywhere else. Mother told me that one time, we visited a friend’s home and I just sat on the couch, staring at the candy dish. I wouldn’t dare touch it because I knew I would get a spanking. But, I stared ever so hardly at that candy dish! So much so, the owner of the home asked me if I wanted some, which I gladly accepted as they complimented my Mother on our wonderful manners. If they only knew! Underneath the smiles and good manners was the pain of a child who was going through Hell and was not allowed to feel and be real. A little girl forced to smile even though her heart was breaking.

*Smile, though your heart is
aching Smile, even though
it's breaking When there
are clouds in the sky, You'll
get by, If you smile
Through your fear and
sorrow Smile and maybe
tomorrow You'll see the
sun
Come shining through for you...
-Charlie Chaplin, Smile*

Mother always loved playing “dress up”, so Halloween was one of her favorite holidays. On the last Halloween night that I saw her, as I walked up to her front door, she opened it with a big smile on her face and placed a sequined-sewn skirt around my waist and sequined ribbon in

my hair as we danced around like children. She had costumes for the children, candy, and the house was decorated to the nine's with Halloween everywhere. For a moment, I saw the little girl in her and so wished that who I saw that night was who she really was. Maybe like me, all she ever really wanted was a family of her own? I will probably never know, but I do know that you can't "make a family" because people are not dolls. Jesus has to give you one. I suppose in her efforts to force one together, she never let Him do his part. I understand this because I tried to do the same thing.

A BARBIE

*I'm a Barbie girl in the
Barbie world Life in plastic,
it's fantastic!
-Aqua, Barbie Girl*

My Mother was so incredibly beautiful when she was young that she almost looked like a Barbie doll. She certainly spent a lot of time trying to look like one. She had long blonde hair, blue eyes, and a perfect figure. My father told me that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He was instantly smitten. I'm sure a lot of guys were smitten with her—so much so that maybe she felt like an object, instead of a person. I was in love with Barbie as a child, so I suppose my Dad was Ken to me. Growing up, I always wanted to be thin and have long, blonde hair like my Mother. But, as fate would have it, despite my tears, incredible pain, and shame, she repeatedly instructed the hairdresser to cut it all off into a “Dorothy Hamill cut”. Forgive me Dorothy, but I hated that haircut. Apparently, I was “so cute” with short hair, that despite the fact that I did not want it and cried as my hair fell to the floor. I was going to have that haircut because that was what Mother wanted. Having short hair made me feel like a boy. But, at least it was blonde. I loved blonde hair and I think before I was even seven years old, she began squirting Sun-In in my hair and having me sit in the sun to keep it blonde. Having blonde hair made its shortness not so ugly to me.

Aside from my hair, there was my weight. Growing up, I was never quite skinny enough in my eyes or Mother's. She frequently told me how fat I was and pushed various diets on me. In my desperation to be thin, I made myself vomit, starved myself, and ultimately got addicted to diet pills when I was old enough to get them on my own. The shameless thing was that I began taking diet pills at the age of nineteen when I was only 110 pounds—pretty thin in the eyes of most everyone but Mother. I took diet pills for years. From the age of nineteen

through my early thirties, I took Phentermine intermittently. I even got a small settlement for “slight regurgitation” of my aortic valve in my heart. Despite the pounding of my heartbeat in my chest, I was willing to risk a heart attack to be thin. Oh well, beauty has its price.

Having blonde hair made me feel beautiful like Mother. I had platinum blonde hair in High School and loved it. On one summer trip to Italy, men from twelve to eighty were falling all over themselves over my Sister and I. My aunt told us before the trip to dye our hair brown because she knew that being blonde in Italy meant trouble. No such luck—I was looking forward it because I never felt so beautiful in my life. A group of twelve to thirteen year old boys drove their bikes around us every day as we walked through the Piazza, screaming “Kellie, Candy.” On my Sister’s birthday, two men in a BMW drove up, flew up out of the sunroof, and threw thirteen pink roses to my Sister. I also remember being serenaded by an elderly gentleman on a bus—opera style—with the entire bus bursting into applause as I stepped out at my stop. I thought that I was finally just like Barbie—short of the breast implants. Unlike my Mother—I wasn’t quite that desperate. Still, I could never quite reach the bar in her eyes. She had to be the most beautiful and she was, so I finally gave up. Unable to ever please her, I decided that from that point on, I was “Daddy’s little girl.” I wish I would have known then what I know now—true beauty comes from within, not without. The search for outer beauty is a lust that can never be satisfied. Ultimately, happiness comes when you accept yourself as you are.

*Little girl fourteen flipping through a magazine
Says she wants to look that way
But her hair isn't straight her body isn't fake
And she's always felt overweight
Well little girl fourteen I wish that you could see
heart
That beauty is within your heart
-Johnny Diaz, More Beautiful you.*

THE BATHROOM

*Some place where there isn't any
trouble... Do you suppose there is
such a place, Toto?
There must be!*

*It's not a place you can get to by a boat
or a train It's far far away
Behind the Moon, Beyond the
Rain Somewhere over the
Rainbow*

*Way up High, there's a land that I
heard of Once in a lullaby.
Somewhere over the Rainbow, skies
are blue*

*And the dreams that you dare to dream really do
come true.*

-The Wizard of Oz

As a child, I felt that I was a burden—constantly “in the way” and the source of most of my Mother’s troubles. I had certainly caused a lot of problems by the time I was two years old. First, I was born. I caused her terrible postpartum depression. Then, I drank a bottle of furniture polish and had my stomach pumped. Shortly after that, I ate a bottle of Flintstone Vitamins with Iron and had my stomach pumped again. I also almost drowned three times in swimming pools. Looking back, I wonder if anyone had told me not to eat more than one Vitamin or if I just could not decide between Barney, Betty, Bam Bam and Pebbles. I wonder, like *Alice in Wonderland*, if I thought that drinking that furniture polish or jumping into a swimming pool would take me somewhere else. Keeping me out of trouble was a full time job.

My mother used to tell me that I had ruined her life and she wished I had never been born. She was usually raging and screaming at my Father and somehow, I knew that they were going to get a divorce. I felt like a mistake and she said a lot of things to me that seemed to indicate that she felt like I was a mistake as well. Unable to bear the pain and fear that I was

feeling, I locked myself in the bathroom at the age of three with my Barbies and found a place of peace, where I could pretend that what was happening outside the bathroom door was not really happening. Outside of the bathroom door, there were storms—both literal and figurative ones—tornadoes and the rage of a mentally unstable mother. I don't know which was more frightening—a tornado or my Mother. There was not much difference in my world. Both made you want to run and hide. And, so I did. I was “out of there.”

Unable to physically leave, my only option was to mentally escape into a world of fantasy and fairy tales, where life was what I wanted it to be, instead of how it really was. It was my safe place and NOBODY WAS GETTING IN. It was my shell, my imaginary “fortress,” a place of comfort and protection that I loved because I was the only person in it. The bathroom was mine and mine alone—a world of fantasy, where the possibilities were endless, I was not in the way, and there were no storms. I have often been told that during a tornado, the bathroom is the safest place in the house. Tornadoes were a frequent occurrence in Lubbock and in my home. I remember a day when a tornado was passing through Lubbock. My parents put my sister and I into a bathtub and placed a mattress over the tub until the storm passed. It was terrifying. I recall the feeling of almost holding my breath until Mom and Dad said the storm had passed and everything was okay. Sometimes I still forget to breathe. So, I suppose I thought the bathroom was a place where I could be protected from tornadoes and my mother. The terror associated with these storms and my Mother was so severe, that I continued to have dreams that tornadoes were chasing me well into my thirties.

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

*If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense.
what it is,
Nothing would be what it is,
because everything would be what it isn't
And contrary wise, what it is, it wouldn't be.
And what it wouldn't be, it would... In a world of my world
All the flowers would have very extra special powers
They would sit and talk to me for hours
When I'm lonely in a world of my own...
In a world of my own, Alice in Wonderland²*

Like Alice's discovery of the rabbit hole in *Alice in Wonderland* or the mirror in *Through the Looking Glass*, the Bathroom was my secret portal to a fantasy world. It was a fantastic place where I escaped from the pain that I was trying to hide as a child—a place where Barbie and Ken loved each other, kissed, and talked about their dreams, instead of arguing and getting a divorce. As I discovered the peace and love that lie in the bathroom, I began spending hours and hours there, playing and pretending that things were different. I always had a wonderful imagination of how things “could be.”

My imagination was so vivid that it did not take long for me to realize that I no longer needed the bathroom to escape. I could simply “check out” and disassociate into my own world of fantasy, imagination, and peace. My Mother used to say that I would play alone for hours. When she would call my name, I didn't respond. Maybe I couldn't hear her? Maybe I wouldn't hear? Or maybe I didn't respond because I wasn't really there? All I remember is that I had found peace amidst the storm. As I became a pre-teen and teenager, I no longer required much imagination to escape reality. I mixed drugs and alcohol with my imagination and found the perfect world. Drugs and alcohol made my dull reality full of color and eliminated the effort required to dream. With drugs and alcohol, I created an “alternate reality”, where things

could be as I wanted for them to be, instead of how they really were. I could simply ignore anything I did not want to deal with in favor of the excitement and thrill that my world provided. I imagined how things would be when I grew up. I was like a damsel in distress, waiting for the day when my Prince Charming would rescue me and we would ride away into the sunset and live “happily ever after.” Little did I know that this could actually happen if I just knew Jesus. Thus, the Bathroom became a “metaphor” for a place of escape from reality. It was a kind of “parallel universe,” running alongside the real universe, occasionally intersecting it, that only I knew about. It seemed almost Heaven.

I didn't live in this place. It was just a place I frequented when things got too difficult for me to cope and I needed comfort, peace and solitude. When loving people came into my life to show me they cared, I came out and let them love me. Sometimes I stayed out for long periods of time. The problem is...I always returned because the good people never stayed forever. Have you ever heard the saying “the good die young?” Well, in my life, the good died, left, were absent, or I was taken from them, so I left. But then, who could be there for you at all times and love you unconditionally besides God? When the loneliness, terror, pain, shame, anger, or rage returned, I returned to the bathroom that I knew so well. Ultimately, I didn't even need to be angry or in pain to go there—boredom was a sufficient motivation. By this time, I was a teenager and it was the only place that I really had a good time. In my parallel universe, life was great and the possibilities were endless. But it was also a place where “normal” people were not allowed to enter because to do so would destroy the fantasy. So, needless to say, there were a lot of screwed up people in the bathroom.

WE'RE ALL MAD HERE

*All around me are familiar
faces Worn out places, worn out
faces Bright and earlier for
their daily races Going
nowhere, going nowhere...
When people run in
circles It's a very,
very
Mad World
-Gary Jules, Mad World*

I feel like Alice in Wonderland, living in a world where everyone is mad, not wishing it to be that way, but thinking maybe “I’m not all there myself.”³ The difference between my experience and Alice’s is that mine was real. I didn’t have the luxury of waking up from a bad dream, sighing with relief. Like Alice, everything in my world was backwards—by circumstance and choice. Like Alice, I kind of lived on the flip side of a mirror. I have some idea of what she may have found there because I’ve been there. I lived in a fairy tale place that was upside down and backwards and dysfunctional or insane people were my mirrors. So, reality and my non-reality were both insane places to live.

There are many ways in which I relate to Alice. Seeing the misery of the adults around me made me not want to grow up. I remember feeling how nice it would be to not have to grow up, old, and die; and yet, the dilemma of constantly having lessons to learn and re-learn. I see myself in Alice, sitting with her face in her hands, wondering if anything would *ever* happen in a natural way again and yet, realize that nothing has ever really been *natural*. I understand what it’s like to feel constantly on trial with the Queen of Hearts, my mother, being judge, jury and executioner, imposing the sentence before the verdict because the evidence is irrelevant, being punished for violating rules that you didn’t know existed, living in a world with no solid

rules, most of the people in it were crazy, and the insanity of trying to make sense out of nonsense.

The people that I spent most of my time with as a child were either alcoholic, drug addicted, or mentally ill. My Mother has always been mentally unstable and taken a plethora of prescription drugs. She could always convince one of her many doctors to give her whatever she wanted and had her own personal pharmacy in a closet that she called “Eckerd’s.” She probably learned this from Nanny. Nanny had a little pharmacy of her own—a big red suitcase full of drugs. ~~Nanny was a nurse~~ and had a physician’s desk reference so that whenever you did not feel well, she could cross reference your symptoms with the PDR and give you a magic pill to fix your problem. Through all of this, I learned that there is a pill for every problem.

I also learned that alcohol was pretty interesting, as well. My Father drank frequently, my uncle Dean was an Alcoholic, and my Papa was a raging, pass-out alcoholic. While Papa was frequently drunk and violent, he was never abusive towards my sister and I. But alcohol was a huge part of his life. Tyler was a dry county, so he would frequently drive my sister and I to Gladewater on beer and whisky runs. He was almost always drunk or passed out on the couch, while my sister and I were left to roam his farm and fend for ourselves. I suppose through all of this, I learned, like Alice, that if I ate or drank things, something interesting was sure to happen!

Nanny and Papa were married and divorced three times, in between trying to kill each other. I’ve been told that Papa shot guns in the home and broke Nanny’s back. Nanny broke both of Papa’s legs when she caught him cheating on her by ramming his legs between her car and his girlfriend’s. Papa beat up Nanny’s husband while my sister and I watched in terror. They were certainly violent with each other, but never abusive towards us, so I suppose I thought this was okay. They usually lived apart. Nanny lived in a small house crowded with piles of junk everywhere and Papa lived on a farm. We spent many days traveling back and

forth between Nanny and Papa's.

During our summer visits to Tyler, we played in the woods, rode bicycles, ate popsicles, burglarized a Goodwill drop box, helped Nanny collect rental payments from insane tenants as she told us of the violent things they did to each other, listened to stories of square pigs and menstruating monkeys, got to know two mentally ill women from Rusk State Hospital who lived in the back of Nanny's house, took Valium, drove tractors and motorcycles while my Papa was passed out on the couch, picked watermelons, shot animals with rifles at midnight as we flashed glaring spotlights towards the woods to make their little red eyes glow in the dark, combed junkyards and garage sales in the scorching summer heat for "one man's trash"⁴, and watched in horror as people beat each other up. We had a grand old time!

The only problem was—everybody was insane and I was not completely aware of that fact. As loving as Nanny and Papa both were, they were not exactly the picture of mental health. Nanny was very loving, but also eccentric and Papa was a certifiable Alcoholic. We were either influenced in very strange ways or left to fend for ourselves and do whatever we pleased. I somehow knew this wasn't quite normal, but thought, "oh well." All in all, there was fun, chaos, adventure, laughter, love, intermittent supervision, violence, alcoholism, pills--sprinkled with a bit of sanity here and there.

It would be so nice if something made sense for a change.

-Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

2I still hate garage sales!

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

Playing with the queen of hearts, knowing it ain't really smart

The joker ain't the only fool who'll do anything for you...

Baby, I know it makes you sad

*But when they're handing out the heartaches
you know you got to have you some.*

-Juice Newton, Queen of Hearts

I have few good memories of my Mother during childhood. While I recall her sewing clothes for us, making Halloween costumes, cooking, cleaning, and participating in a few fun activities, most of my memories of my Mother are unpleasant. I seem to recall a time—or maybe I just want to remember a time—when she was very young and kind. It was around the time of her baptism. She yearned deeply for my Father to participate in her baptism and was very hurt when he expressed disinterest. Ultimately, she was baptized. I do not remember whether my father was there or not. I just remember her being disappointed and do not recall any change in her afterwards.

My mother was like the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*—nice for a short period of time and then out of nowhere, exhibiting a blind fury of rage that would frighten even the strongest of character. “*When she was good, she was very, very good, but when she was bad, she was horrid.*” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. She could be so wonderful sometimes, making chicken soup for you when you were sick or cookies when you wanted something sweet. She sewed your clothes by hands, fixed your hair, took care of you while working on the side, and always ensured that you “looked” perfect on the outside. Then, out of nowhere, she would explode, rage, cuss, call you names, accuse you of things you had not done, tell you that she wished you had never been born and had ruined her life, send you to the yard to pick weeds in 100 degree heat, give you a toothbrush to scrub the baseboards, or run raving mad at you with a leather belt. She was frequently threatening people, making them jump through hoops to

please her, placing people on trial for trivial things, making everyone around her bow down and worship her for fear of their lives, and punishing us at the drop of a hat. She used to say “I brought you into this World and I can take you out.” I can almost hear her saying, “Off with her head” for no reason at all. Her husband was the perfect King of Hearts, afraid of her because you never knew what she was going to do next. Mother had a horrible temper and most people feared her. However, like the Queen of Hearts, she was a coward inside.

Maybe she was trying to “build” a “family” for us in the best way that she knew how. The problem was—she didn’t know how. What was probably her effort to put a family together looked to me like finding a man to pay the bills and creating the perfect “doll house,” where everyone was miserable but her. She even said one time that if her husband died, she would be out on the golf course looking for another Man before he was cold in the ground. Her husbands seemed to be there just to pay her bills and do what she told them to do. If they did not do as she told them, they were replaced. Mother married four times after divorcing my father: to Gary, Rickey, Kenny, and then Rickey again. She just celebrated 25 years of marriage to Rickey, so I suppose the marriage to Kenny does not count. Well, it’s not very important anyway, so we don’t need to talk about Kenny.

Her second husband, Gary, was an abusive, mentally disturbed Alcoholic. I remember nothing about Gary, other than one incident when I was eight or nine years old, where he tried to beat up my Father in my Nanny’s front yard. We were visiting Tyler while my Father was there and he came to Nanny’s home to pick us up. When Gary tried to prevent Dad from taking us for the afternoon, Dad lost it. He took a swing at Gary and then, the 6’4” tall Gary began to pummel my 5’10” Dad. Thankfully, Nanny threw a brick at Gary’s head and burst it open, saving my Dad from being beaten up. We were screaming and crying—seeing blood everywhere when Dad said, “Don’t worry girls, it’s his blood, not mine.” Knowing that it wasn’t Daddy’s

blood made it somehow alright! We spent the afternoon with Dad and by the evening, I was sitting in the front floorboard of my Mother and Gary's car for the ride back to Dallas and told to "shut up" as I cried for my Father. All I remember is despising Gary because I wanted my Daddy. My Sister hated him because he abused my Mother. Kellie told me that one time as Gary screamed at my Mother by the swimming pool, she ran up and shoved him into the pool with his clothing on, saying "Stop yelling at my Mother!" Then, she ran as fast as she could. Thank God this marriage did not last long—probably because Mother could not push him around.

Then, my mother married the man to which she is currently married, Rickey. Rickey is Mother's puppet on a string who does whatever she tells him to do. Rickey is a kind, gentle, soul, but also her codependent doormat. They bought a house in Humble and we lived with them for three years until my Sister's teacher and principal called my Father and said "get them out of that house." "That house" was a place where we watched in horror as she chased my step-father down the street with a baseball bat and bashed his headlights in, endured my Mother's suicide attempt and incessant hypochondria, cleaned the house and prepared dinner for fear of our lives, dressed up to endure "celebrations," heard mother shoot guns through the ceiling to scare my step-father, and watched her repeatedly prance around in her negligé while my step-father squeezed her breasts to ensure that her implants were satisfactory. I also remember vomiting on the table after being forced to eat onions, being baptized against my will because we were all "going to do it together," being chased through the neighborhood in

my underwear with a leather belt, hiding in the bushes while her husband stalked me with their Cadillac, and running away with my boyfriend until 4:00 a.m., returning to my Father's home drunk with everyone in the front yard waiting for me.

But, ultimately, I remember always feeling that men, money, and appearance were more important to her than love. Money is her security and she has always been more interested in herself than anyone else. I think she would sell her soul for money because possibly, it's the only the that she trusts. We are all products of our environment and her childhood certainly seems to have been more violent and dysfunctional than mine, so I do have compassion for her. I just wish that she would have sought help to deal with her mental problems, instead of remaining in denial and sabotaging much of the happiness in our lives. But then, how can you give someone something you do not have? She was a miserable person and I suppose misery loves company. My mother was really not capable of being a good mother. I remember awful times with my mother as a pre-teen and teenager, but before then, aside from a few mental impressions, I really don't remember her at all.

A BULLY

Hit me with your best shot!

*Why don't you hit me with your
best shot!*

Hit me with your best shot!

Fire away...

-Pat Benetar, Hit me with your best shot!

Like the Queen of Hearts, Mother was the ultimate bully. I recall being punished for just annoying her and can almost hear her saying, “never mind, get to the part where I lose my temper!”⁵ She was constantly pushing people around to get what she wanted—money! In all of this insanity, I even had the mischievous idea of trying to make her lose her temper! My therapist told me “hurt people hurt people.” She’s right. She was hurt, she hurt me, I was hurt, I hurt others, and the list goes on. Stop the madness! Much like *Alice in Wonderland*, while growing up, I was constantly corrected, coerced into doing things that I did not want to do, required to explain my actions amidst the confusion and dysfunction around me, and threatened or punished for things that I did not do—resulting in anger and tears. My mother terrified me so much that I was a “sitting duck” for any subsequent bullies that came along and they came. Bullies can almost smell fear and I certainly had a lot.

Aside from my Mother, the earliest bully in my life was Clint. He was my sister’s friend and loved picking on me because I was little. When I was about five or six, I remember being deep in the woods with my sister, Kellie, and Clint, when Clint suddenly screamed “Bear!” and they both took off running. I was so terrified, I found an overhang of trees and mud, gathered sticks and leaves, and piled it all on top of myself and hid there until the “Bear” passed. I thought I was going to die, so I lied there and shook until the panic subsided and I felt safe to come out and find my way home. They certainly thought it was funny, but I

didn't.

I remember another occasion in the woods with Clint, Kellie and my dog, "Little". I had walked into a wooded area with Kellie and Clint, but became separated from them because they ran faster than I did. When I saw them ahead of me, Clint was hitting a tree with a stick. I suspect that he used that stick to knock the nest of yellow jackets down that he subsequently had me run through. When I asked them how to get where they were located, he pointed to a small path and said "right here." Little and I started to run until I stepped right in the middle of a yellow jacket nest. Bees were everywhere—my hair, shirt, sandals, shorts, underwear, you name it. I've never screamed so loudly in my life. As I ran in terror down the road, Kellie and Clint chased me down the street, hitting me over the head with sticks to kill the bees in my hair

This was also probably the fastest I have ever run. I was a long way from Nanny's house, but somehow, I got there very quickly. I was allergic to bees and remember getting very sick. I remember lying by the air conditioner on Nanny's couch for a couple of days, thinking I was dying. You would think that a near-death experience would be enough to keep me from playing with Clint anymore. But, I was always a slow learner. Yes! I went back for more. Predictably, Clint tried to get me killed two more times before I realized he was not a safe person to play with—once by red wasps and the other time by bumblebees. It seemed just too inconceivable that someone would hurt a friend on purpose.

I have spent most of my life running from bullies. I must have been a "bully magnet." It was not until I was about fourteen years of age that I learned to stand up for myself and stop being a victim. A neighborhood girl, Jenny, was bullying me and talking trash about me to my friends, so I walked over to her house with a group of my friends and beat her up. She was much bigger than me, but I was so angry and fed up with her behavior, she didn't stand a

chance. I remember knocking on her door, asking her to come outside and fight. She took a running lunge at me and ended up on top of me. Being a gymnast and quick thinker (yes, I was a quick thinker, just slow learner), I balanced my weight on my shoulders and began kicking her in the mouth with my feet. She had braces, so blood was everywhere and it was a short fight. I went home with no injuries, proud that I had showed her “who was boss.” I really was not too concerned about the blood. I suppose I was used to seeing blood by then.

I remember another girl that was a track star who bullied me, kicked my chair, pulled my hair, and made fun of me constantly—until the day I turned around, picked her up in her chair and slammed it down on the floor, asking “Do you want a piece of me?” She didn’t. From that day forward, she was my biggest fan and the compliments never ceased. There was another very big girl named Jennifer that was “after me” because I was dating her friend’s love interest. I spent months avoiding even going to my locker for fear of running into Jennifer—until I thought of the brilliant idea of having my popular sister ask her classmate, Jennifer, to leave her little sister alone. It worked—until Kelly came along. Not sure what I did to upset Kelly. At any rate, I spent at least one or two years running and hiding from Kelly.

After graduating from High School, the bullying stopped until I began working as an Attorney. I remember working with a verbally and sexually abusive man fifteen years my senior when I had about four years of legal experience. While sexual harassment and innuendo is offensive enough, it is somehow more tolerable than emotional abuse. I endured several months of sexual harassment and innuendo and ultimately, blew up, when I was told to put the “F***** file in *his+ chair.” I got up immediately and went to see our Supervising Partner to

stop the madness. It was handled promptly and the abuse stopped immediately. Oddly enough, I forgave this man and even remained friends with him afterwards! Recently, I endured four months of the most intense emotional, psychological, intellectual and spiritual bullying that I have ever dealt with in my life—short of dealing with my mother. I was working with three very intellectual, liberal attorneys from top tier law schools. I was the only conservative Christian in the room from a fourth tier law school. We were basically the “Breakfast Club,” minus the drugs and dancing. The only problem was, instead of self disclosure and growth, it was pretty much all out war of a sarcastic jerk, sexually harassing devil’s advocate, and an anti-social, intellectual bully against me. While the devil’s advocate sexually harassed me, the true bully relentlessly fed his ego by exposing my ignorance with a daily dose of humble pie.

The amount of crow that I was forced to eat left me feeling humiliated, hated, angry, resentful, frustrated, confused, and moved to tears. So, rather than remove myself from the situation, I shoved a little crow down their throats and did some bullying of my own. I should have gone to my Supervisor for help instead of enduring the abuse, but I was too afraid to get help. I thought I would lose my job. I got so beaten down and depressed, I almost could not get up and defend myself. Finally, I mustered up the courage to do something about it. The last day that I worked with them, after being insulted and humiliated in front of the group, I sat for a moment, picked up my things, and walked out of my office to see my supervisor. He immediately moved me to a new work area with a great group of people. I was left asking myself, “Why did I allow this to go on so long?” It was because of mother. I was used to it. I am finally learning that I do not have to stay in abusive situations and have the right to ask for what I need—even in the workplace. But, even better, I am finally learning tools—other than violence—for how to deal with these people when leaving is not an option.

UN-BIRTHDAYS AND UN-CHRISTMASES

*How very very un-
birthday To me, To
you
How very very un-
birthday For me, for
you.
-Lewis Carroll, Alice in
Wonderland*

Alice didn't know what an un-birthday was, but I do! My parents divorced when I was about seven years old. After their divorce, almost every holiday was dreadful. I call them un-birthdays and un-Christmases *not* because they were not on the proper date as in *Alice in Wonderland*, but because they were *not* celebrations to me. They were not fun, but rather, something I was forced to endure for mother's sake. It was all about her. Forget ever really getting to do what you wanted for your Birthday, because it wasn't going to happen. Even when she had the opportunity to celebrate my birthday with me with her husband, she found it necessary to shove a gun into my step-mother's stomach for not being invited to my birthday dinner with my Dad. To think, after she had cussed them out, threatened them, and threw bricks threw their windows, they don't invite you to dinner—the audacity!

*So this is
Christmas And
what have you
done?
Another year
over And other one
just begun...
-John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Christmas*

There were also un-Christmases. I remember two Christmases, among others, before the age of twelve that she ruined by throwing a fit until she made Kellie and I cry and beg our

father to buy her a pearl necklace and an exercise machine. Christmas was much more about her than any child—even baby Jesus. So much so, I began to dread Christmas. I knew that I would either be used as a pawn and made to cry to get what she wanted from my Dad or else she would be openly unhappy with whatever I bought for her. It was a no-win situation. Add to that her need to control the decision of where we spent Christmas Eve versus Christmas morning—with her usually managing to have both—and you have the perfect, miserable Christmas. Merry Christmas? I don't think so. Where is Jesus in all of this?

Christmas wasn't the only holiday she ruined. There was also Easter, Thanksgiving, Mother's Day, and her Birthdays. I was miserable every time her birthday or Mother's Day approached. It did not matter what you bought for her because she didn't like it. Your best bet was just to take her shopping and get her what she wanted or give the money to buy what she wanted for herself. Forget the homemade cards. Thanksgiving – count on eating at least two full meals just to please everyone and—Mother picks when we have Thanksgiving dinner with her first, ofcourse. Easter was not quite as bad. I wore my Sunday best and endured Baptist Church services with the “family” when none of us were Christians. But, alas, at least I was allowed to go hunt eggs with Dad afterwards.

A PAWN

I may be slow, but even so I know a thing or two

I've learned from you...

Love is like a flame, burns you when it's hot

Love hurts...

-Joan Jett and the Black Hearts

The most sickening thing my Mother did to us when we were young was to use us as pawns to get what she wanted from others—gifts and money. She used our “cuteness”, tears, her constant “illnesses” to extract what she wanted from others—money and gifts. She used our tears and suffering to extort money and gifts from my father. She also used our “cuteness” and a lonely old man’s need for a family to extract money from him. There was an old man named George Wilmont that kind of adopted us as his own family, since he had no children and his wife was very cold to him. While my Mother looked up to him in some ways as the Father that she never had, she also took full advantage of his loneliness for her gain. He gave her money frequently and she somehow manipulated him into buying school clothes for my Sister and I. Mr. Wilmont was a very kind, giving man, whom I loved very much. I felt sorry for him for what she was doing and very used and dirty because I was forced to participate in the swindle.

Without knowing it until I was about twelve, I was a Pawn in an insane game that she was playing against everyone. It was a Survivor game with elements of chess, a lot of bluffing, and secret rules known only to the Queen, whose objective was to win at all costs. While most people say it’s not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game, those were certainly not her rules. Forget anything you ever learned about good sportsmanship. It’s all about getting what you want, winning, and the schemes involved in getting there. Mother, the Queen, was the most powerful piece on the board and did whatever she pleased, replacing any unlucky piece that got in her way. Being the least powerful piece on the board, I was at a

severe disadvantage until I learned what the rules were. My goal was just to survive until I got old enough to escape. The problem was, by the time I reached that age, I wanted revenge. I had finally learned the rules of the game: Survivor: “Outplay, Outwit, Outlast.” Oh, and the best way to win that game is to form an alliance. I suppose that is when I unknowingly made a deal with the Devil to beat her at her own game.

Let the games begin! It was payback time. My objective was to see who could inflict the most pain in the shortest period of time. After all, her favorite saying was “Payback is a mother *@#*#@!” Good enough for me. The most important rule is that there are no rules. You can lie, steal, or cheat to get your way, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease”, make everyone around you as miserable as you are, destroy anyone who gets in your way, “don’t mess with the bull or you’ll get the horns”, intimidate everyone around you so that no one dares to challenge you, never let them see you’re bluffing, and when all else fails, act like a victim and play sick to make others feel sorry for you. The only problem with my approach was that I was rarely able to anticipate her next move because it was an insane game. So, I decided to drive her crazier than she already was. I think I did a pretty good job.

I picked the worst Anti-Social boyfriend I could find, started doing drugs, drinking, skipping school, disobeying everything she asked, drove my brand-new car through the edge of the surf at Jamaica Beach, filling it with salt water and trash can punch, and fled to my father’s house to live when she went nuts. While I thought I had beat her at her own game by driving her crazy and rarely spoke to her, until I was sixteen years old, I now realize that this is a game in which nobody wins. In chess, three ways of ending the game are: capturing the other team’s King, having a stalemate, or resigning. I thought I had resigned, you know—“GAME OVER.” Little did I know that in playing the game, I had become just like the Queen—which is another way to win *or lose*—depending on your perspective.

CRYING WOLF

*The little things you
haven't got Could be a
lot if you pretend
-Nat King Cole, Pretend.*

Mother also used her many illnesses to extort money and gifts from people by “crying wolf” incessantly. This made me want to vomit. My mother is the worst hypochondriac I have ever met, but there were times when she knew she was not ill and faked it to get.....money! I remember her telling my Father a sob story of how she had Leukemia in order for him to buy her something expensive that she just *had* to have. She had “cried wolf” so many times, I don’t believe a word she says. The worst part is—I believe that by now, she truly believes that she is sick. She had not admitted to the mental part yet. She has been to more than one hundred doctors, many whom have told her to go see a Psychiatrist. For some reason, she just won’t accept those referrals.

When I was about twelve years old, my mother attempted to commit suicide—I think. I cannot say whether she intended to go through with it, it was a cry for help, or just another pathetic attempt to get attention. Anyway, she used to always promise us various items of jewelry when she died and allowed us to pick our favorite pieces. One night, she went into my Sister’s room and put all of her rings on her fingers and I was awakened to a blood curdling scream of my fourteen year old sister, who found Mother lying on the dining room floor with pills scattered everywhere. My Sister was crying, trying to carry her to the bathroom and make her vomit the pills up. I wouldn’t help her and was resentful that Kellie did. I was irritated that I was even awakened by what I perceived as another pathetic attempt to get attention. She did not seem to have taken many pills, so I thought that she was faking it. For what purpose? God only knows. I just know that I lost all respect that I ever had for her that night. Kellie called 911

and I was raging inside, thinking “Why didn’t you just let her die?” The night my mother attempted to kill herself, I realized that my Hell was never going to end. Since she used to tell me that I ruined her life and she wished I had never been born, I decided to ruin her life and make her wish I had never been born. Instead of wondering why she was beating me, I gave her reasons to beat me—at least then it would make sense.

Aside from extortion, manipulation, and attention seeking, mother’s illnesses are almost always ploys to make people feel sorry for her so that she does not have to accept any accountability for her behavior. A few years ago, I set up a family counseling appointment with my Husband, Mother, Step-Father, and I. As issues began to emerge, she suddenly became unable to handle it and pulled out a ten year old medical report that was almost indecipherable, stating that she had cancerous tumors in her back and was dying. Everyone in the room—my therapist and Husband included—fell into piles of mush, feeling sorry for “all she had to deal with.” I sat there silent, laughing to myself for being enough of a moron to think I could bring her into therapy and something productive would happen! Right! I didn’t confront the issue because I knew I was never going to convince her that she was not dying. So, I just ended the session, said goodbye, and walked out into the parking lot laughing at the crap everyone had just fallen for. That’s Mother, alright. She can trick almost anyone. I say *almost* because I’m not falling for it. She’s been dying since I was born. You’d think she’d be dead by now.

DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL

*She spins and she
sways To whatever
song plays
Without a care in the
world And I'm sitting
here wearing
The weight of the world on my
shoulders...*

*-Steven Curtis Chapman,
Cinderella*

I have probably always been “Daddy’s little girl,” but I certainly cemented that decision by the time I was fourteen and moved back in with my Father and Step-Mother, Theresa. It was a welcome change from the insanity that I endured with my mother. My father is the most wonderful man I have ever known. He is smart, kind, loving, and has spent much of his life sacrificing his desires for us. His top priority has always been building a future for our family, for which I will always be grateful. Dad worked several jobs while going to law school—which made him frequently, but necessarily absent.

But, when he had the time, he found a way of putting silver linings in dark clouds by making the time we had together special. Maybe it was special because it was infrequent, but it was also special because he was good. In my eyes, Dad has always hung the moon. When we were toddlers, he built a playhouse for us made of cardboard boxes with windows and a door. I have seen filmstrips of Dad watering the yard while my sister and I played in a baby pool, rode bikes, played on a slip and slide, and slid down a hill of snow on an inner tube.

After my parents’ divorce, we lived with Dad for about a year. He was kind enough to sacrifice the only bed we had to my sister and I, but frequently, he worked all day and did not return home until late at night, after Kellie and I had gone to bed. I remember helping my Sister

make sandwiches with smiley faces on them, leaving them by the front door of our apartment for when he came home. After school, we spent our days pretending to smoke by rolling up paper and blowing baby powder over the fence, climbing through manholes, rolling in the clothes dryers, playing in the bayou, and skipping school to make chocolate chip cookies. Kellie and I were pretty much on our own. While we were neglected in some respects, I was never unhappy living with my Father. To the contrary, I was always the happiest when I was with my Dad. But, we did not live with my Father long because my Mother insisted that we go live with her.

After moving in with my Mother, my father and Theresa picked us up on weekends and during the summertime for a lot of special, meaningful activities. We had such great times with Dad and Theresa. We saw musicals, skated through empty parking garages, slid down grassy hills in downtown Houston, ate empanadas, and swam while dad lied in the sun. The only negative thing I remember was Dad being frequently emotionally unavailable. I suspect that he was trying to escape the stress of his own life, so he was frequently in his own world. This made me feel a lonely, but I loved him so much that I just accepted that he could not always be present.

All in all, my father has been the single, most positive influence in my life. He has taught me some of the most important lessons in my life: courage, perseverance, integrity, giving, and that you should following you dreams, instead of money. I remember Dad saying that if I picked a career solely based on money and did not like it, I would not excel, but if I chose what I loved to do, the money would follow. Although I did not exactly follow this instruction, I believe that my choices were part of the inevitable path that I was supposed to take.

The most significant lesson was courage—to never give up despite the failures I would encounter in life. This lesson has undoubtedly saved my life because it caused me to keep getting up when alcohol and drugs kept knocking me down. Between the 6th and 9th grade, I tried out for cheerleader four years in a row. Every year, I would lose by just a hair – eight votes, first alternate. After crying my eyes out for days, I would quickly resolve to try again next year. I would say, “Dad, put me in gymnastics. I am going to learn to do a flip-flop and I’ll win next year.” It broke his heart to see me lose year after year and made him sick to hear of my plans for “next year.” But, it also made him proud. I have a vivid memory of walking down the street with my Father one day when I was about sixteen years old, crying over a recent defeat, when he said something profound. He told me that he was more proud of me for losing than winning. He said, “Though it hurts to see you cry after losing something so important to you, it takes true courage to get up over and over again with the determination to win, knowing how painful it is to lose.” He said, “If you don’t try, you will never win. You can only win by being willing to accept defeat.” This message has been the central theme of my life and has helped me overcome much adversity. It has made me an overcomer because I know that regardless of how many times I lose, I will win if I keep trying—or, at least I have a shot at winning. And, the pain of losing doesn’t hurt for too long.

While he certainly has had his own demons to battle, he has always been the most dependable person in my life. He is supportive, loving, kind, and generous—even to a fault. He guided, encouraged, loved, and supported me until I was twenty-eight years old. He “bailed me out” of mistakes and jail, but he also paid thousands of dollars to send me to the Betty Ford Center and for counseling to get me the help that I needed to recover from Alcoholism. He supported me financially and paid for me to complete my undergraduate and law school education. His kindness has even extended to my children—putting money in

accounts to pay for their college tuition. His only true fault was failing to discipline me, but I was so full of rage, anger, and rebellion by the time I moved back in with him, there was little he could have done to stop me. I suspect He did not know what I was doing. I really despised the fact that I was always so dishonest with him. I was just determined to do what I wanted to do by that time and I had to lie to do it.

LITTLE ORPHAN CANDY

*Maybe far
away Or maybe
real nearby
He may be pouring her
coffee She may be
straightening his tie...
Betcha they're
young, Betcha
they're smart Bet
they collect things
like ashtrays and
art...
-Maybe, Annie*

When I was eleven years old, my father took me to see the musical, “Annie.” Every song in the musical so touched me. My father bought the album for me and I sang the songs from my bedroom so many times, my Dad was sick. He asked when I planned to stop singing “Tomorrow”, “Hard Knocked Life,” and “Maybe.” I didn’t want to because I loved them. What I didn’t know until now is that they touched me because, like Annie, I felt like an Orphan. I dreamed of having a “normal” family, so I began to reject my own. Now, I almost laugh at the idea of a “normal” family, wondering if that is just a fantasy too. It’s a pretty relative term! The lyrics of “Maybe” particularly touched me because the words described my Father. He drank coffee, wore ties, paid the bills, collected ashtrays and art, and was nearby.

After moving in with my father and Theresa, things would probably have become normal had my Mother stopped terrorizing us and I not become so threatened by Theresa. Theresa is a wonderfully sweet woman who I wish I had learned to trust and become close to. I remember so many wonderful conversations between Theresa and I. Sometimes, we would talk for hours upon hours and I treasured those conversations because it made me truly see that Theresa loved me and was interested in simply knowing me. I am quite certain that if

Theresa and I were simply allowed to form a relationship without the constant lies, interference and terrorism of my mother, I would have ultimately come to rely upon her as a friend and a mother. I'm sure my mother sensed this because she immediately went to work on sabotaging my relationship with Theresa. I don't know why I ever doubted Theresa and gave a second thought to my mother's lies and manipulation. I guess it was because I still did not truly trust anyone. Doubt, fear and insecurity slowly replaced the loving bond that could have changed so much in my life. My mother constantly told me that Theresa did not love me and wanted me gone so that she could have a separate family with my father. This was very threatening and made me guarded, never really knowing if I could trust Theresa. I became increasingly more confused and mistrustful, which caused me to pull away instead of following my heart. So, I would swing from wanting to get close to her to pushing her away.

There were a myriad of other issues swirling together in chaos at once in our family which came together in the "perfect storm," but I am quite certain that had my mother not been around, we would have managed fine. My mother was so full of jealousy and envy of Theresa's youth, beauty, and status as the "new and improved" "Mrs. Leonard," it literally ate her alive. After utterly failing at creating a happy home for us with my father, there was no way my mother was going to allow Theresa to "beat her." My mother terrorized Theresa for more than a decade and spread her misery around by manipulation, violence, drama, hysteria, hatred, and constant interference. Her narcissism left her unable to see or care about anyone's needs than her own. Like a child with a toothache, my mother was fixated for at least a decade on her "entitlement" to my dad's money, for all she suffered to "put him through law school," which is far from accurate. My father gave in to her for awhile—unable to watch us cry as my mother manipulated our tears to make him give her money. But nothing was ever enough to satisfy her because she wanted more. Everyone had to pay for Mother's misery. I finally became overwhelmed with my

living nightmare and gave up. I felt that my deep emotional needs were never going to be met, so I gave up on the idea of having a “family” with Dad too. I said “to heck with this whole family thing. I’ll find a family of my own.” With every successive trauma, disappointment, or hurt, I cemented my decision to disown them further and became a “self proclaimed orphan”. The bible says that *“Hope deferred makes the heart sick.”* Proverbs 29:5. I suppose I was heartsick by the time I was fifteen and decided that my needs were never going to be met. So, I gave up trying and my friends became my family. My parents did not abandon me. I abandoned them. I had waited so long for love and attention, only to be thwarted again. So, I became Little Orphan Candy.

After emotionally detaching from my Father, I was physically present, but not emotionally. I continued to act out and got worse and worse. Though I loved my father deeply, I was in complete and utter rebellion by then and could not stop. I was so angry that I lied, disobeyed Him, ignored his advice, snuck out of the house, got drunk, took drugs, and got into increasingly worse predicaments. My step-mother truly tried to be a positive influence in my life and was the only true source of discipline that existed. How I wish I could have obeyed! By that time, I was not going to submit to any form of discipline by anyone, period. I learned later in my life that Theresa was the sweet, loving person who I believed she was in my heart before my mother poisoned my ability to fully trust and sabotaged our relationship. She was the kind friend and mother that was present during all of those wonderful conversations that we had. Theresa was a victim too and told me that she would have left my Father earlier were it not for her concern for Kellie and I. A fourteen-year relationship with a mother that could have helped me—sabotaged by “Mother.”

DRAMA QUEEN

Popular!

*You're gonna be
popular! I'll teach you
the proper ploys
How to talk to boys
Little ways to flirt and
flounce... I'll show you
what shoes to wear How
to fix your hair
Everything that really
counts...*

-Kristin Chenoweth, Wicked

After detaching from my parents, I sought to have my emotional needs met by my friends. But they were so deep that I had to be the center of attention—the best at everything and one of the most popular girls in town to feel accepted and loved. I enjoyed being the center of attention and was very popular in middle school and high school. Why does it feel so good to be noticed by everyone? Maybe it's because I felt invisible as a child. But, looking back, I know it was equally, if not, more important to my Mother that I be popular. So, I had two motives for jumping through hoops, my Mother's needs and my own. So, as soon as I found an outlet to be a “star”, I threw myself into it. My first endeavor was drama. I remember wanting the roll of Helen Keller in eighth grade so bad – I had to have the lead, nothing less. I didn't get it, but I did get the lead in another less known play. Still, it wasn't enough.

I had to be the best—not just a member of anything, but the leader. I wanted to be a cheerleader, drill team officer, Student Council President, homecoming princess, class favorite—you name it. I actually managed to accomplish some of these goals, but ended up shooting myself in the foot in the end. I was President of Student Council for a day, until I got kicked off for changing votes in the general election. Because my mother and sister were

cheerleaders, I HAD to be a cheerleader. I got within arms' length of being a cheerleader four years in a row, but would miss it by a hair every year and feel like a horrible failure. I was a member of the drill team, but ultimately, got kicked off of for being drunk at a game. Determined to be a member of the drill team again, I auditioned and was selected again. But, I ended up quitting because I couldn't be an officer. I was nominated for homecoming princess and class favorite as one of three girls, but never could quite clinch the title. But, I was voted Most flirtatious—finally, a victory that fits! I had to have the best and be the best—at everything! If the sky's the limit, then I'm going to have the sky!

I was the quintessential drama queen – stuck on myself! But, I hid it well. You see, you can't be popular if everyone thinks you're full of yourself. So, I mastered the art of pretense to make everyone like me and became... popular! I didn't care who I was, as long as I was "popular." So, I just mirrored what it took to be popular and achieved my goal. Though I was certainly popular, I was not always popular in the ways I wanted to be. Rather than famous, you could say I was infamous! Most people knew about all of the trouble I was constantly in and began to distance themselves from me. The nominations stopped and I knew why. Looking back, I realize that being the best at everything and the most popular is a lust that never gets fed because you're never enough in your own eyes. Your true identity is not in the mirror or in the minds of people that love you. It can only be found in God, so I had little idea who I really was even when I thought I was "all that!"

A TORNADO

*The phone rings in the middle of the
night,
My father yells "What you gonna do with
your life?" Oh, daddy, dear,
You know you're still
number one,
But girls, they wanna have
fun...
-Cyndi Lauper, Girls just Wanna
Have Fun*

After living with a tornado for so long, I unknowingly became the tornado when I hit fourteen. I started drinking and stopped listening to a word anyone said. I was a living nightmare during my teenage years. My first experience with alcohol was a disaster—and almost every one after that. A friend of mine and I went to a church dance at St. Mary's Catholic Church and decided to fill our thermoses with rum, amaretto, and vodka. She drank more of the hard stuff than I. I drank the amaretto and to this day, the smell of amaretto makes me want to vomit. It certainly wasn't the good time that we planned. It wasn't even an hour before my partner in crime was falling all over the place and taken away by the police for her parents to retrieve her. Lucky for me, my sister showed up with some guys in a van to whisk me away before I was taken to jail too. Ofcourse, my friend's parents didn't want her hanging out with me anymore!

Shortly after that, I began smoking marijuana. I did not really care for it, so I smoked it only occasionally. My neighbor played the drums and was always jamming with a friend. One day while my sister was at cheerleading camp, I was "home alone," so I walked next door and asked my neighbor if I could jam with them. I had taken piano lessons for a short period of time and knew how to play "Stairway to Heaven." That was good enough, so I was in. We smoked

some pot and then began playing “Stairway to Heaven” like nobody’s business! I felt like I was actually in Heaven and could almost hear Robert Plant singing! While my sister was at camp, I also took her car for joy rides around the neighborhood. Since I did not know how to drive a stick-shift, I called an older guy in the neighborhood and learned how. I was pretty good at getting what I wanted by then.

While I did not like pot very much, I loved alcohol, ecstasy, and poppers! I first took ecstasy when I was fifteen years old. There were always a few drug dealers hanging around to sell you ecstasy so that we could dance the night away at all night dance clubs, while our parents thought we were spending the night at friends’ homes. The only problem with Ecstasy is that it is usually laced with all kinds of things, including acid. Acid trips are not fun! Want to experience the most frightening night of your life? Drop some acid and see what happens. I took acid the night of our Project Graduation because it seemed like fun. I thought I was going to vomit as they served me “breathing” eggs for breakfast and I had to sit on the railroad tracks for several hours with my friend, Mike, before I was able to go home without scaring my family. Poppers were always fun, though. My sister and I bought a drink carbonater for my Dad’s birthday. The real purpose of that gift was so that we could borrow it and pop laughing gas cartridges with our friends. Nitrous oxide was wonderful! You would almost fall into a trance, sing and laugh, and then sort of come out of it with everything blurred and hilarious.

During my teenage years, I regularly snuck out of the house by climbing down the wall of my second story bedroom to meet friends and get wasted. One night, a small group of friends and I broke into our school and had fire extinguisher fights. On my sixteenth birthday, five of my friends and I broke into a vacant house to drink beer and celebrate. We were not there even five minutes until police surrounded the house. Everyone ran out of the front door while they guys scaled the fence. Never having been a fast runner, I decided to hide under a

neighbor's car. I could see the officer's feet about three feet from where I was lying, but stayed ever so still as I heard him yell, "Stop or I'll shoot." They stopped and everyone got arrested but me. I guess I was pretty good at hiding by then. After I heard all of the voices fade into the background, I got up and started walking towards home. Then, I had the brilliant idea to call my friend's older brother while she sat in jail. They picked me up and we smoked some pot before they dropped me at my house and went to pick her up from jail.

You would have thought that these experiences would have slowed me down—no such luck. Most of my weekends during high school consisted of getting drunk in my friend's garage, partying on vacant streets, or sneaking into the boat marina to get wasted. On special occasions, like prom, we would pool money and rent limousines or beach houses, and get drunk, take drugs, and have blowouts. Strangely, most of my friends recall getting drunk and/or vomiting at my house. We usually drank the nastiest liquors, like amaretto, triple sec, or banana liquor to avoid my Father knowing what we were up to. I hated having to water down the things he liked to avoid discovery, but I did that too. We had some good times in Humble!

A DOUBLE MINDED DOVE

*Yes, there are two paths you
can go by But in the long run
There's still time to change the road you're on.
-Stairway to Heaven, Led Zeppelin.*

For most of my life, I have acted like a dove. While doves are beautiful and have great spiritual significance for deliverance, they are also known for vacillation—going back and forth as if disoriented, in regards to one's destiny. I did this for thirty-seven years. While I was saved at the age of seventeen and part of me wanted to serve God with all of my heart, the other part of me wanted to go my own way and continuing doing the things that I wanted to do, instead of what I knew I was supposed to do. While I did not want to wander too far away from God, I also did not want to surrender. I wanted a Savior, but was not ready for a Lord, so I decided to straddle the fence—for 20 years. This was not a good decision.

I have always known that Jesus was good. As a young child, I remember seeing paintings of Jesus on the walls of different churches, surrounded my children, thinking, “He must be really nice.” I really wanted to know him. I know that he wanted to know me too. My first real encounter with “the church” was when I was fourteen—right about the time I started drinking. I went on a ski trip with a friend's Southern Baptist Church group to Vail, Colorado. I was primarily interested in skiing and boys, but also curious about Jesus. While I enjoyed the trip, the nightly bible meetings became a bit cumbersome, so on the last night, I tried to play hooky and got caught. I remember the Pastor calling my room and telling me to get my butt down to the meeting. At the meeting; however, I experienced awful grief and pain. At the end of the service, the Pastor had those who “knew” they were saved hold hands and sing a song that I didn't know. He told those who were not saved to go to the back of the room and said if you don't know, “sit down.” I was horrified, frightened, confused and humiliated. So, I left the

room, screaming and crying, wanting nothing to do with the church for a long time.

It was not until I was 17 years' old that I again drew near to God. I was working at Revco Pharmacy for a Pharmacist named Walter Bartek. Mr. Bartek was so kind and treated every customer that came in as though they were his very own 90-year old grandmother. Also, many times when customers would come in, he would scribble something on a piece of paper and tell the person that "God told me to give this to you." Watching the way that he operated with others ultimately got my curiosity and I asked him how do I get saved. He asked if I wanted to be saved and I said yes. So, we knelt down in the back of the pharmacy and prayed together, asking Jesus to come into my heart and be my Lord and Savior. But, almost as soon as I left the pharmacy, the warm feelings left and I began to doubt. Like a horse running back to the barn, I ran back to my life of drugs, alcohol, and men. Nothing changed.

Throughout the years, many people have come in His name and tried to reach me. I ran the aisles of so many churches to receive Christ that I lost count. I call my walk with Him "20 times of Salvation" in no joking sense, but rather, to explain the intense longing in my heart to serve Him and the intense pull right back into my world of alcohol and drugs. What little religious training I had as a child was Baptist, I was told that all you needed to do was say the "saved prayer", accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and you were saved. I certainly wanted a Savior, just not a Lord. No one told me that you had to change—repent of your former life. So, I ran the aisles to the alter calls over and over again to say "the prayer" and left unchanged. My heart was still the same.

Once I realized that serving him meant giving up the life I had, I found myself unable to do it, so whenever Christians appeared in my life, I ran. In 1990, my mother scheduled to have me baptized with her, her husband and my sister. It was an awful day for me because I knew that I understood the changes that would be required of me and I knew I was not ready. I felt it

was an awful affront to the Cross to be getting baptized when I wasn't ready to change. I cried all day, but she forced me to. I wanted to know God, I just was not ready. I remember my sister saying, "Stop crying. Just do it." Funny how she works at Nike now! Just Do It! I just could not take that attitude towards something that was so sacred to me. I felt that I was committing an awful sin. I just couldn't say no to my mother.

I did not come back to Christ for nine years and I was twenty-eight—when I was broken and wanted to die. I stayed close to Him for two years before I became very broken and turned my back on Him again. After turning my back on Him, I came back and left more times than I can count. I never wanted to stray to far away, but I just could not bring myself to trust Him and surrender until I was thirty-seven years old and feared that if I did not get my act together soon, I was going to die.

AN ALCOHOLIC AND ADDICT

*All I wanna do is have some
fun I've got a feeling I'm not the
only one...*
*-Sheryl Crow, All I wanna do is have
some fun.*

It all started out just wanting to have a good time, but I was probably an Alcoholic by the time I was 17. I was always on the run, living in extremes, with alcohol and drugs. And all of my boyfriends were bad news! So much so, the Principal once called my dad in reference to a boy that I was dating and said “Ger her away from Him.” No such luck! They couldn’t have pried me away from him with a crow bar. In the end, they were all right. He ended up going to prison and committed suicide about five years ago.

I was first arrested in 1988 when I was seventeen years old for public intoxication. By the time I entered college, I was definitely an Alcoholic. I drank every weekend and frequently, during the week as well. I never went to any social gathering without alcohol. Usually, I got a good buzz going before I ever even left the house so that I felt nice and comfortable by the time I arrived at my destination. That was not the best idea because it made me so inebriated by the end of the night that I was frequently passing out. I was living in Austin at the time, attending the University of Texas, and was arrested once for public intoxication in 1990 and for Driving While Intoxicated in 1992. I received a second charge for Driving While Intoxicated in 1997 and was arrested twice more for Public Intoxication after that. Despite the alcohol-related arrests, I continued drinking. I just could not seem to learn my lesson—maybe because I did not want to.

I frequently used alcohol to make myself feel comfortable enough in my own skin to go out on the town and meet boys. I was very flirtatious when I drank, but I wasn’t looking for sex. I was looking for love. I didn’t know the difference between the two, so I was “looking for love

in all the wrong places”. In return for what I perceived to be love, I occasionally got drunk and had sex with men who had no interest in long term relationships. I kept thinking that I could make a man love me by being sexually intimate. It was a lie that damaged my ability to trust further because there was always a man more than willing to accept my “love.” During these drunken episodes, I was taken advantage of over and over by men. To mask the pain and shame that these episodes carried with them, I drank more and more. I did not stop drinking until I had to—at the command of the State Bar of Texas in connection with getting my law license. I walked the line and stayed sober for two years and started drinking again when tragedy struck my life. I spent the next seven years trying to regain my sobriety. While I had intermittent periods of sobriety, I always went back to drinking. During those years, I paid such a price. My husband paid such a price. Everyone suffered. I reached a point of hopelessness indescribable. But, something in me kept fighting, realizing all the while that the odds were no longer in my favor.

THE TOILET

I've got it all, but I feel so deprived.

*I go up, I come down,
and I'm emptier inside.*

*Tell me what is this
thing that I feel like
I'm missing and why
can't I let it go?*

*There's gotta be more
to life
than chasing down every temporary high
to satisfy me...*

-More to Life, Stacie Orrico

I once had a dream that I now believe was a warning from the Lord. I was a turtle, swimming in a toilet bowl that was going round and round powerfully and no matter how hard I tried, I could not get out. I saw a chest of drawers, with one open, and knew that if I could reach those chest of drawers, I could escape. But, my legs were too short and so I just kept on spinning and spinning in the toilet bowl. I could not get out, no matter how hard I tried. But I kept swimming as hard as I could and I would not stop. I now see that like the turtle, I'm the one who created the shell. I created it to protect myself, but the shell was the very thing that was preventing me from escaping the toilet. The shell kept everyone out—including Christ—and He was the only one with the power to set me free. I think the shortness of my legs represented my inability to extricate myself from the whirlpool of my addiction and the dysfunction that I had to live with as a child. I also find it strange that the very thing I was trapped in—the toilet—was in “the bathroom.” I believe that the open drawer represented my inability to save myself because I just could not reach it, regardless of how hard I tried. So, I stopped trying. I failed to heed this warning and just went further into my addiction. I really did not care anymore and could not let go of the partying. I was off to law school.

DUMB BLONDE

*Is that my name up on that
list? Does someone know
that I exist?...*
*Yes that's my name in black and
white*
*Maybe I'm doing something
right WOW! I feel so much
better*
Than before!
-So Much Better, Legally Blonde

I always loved playing the “dumb blonde” act, while kicking everyone’s rear academically. I was very smart, but did not want for people to know it, thinking that I would be thought of as a “nerd.” So, I played the “dumb blonde” well into law school. While I had considered being a therapist or doctor, I ultimately chose law school so that I could continue to party and make lots of money! Because I never felt pretty, I thought that the only way I would find a man willing to marry me was to be successful and wanted to marry the man that I fell in love with regardless of how much money he made. I respected strong men, but was also threatened by them because they had the power to abandon me. Seeing my Mother manipulate everyone for so many years for money also made me want to have my own money. Then, I could live the life I wanted to live and never be left “holding the bag.” So, I decided to go to law school and become a rich lawyer like my Father. Funny how the rich part never materialized!

I had no interest in becoming a traditional woman—way too vulnerable! So, I rejected my femininity in favor of the more appealing male world. But, again, I had to be the best. I had to be a member of the Law Review, Varsity Moot Court team, and work for the prestigious Court of Appeals. So, I took diet pills, studied until 9:00 p.m., drank until 2:00 a.m., and started

the insanity all over again at 10:00 a.m. the next day to reach my goals. I did nothing but study, smoke, drink, and take diet pills for a year. Bingo! I came in first place in Torts, Contracts, Legal Research and Writing and Property law. Yes, my name was on those lists! Everyone knew I existed! They also knew I was drinking like a fish and doing a little cocaine on the side. I was the most hated girl in law school—and I loved it! It felt even better to know that I accomplished these things drunk while the rest of the World had to work for it! How sick is that?

I was an Assistant Editor of the Law Review, Brief Writer for the Varsity Moot Court Team, Research and Writing Assistant to a prominent professor, and worked for the Court of Appeals, all while doing drugs and running myself into the ground. I temporarily crashed, ending in rehab, but returned to my addiction as soon as I was released. Upon returning, my Case Note was selected for publication, I was being considered for Note & Comment Editor of Law Review, and spent an entire semester pouring my heart into a brief for the Varsity Moot Court team. Suddenly, my Moot Court team members stole my brief, spread lies around campus that it was horrible and had overruled law in it, I lost my bid for Note & Comment Editor, a \$5000 scholarship, and the Case Note that was originally deemed brilliant suddenly became questionable. I was so angry and resentful, I decided that I no longer cared about any of it and fled completely from reality. I hated the World and no longer wanted any part of it. So, I embraced alcoholism, cocaine, and the craziest life I could find—but still somehow managed to graduate *Cum Laude*. Being smart has always been a blessing and a curse for me!

XANADU

*A place where nobody
dared to go The love that
we came to know They call
it Xanadu
And now*

*Open your eyes and
see What we have
made is real We are
in Xanadu...*

-Xanadu, Olivia Newton-John

A place where nobody dared to go? Perfect—just what I’m looking for! As I sat on a barstool one day at Ninfa’s Cantina drinking my troubles away, a dark stranger walked through the door, waiting to take me to Xanadu. His name was Rudy and I took the bait, hook, line and sinker. It was like jumping on the back of a motorcycle with my hair blowing in the wind to an unknown destination with a devil may care attitude. Little did I know where I was headed. Maybe the lights, disco ball, and dancing blinded me. I just loved being in a place where I felt suspended in time and there were no rules, just “strange magic” and a “trance like” existence that was more exciting than anything I had ever experienced. I found Xanadu!

Xanadu is a mythical land of eternal peace, abundance, and bliss—utopia on Earth! It’s a place of sinful indulgence where you can bask in the ultimate ecstasy of lust and have whatever you want, pushing life to its limits. Xanadu is a place of disconnect from the real world, where you throw caution to the wind. Whatever you desire is at your fingertips—cocaine, alcohol, and men. You can dance all night as if there’s no tomorrow, feel alive as if the World is your oyster, and never have to grow up. Xanadu is such an extremely indulgent place, you are willing to take all of your chances for just one more night. If you stay there long enough, you will want to stay there forever. Xanadu was like living in an underworld where

there were no rules, no laws. We went to clubs that I didn't know existed with a huge crowd of people who were not even legally in this country. I danced all night in ecstasy as strange men gawked at my blonde hair and little black dress at bars that I should have had a gun to go.

There was only one problem. Xanadu was not a good place. It is part of the Enemy's Territory and I forgot to heed the warning: "I'm never going to set you free because I was born to love you for eternity." I didn't listen to God tell me that if I wanted to escape that I better get my butt on the very next train out of there. Anyone feeling cold? No one there to hold? You've been had. You see, Xanadu is where the Vampires live. When the light of day arose, Xanadu was gone and I had become a creature of the night.

In the passion that I felt for Rudy, I thought that I had finally found love. Despite the horror that my parents felt when they discovered that I was dating him, I could not let him go.

As impractical as a life with Rudy was, I just could not stop fantasizing about him—until I discovered that he was nothing but a cheater, liar, and user. Rudy was the Vampire who bewitched me. I'm still not sure if he was real. I thought I had found Paradise, but all I found was sex, lies, infidelity, and abuse. Sin feels really good for awhile, but usually ends in misery. Such was my lot. One night, I got really drunk and as I was coming out of a black out, I realized that I had been raped by three men who were supposedly my "friends." "Oh well, I thought, I suppose I shouldn't have gotten so drunk." That was that. I moved on. Shortly afterwards, I broke up with Rudy, graduated from law school, and got sober. After nine months' of sobriety, I no longer had any desire to drink, but I also no longer had any desire to live. I was so lonely, I cried out to God, "Either send me a Christian husband who REALLY KNOWS YOU or take me home."

A FAMILY OF MY OWN?

*I Close my eyes, only for a moment,
And the moment's gone,
All my dreams, pass before my eyes, a curiosity,
Dust in the wind,
All they are is Dust in the Wind...
-Dust in the Wind, Kansas*

Very soon after I prayed to God for a Christian husband, I met Rick. On our first date, he showed up with a spiritual book and a *Jars of Clay* CD. I didn't think he was the one, but he was the only man to ever care about me spiritually. I was searching for God and he was willing to go to church with me, so I thought that we would just be friends and go to church together. Rick prayed with me so many days when I was hurting. He has often told me that he has never seen anyone cry as much as I did. I did not know this, but he was testing me too to see if I was "the real thing." I was certainly trying to be, but I did not know how. While I was not initially interested in a romantic relationship with Rick, one day, I got a half second glimpse of Jesus in Him. I saw a love and kindness that I had never known. Immediately, I knew Rick was "the one." From that point on, I could not let him go. I knew that if I were ever going to have a family, it would be with Rick. I was also very curious about the things of God and knew that Rick lived in a different world than I did, so, I said, "Okay God, show me everything. I want it all."

Immediately, God began performing amazing healing miracles in my life. I was told by doctors that I had an 80% chance I'd never have children because I had lost one fallopian tube and they believed that the other tube was probably blocked too. One day, I went to church with Rick and these ladies were praying for Rick. I was out of there. I walked to the sidewalk and began smoking a cigarette—Until I heard "You better get back in there right now or you're

going to regret this day the rest of your life.” So, against everything in me, I went in and let them pray for me. I began to experience something supernatural. I felt wind, heat, and suction around my abdomen like a vacuum cleaner for about 10 minutes. It was so overwhelming, I could not speak—only cry and cry. I have never so completely had my breath taken away from me. I was amazed, I just did not have words to describe what was happening to me because I didn’t really know myself. But, after the wind and heat stopped and I could speak again, we left. As we walked out of the Church, I told Rick, “I think I was healed.”

Within one month, I was pregnant. So, we decided to get married. My dreams were finally coming true—until six months into my pregnancy when Zachary was born weighing only one pound and critically ill. The doctors said that there was an 80% chance he’d die, be blind, or have cerebral palsy. My heart was broken for him. I had so many feelings—pain, grief, fear, and the quiet solitude of a broken hearted girl, wondering if her dreams were ever really going to come to pass. But mostly, just speechlessness because there were not words to describe the pain that I felt. I suppose I thought that after all of this, I had been tricked and my dreams were not going to come to pass.

The first six weeks were so painful, it was unbearable. Zachary had to have heart surgery to close a blood vessel in his chest 11 days after he was born. I feared that he might not survive the surgery, but he did. It took Zachary six weeks to gain one pound, but little by little, Zachary began to recover and we witnessed amazing miracles in the Intensive Care Unit. When he was six weeks old, we took his cap to our church and Pastor Walter Hallam held it up at the alter and the entire church prayed over Zachary’s little cap for him to grow. We went to the hospital that night and placed the cap on Zachary’s head. To our amazement and great joy, the next day his head had grown so much, the doctors mistakenly thought that he had water on his brain. During the next week, he gained another pound to reach three pounds. To our great

distress, Zachary had retinopathy of prematurity and had to have laser eye surgery at two months of age. He made it through the surgery, but his vision was badly damaged and the doctor had to burn away Zachary's peripheral vision. This has caused me an incredible amount of grief for Zachary's sake. I love that child with all of my heart and want everything in his life to be perfect.

After Zachary's eye surgery, everything seemed to progress well until the doctors noticed that he had a swallowing problem and wanted to perform surgery to close his esophagus and put a g-tube in. I just could not let them do this to Zachary, so I refused the surgery, in faith. They yelled at me, stating that I was being negligent, pointing to a shadow on an x-ray that they claimed was pneumonia from milk being aspirated into his lungs. We prayed hard and two days later, were shown a clean x-ray. The doctor said that the first x-ray must have been defective because there was no way a pneumonia could clear that quickly. I knew God was healing him. He came home from the ICU after four months on oxygen, a heart monitor, and feeding tubes. He slept in a crib at a 45 degree angle due to reflux.

Despite the fact that my heart was breaking this entire year, I never allowed myself to feel or say anything negative about the situation. We spoke words of faith and prayed over him because his very life and health depended on it. After a year of caring for precious little Zachary with all of my heart, stuffing my feelings, refusing to let myself cry, and having to revive him from a near death experience, I collapsed, unable to cope, told God "If this is what being a Christian brings with it, forget this Christianity thing" and turned my back and started drinking again. I fell to pieces, developed mono, slept 20 hours per day, and became drunk all over again. I never learned to cope with life without it and the pain that I was in literally made me feel disabled—unable to deal with the simplest of tasks. Once I anesthetized my brain, I found that I could suddenly deal with the issues in my life.

I spent the next seven years trying to get sober. Even though my life was improving and I had another child, Joshua, I just could not stop drinking completely. I certainly stayed sober during my pregnancies, but after each pregnancy ended, I would return to drinking. I had four to six month periods of time during this seven year period in which I stayed sober, but would always return to liquor. For some reason, I was unable to let go of it. I went through deliverance, counseling, Theophostics, Alcoholics Anonymous, and had so many people pray for and over me, yet nothing helped me to regain the freedom that I had during the two years that I was sober. I could not let go of the pain and trauma that I felt when Zachary was born premature and kept drinking to mask the pain. My heart was truly broken, so I kept drowning it in liquor. For a time, I was so weak, I gave up trying to stop and just hoped to survive, one day at a time.

RUNNING BACK TO THE CEMETERY

*Desperado, why don't you come to
your senses?*

*You been out ridin' fences for so
long now Oh, you're a hard one
But I know that you got your reasons*

*These things that are
pleasin' you Can hurt you
somehow...*

-The Eagles, Desperado

When I turned my back on God and went back to drinking, God showed me through a dream that I was just running back towards the cemetery—death. In my dream, I was at the most beautiful cemetery on a perfect day, waiting for someone's funeral, wondering who it was. Little did I know it was mine. The funeral for the “old man” that was dead when I accepted Christ and was “born again” as a new creature in Christ. As I sat in my chair, I was getting so impatient, wondering “when is this funeral going to happen?” I'm sure God was saying the same thing! I didn't realize that I was the one keeping it from happening.

Suddenly, the undertaker pulled up in a hearse with an empty casket in the back and asked if I wanted to “go for a ride.” I said “sure, let's do it.” Off we were, laughing and having fun. Until, he glanced at me and it was Satan himself. The most horrific looking person I'd ever seen. Terror filled me. He said, “You're trapped and I am going to embalm you alive with alcohol” and laughed. I was terrified as he hit the power locks. But, I had to get out. I reached for the door and was surprised to see it open. He lied. I could escape all along. I ran and ran and ran, so fast, I couldn't stop to think logically. There were so many “right” turns I could have made, but I just kept running as fast as I could to the cemetery—which kept him right on my tail. Then I woke up, horrified, but glad it was only a dream. Or was it?

After the dream, God showed me that the casket in the back had the dead body of my “old man” in it and I was the one refusing to bury it. Although I accepted Christ at the age of seventeen and became a “new creation”, I was still carrying around the “old man” the existed before I received Christ. This was another warning from God that I was living a double life and needed to bury the “old man.” I just could not do it.

YOU'RE NUMBER'S UP!

*Last thing I remember,
I was Running for the
door*

*I had to find the passage
back To the place I was
before relax, said the
night man,*

*We are programmed to
receive. You can checkout
any time you like, But you
can never leave!*

*-Hotel California, The
Eagles*

Not long after the last horrifying dream, I had a dream that I was in a theatre, waiting for a show to start. My father, mother, sister and I were there. As we waited for the show to begin, we eagerly awaited the entertainment we could see. I had no idea what the show would be about until it started and oh, what a horrible show it was. First, all of the exits were sealed—doors made of iron bars slammed to the ground. Then, a bull appeared in the front of the amphitheatre and began circling the crowd to keep them at bay. Silence spread across the room. Suddenly, the master magician, Satan, appeared on the stage. It reminded me of a time when I sat in a crowd as a hypnotist began selecting people to bring to the stage by calling numbers. I had a premonition that this show was not going to be good as evil filled the room and I felt trapped. I was looking for a way out and saw a window very high up in the amphitheatre. I felt that if I could reach that window before Satan's cohorts saw me climb up to it, I could escape, so I began running towards the window in fear. As I climbed up to the window and was almost free, I suddenly thought about my sister and just couldn't leave her there to suffer the horrible fate that I knew awaited her, so I went back for her. This turned out to be a poor decision.

As I ran back towards my sister, the window closed and I was trapped in horror. Then, the show began. Satan began to call people's numbers as his cohorts led them to the stage to face their demise. The audience was forced to watch as people were decapitated and their arms and legs ripped from their bodies. As he laughed with a mocking thunder, I tried to turn away from the screaming and gore occurring on the stage. It was worse than any horror movie that I have ever watched in my life—bar none. Hollywood hasn't a clue! Then, he called my number. I cried in horror as I knew that they were coming for me to lead me to the stage as well. In a cold sweat, I suddenly awakened, realizing that it was a nightmare—or was it? Had I waited too long to get out? Was it a warning that if I didn't leave, I going to Hell? This nightmare haunted me for a long time and initially, I believed that if I did not get my act together soon, it would be my fate. Yet, I still didn't change after that. I suppose I suppressed and rationalized the nightmare as just that—a nightmare. I told myself that the dream was not from God. Instead, I chose to believe that it was just another way that the devil was attempting to torment me and went on with my life. I was in denial. It was another warning from God that I rationalized and failed to heed. So, I went on with my life and continued to drink Alcoholically, even though I was trying to be a good Christian.

DOUBLE DIPPED

*Even when the rain falls
Even when the flood starts rising
Even when the storm comes
I am washed by the water...
-Need to Breath, Washed by the Water.*

I began to sober up and turn back to the Lord in 2006 and realized that the first time I was baptized with my Mother was against my will and I needed to be baptized. My son, Zachary, indicated that he wanted to be baptized too, so we did it together. It was a very special day for me and Zachary. I bought a beautiful sweater with sequins, black pants and beautiful sandals. I really did not care if the clothes were ruined in the water, I just wanted to wear the most beautiful clothing I could afford to my baptism. Zachary dressed very nicely too. My father was there and said, "What's wrong, the first one didn't take?" I said, "No, it didn't." I didn't see the need to go into why, but the first baptism definitely did not "take." In 1990, I did not arise from the water transformed into anything new because I was not ready. The second time, I was more than ready. I couldn't wait. It was beautiful.

What I did not realize until much later was that I was still trapped in the prison I made for myself and unable to let anyone inside. Even after my second baptism, I continued to drink and use tranquilizers addictively. Finally, I woke up August 4, 2007 and the Lord, in His mercy, took the desire to drink away from me. Still, I could not move forward because I did not know how to trust. I needed the Lord to rescue me, so He did by smashing the fortress that I had built around my heart.

THE FORTRESS

*And if I built this fortress around your heart
Encircled you in trenches and barbed wire
Then let me build a bridge
For I cannot fill the chasm
And let me set the battlements on fire...
This prison has now become your home
A sentence you seem prepared to pay...
-Sting, Fortress around your heart*

While the bathroom began as a place of comfort and adventure, it ultimately became a fortress around my heart that I built without even knowing it. While it kept others out, it also trapped me inside. It was not until the age of thirty-seven that God allowed me to view the fortress I had built. He showed me this fortress by taking me to a stranger's home to view it while I was working as a Realtor. I was lured to the house by the prospect of listing it for sale for \$2,000,000. I was excited, thinking that my first listing would be a two million dollar home. When we arrived at the home, it certainly did not appear to be worth \$2,000,000.

My husband, baby, and I were immediately greeted by two fierce-looking Dobermans at the gate. We rang the bell, requesting an escort upstairs. Upon arrival, the couple that owned the home seemed odd to me. They were drinking and jovially offered my baby a Margarita. I immediately noticed a Mason's ring on the man's hand. The lady of the home showed me a quilt that she had made, asking me to focus clearly on one square that had a huge hook, three fish, a tombstone, and date of death. I interpreted the fish to symbolically represent Christians,⁶ which made me wonder "what's the catch?" Why did she keep pointing to the date of death? Noticing that the date of death was in the past, I wondered if it pertained to me—was I living on borrowed time? She was involved in a group of women that made quilts of deceased Mothers, which was very creepy to me.

The man of the home then took me for a tour. He first showed me the construction of the home. It was built with 12” thick steel beams, so that neither hurricanes, tornadoes nor floods could knock it down. The home was on the South side of the lake facing the water and was built at a 45 degree angle, to where the North Wind would have to bow around it. Incidentally, I have heard that the North Wind is a representation of Christ or God’s breath. Christ would surely not be bowing down to that house. Strangely, the hallways were built about one foot higher than the bedroom floors; so that you had to step down to enter the bedrooms. I thought, “This guy is a NASA Engineer? Hope he’s not working on the Space Shuttle!”

As the tour continued, he showed me the quilting room. Talk about “Silence of the Lambs!” It was creepy. It was the size of a tennis court, had quilting arms, and all kinds of ugly, piecemeal fabric with which these quilts were made. There were no beautiful rolls of fabrics that I imagined you would see--silks and velvets in purple, sapphire blue, and emerald green. I was waiting for the moths to fly off. Next, he took me to an Engineering room, where he created things. When I asked what he created there, he very arrogantly said, “ANYTHING I WANT.” I thought “O-kay...,” noting that none of his “supposed” creations were there. Then, we walked up to the radio tower, where he showed me that in the event of a disaster, he could contact anyone he wanted anywhere in the world. Next, was the gun range. Yes, he had a huge gun range in the bottom of his home. He arrogantly said, “This is where I teach me students to hit the mark.” At that point, I was feeling very creepy. Suddenly, it all came together—“hurricanes, tornadoes, disasters, floods, guns, radio towers, the North wind – this house was built for Armageddon. It was built to withstand Christ.” I wondered if he had purchased any fire insurance, all the while knowing that he had not.

Strangely, he also said that he had scuba dove down and dredged up sand, which he brought up onto his property to raise the foundation, which reminded me of the scripture, “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” Matt. 7:26. Whoa! Immediately, I thought, “This guy is an Engineer and built his house on sand? The foundation is all wrong. It is surely going to fall.” In reflecting on the house, I thought, “It is ugly. It’s only value lies in the land on which it is sitting. It needs to be knocked down and something beautiful built there.” I immediately began to envision the beautiful home, overlooking the water, that might be built there. Instead, the Man of the home, as if reading my thoughts, insisted that whoever bought the home could not knock it down.

I somehow intuitively knew that this house was “evil” and arrogantly thought “Christ could knock it down if He wanted to.” I envisioned Christ taking a wrecking ball and knocking that house to the ground.—and so He did. But instead of a wrecking ball, He used a cough drop, and the walls came tumbling down. You see, the house was the fortress that I had built around my soul that effectively, imprisoned me from the outside world. The walls were strongholds I had built to protect myself, fortified by lies, terror, pain and the distorted perceptions of a child who never grew up. The land was me. As my fortress fell, I was left grasping for walls that weren’t there. Not being able to stand the vulnerability, I quickly began trying to erect new walls. That is when God stepped in and said, “Not this time.”

HUMPTY DUMPTY

*Humpty Dumpty Sat on a
Wall Humpty Dumpty
had a great fall. All the
kings horses,
And all the Kings' men
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together
again.*

After all that I had been through with the Lord, I just could not surrender and get off the fence. I suppose I should have foreseen that sitting on the fence for twenty years with God would ultimately result in me meeting the same fate as Humpty Dumpty. I was just so “hard headed” and would not listen. At any rate, my fall was an emotional breakdown. It was at this time that I was diagnosed with Bipolar disorder. It’s true that all the kings’ horses and all the kings men couldn’t put be back together again. Thankfully, God could.

While the Psychiatrists diagnosed me with Bipolar Disorder because of my breakdown, the breakdown proves little to me because the Bible says that *a house divided cannot stand*. I was a house divided against myself and I certainly fell. All I can say is that living two lives is painful and tiresome and seemed to cause a rupture in my soul, resulting in a mental and emotional breakdown. With Bipolar disorder, you have mood swings from mania to depression—and I have had both—but I have also abused uppers and downers for so long that it’s hard to tell whether I have Bipolar or it’s just drug abuse. Regardless of the label that is placed on my symptoms, I’m going to beat it.

My next breakdown started with an anxiety attack that landed me in the Emergency Room of a local hospital. As I sat waiting for an EKG, I called my father, who yelled, “If you keep this up, you’re going to lose your family.” I slammed down the phone in fear. Then, I heard blood curdling screams throughout the E.R. as people saw a man running with his

abdomen split open and intestines hanging out. I ran out of the hospital, ready to throw myself into Clear Lake. Then, I heard my Mother yell in terror, “Candice Lee, come back here right this minute.” I asked my Mother to take me home and once I got inside, I snuck out the door and started running. My husband found me walking and asked me to get in the car and go get some rest at the hospital.

Convinced that God was finished with me and was ready to hand me over to the Devil unless I surrendered all, I surrendered everything I owned and loved aside from the clothing on my back and hoped that God still wanted me. I had seven pairs of clothes, so I concluded that I had seven days. I wore the nicest clothing first and then placed it in a closet next door to mine. Each day, I would place that day’s clothing in the neighboring closet until all I had left was the clothes on my back. I gave my wedding ring to the nurse as a symbol of giving Rick to the Lord. I told Rick to take good care of our children and tell them I love them and prepared to die. That night, I told the Lord that I was ready to go with Him and lied down ready to die, but cried with deep sorrow. I woke up in the morning ever so happy to see the sunrise. Soon after that, the nurse told me that I was being released and my husband was on the way to pick me up. I was going home to Rick and my children. It was not my time yet.

Before leaving the hospital, I gave the “old man” a funeral and did my best to bury him. I even read the 23rd Psalm to memorialize that day. What sucks is – he keeps wanting to rise up again. So, it’s a lifelong battle, I guess—keeping the old person you once were—down, so that you can be all that you can be. God takes you as you are and sanctifies you more and more and more into His likeness. He deals with character defects, temper, sin, and your heart and as you kneel to Him, he takes those things and changes you. But, it’s a long journey. The “old man”, the man of sin, dies a slow death through your cooperation with God.

My last hospitalization was the night that God told me that I was going to sit in the Judgment Seat of Christ. I was so terrified, I fled to the hospital because I thought that *if* I was possessed, I preferred to be delivered at the hospital. Again, I thought He was going to kill me. It was the most frightening night of my life, but it changed me forever. But, just to be certain that I was not possessed, I began a six week fast and repented of everything that I had ever done. I lost fifteen pounds trying to starve the devil out of me. I suppose that I did not realize that I could not starve me out of me. This is when the “Conversation happened.”

THE CONVERSATION

*I've tried so hard my
dear to show That you're
my every dream
Yet you're afraid each
thing I do Is just some
evilscheme...*

Cold, Cold Heart, NoraH Jones

At the age of thirty-seven, I had a life changing conversation with God. I wanted to serve him but I just couldn't move forward because I could not trust Him. I kept trying to surrender my will to Him and would then, take it back. I didn't realize that having a relationship with Christ requires that He be the pilot and I the co-pilot. I really didn't fear Him, as I should have. I recently read that for some people, the experience of the fear of judgment may be the only motivation for them to trust Christ. Unfortunately or fortunately, that is what happened to me. What laid the predicate for the following conversation was heartfelt repentance – making a list of all of the wrong things I had done and people I had harmed and asking God for forgiveness. Then, making a list of all of the people I needed to forgive, praying to forgive them, and asking God to bless them. My mother is on this list. After I did these things, ALL IS CAN SAY IS GOD SHOWED UP!

I was involved in a family court lawsuit against my Mother, seeking a Protective Order to prevent her from ever contacting or harassing me and my family again. She spent the previous year trying to destroy my life by taking my children away and destroying my career—the only things left in my life that I held dear. She spewed awful, defamatory allegations to CPS to try to have them remove my children from my home. Then she contacted the State Bar of Texas and tried to get them to disbar me. The straw that broke the camel's back was when she showed up at my son, Zachary's school, begging and crying for him to talk to me to let her see him,

poisoning his mind with lies and making him cry. That's it. Nobody messes with my kids.

A few days after the school incident, I filed an Application for Protective Order in family court—coincidentally, on my birthday. I hired an incompetent and dishonest attorney, who left me lingering for eight months, thinking he was trying to get the Petition served. When I finally realized what had happened, I fired my attorney and decided to represent myself in court, going head to head with her. I stayed up until 2:00 a.m., preparing all of the necessary court filings and marched down to the Courthouse for JUSTICE! It felt GOOD to know that she was finally going to be held accountable for all of her lies and abuse. I felt empowered and brave to be the one to do it. I had my process server lined up and an attorney to take over the case when it went to trial. I was ready to fight! Then, God came to me and said, “Examine your motives.” I had many: (1) I wanted to beat the crap out of her – I knew I couldn't have that one, (2) I wanted revenge! God said “Vengeance is mine.”, (3) I wanted Justice and for Her to be held accountable— I searched the scriptures and saw that the Government is God's ministers of Justice—He said, “Sit with that for a moment and see what the Court says about Justice.” and (4) I wanted protection. God asked me “do you really need physical protection?” I said “No. I need emotional protection and so do my children” and then God showed me that she couldn't hurt me if I didn't let her in. So, I asked for protection from myself. God said “Hold that thought.”

As for my request for Justice and Accountability, the Court said no and refused to set my case for trial. I said “Why, God, Why?” He said “I'm not going to tell you why.” And I said, “Fine, I don't need to know why (pout).” And then He said, “Come here, I'll show you why.” He gave me the scripture “Do not confront a fool in his folly,” so I looked it up. There were many wise instructions in Proverbs, so I read the whole book. God basically showed me that she was a fool, an insane person, rejoiced in evil like a game, and was willing and ready

to rip me to shreds if challenged. He showed me that even if the court were to give her a thousand lashes, she still would not change. So, there you have it – he protected me from myself by having the court deny my motion. Little did I know that I was about to be ripped to shreds. He also comforted me by saying “Justice delayed is not Justice denied.” In other words, “I’ll deal with her.” I shudder to think of what He’s going to do to her if she fails to repent—the ways in which she may have to suffer. I really don’t want that for her. While I no longer want her in my life, I still love her. Maybe I just love the memory of who she used to be, but isn’t anymore. Then I asked, "How do I protect myself from myself in the future?" In no uncertain terms, I heard “You shall have NO CONTACT with this woman.” My husband had been saying that for years. I finally know it’s the only way. My next question was “WHAT’S WRONG WITH THAT WOMAN?”

I have spent a lifetime trying to figure out what is wrong with my Mother and what makes her do the things that she does to the people that she says she loves. With an undergraduate degree in Psychology, I didn’t have to go far to find the list of mental illnesses that I had considered in trying to find answers: narcissistic, antisocial, histrionic, borderline, or bipolar. She seems to fit them all in some ways. While I am not qualified to diagnose her, the only thing I know for certain is that she is the quintessential Jekyll & Hyde – sugary sweet one moment and ready to slit your throat the next. I looked for a synopsis of the Jekyll & Hyde story and read that it was an alter-ego, exploration of the concept that good and evil exist within one person. Hyde literally represented the good doctor’s other self, a Psychopathic being unrestrained by the constraints of civilized society, who shares the same body with the doctor. That is my Mother.

I ended up at Half Priced Book Store, not sure of what I was even looking for. I felt led to one book, Emotional Vampires, and the movie, “Girl, Interrupted.” As I picked up the movie to read the back cover, I never knew that “Girl, Interrupted” was about a woman who was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder. I watched the movie to see if I could identify with the main character, Susana. The only thing that I related to was the concept of “a parallel universe.” A parallel universe is a “self contained separate reality co-existing with one’s own.” Boy, did I understand that concept. I heard God say, “look up the word, interrupted; you don’t really understand what it means.” So I did. Interrupted means “temporarily stopped, maladjusted, showing signs of mental illness.”

As I read the book “Emotional Vampires,” the story of my life unfolded before my very eyes. In folklore, vampires are creatures of the night with the power to hypnotize their victims into going along with them. They can disguise themselves by turning themselves into bats, wolves, or cold mists. Their goal is to suck out all of your blood until there’s nothing left of you. They cannot see their reflection in the mirror. Emotional vampires are almost the same thing. They not necessarily evil, but usually are people with varying degrees of personality disorders. They have the ability to see your need and become the very thing that satisfies that need. Maybe without even realizing it, they hypnotize you with their charm into believing that they are somebody they are not. They play their roles so well that they fool themselves into believing that they truly are who they pretend to be. They lack integrity and have very little idea of who they are. Not only are Emotional Vampires confused about their own identities, they can confuse you about yours as well. If you get too closely involved with them, you’ll hardly know yourself. This was exactly what happened to me. Suddenly, I realized that my Mother had Borderline Personality Disorder.

With Borderline Personality Disorder, life is black and white—good and evil. There isn't much grey. You swing from one pole of your personality to another, trusting someone to mistrust in a moment because you try to be vulnerable and then when the least action occurs that is threatening, you cover it all up again, run and hide, or strike out violently at them. Your world is a scary place to live, so you have violent mood swings like a creature among a world of predators, running for safety. After I learned what was wrong with her, God flipped the mirror and I saw my failings too.

MOTHER!

*Who can say if I've been changed
for the Better?*

Because I knew you

I have been changed for good.

*-Kristin Chenoweth, For
Good*

As I look in the mirror, I now see two faces—my own and that of Mother! You have got to be kidding me. I have become like Mother! Oh my God, I have, haven't I? I took comfort in thinking that I was good one. Got a little secret...I am the bad one too. I suppose in living with a Mother who insisted that she was the martyr, I begin to detest the martyr. So, I took on the dark side. Hey, at least the dark side owns it. If the shoe fits, wear it! Now, I can see that I am both good and bad. I was an angry person, but I never intended to hurt anyone—besides Mother. Maybe she was angry too? All I know is that I became the very things I detested in my mother. She has two sides, but so did I. She wasn't the only emotional vampire. Unfortunately, you can't live with an emotional vampire and not get bitten. Despite my therapist's insight that I had my Cross and could see my reflection in the mirror, she was only half-right. I certainly had some insight into myself, but I failed to see just how much like my mother I had become. I had lost my true self in the mirror of my mother and had very little awareness of that fact.

As I sat in disgust, I sighed in relief as I read that emotional vampires are not intrinsically evil, but rather, emotionally immature. Pondering my therapist's suggestion that childhood trauma can mimic mental illness in adults, I researched the issue and found articles stating that women exhibiting traits of Borderline Personality Disorder were frequently abused or neglected children—whose growth was interrupted. The article said, "If you observed their behavior from the standpoint of seeing them as distressed children or adolescents, at best, you would think

their behavior is completely normal.” The problem is you’re seeing this behavior in an intellectually and physically mature adult.

Then, God made it all very clear. I was a girl, interrupted. I had never learned to trust, which, incidentally, occurs between the ages of two and three. Living with someone who swings from wonderful to awful at a moment’s notice gives you a very accurate perception of a black and white world filled with good and evil—not much grey—and a very fluid sense of reality. I suppose only God can unravel the mess because nobody else can definitively diagnose me. But, I know that God is able to de-program all of my distorted thinking and show me the way out because He is already doing it. By trusting Him, my counselor, and my husband, He is helping me to sort out truth from lies, determine who is trustworthy and who is not, and find myself. He is having to re-teach me everything from the ground up because three year olds don’t write good treatment plans. Mine sure failed. I needed a parent to guide me and now, I have one. But, I also need a counselor, a husband, a sister, and friends. As I learn to trust, one by one, I am gaining these relationships in my life.

So, I began to ask the Lord many questions. And He was faithful to give me every answer I sought. He showed me that I had one foot in the world and one foot in my own. I created a world where I made things as I wanted them, not as they really were. He made me step into reality and deal with my problems face to face. I am forever grateful for His kindness. In the middle of my worst sin of idolatry— loving everything and everyone, but Him, he reached out His mighty hand and delivered me from destruction. And then He said, read the bible, get to know Him, take care of myself, Rick, my children, and stay off the fence. Whew, or so I thought.

JUDGMENT

*There are far worse things awaiting
man than death.*

- *Bram Stoker's Count Dracula*

-

A few nights later, I had a dream. I was sitting in a court room with my mother, step father, my mother's lawyer, a Judge, Bailiff, and a lady I vaguely knew who said she was my lawyer. I think this woman was my therapist. I was like, wait a minute—I thought I was going to be the lawyer. I didn't trust her to do as good of a job as I would. I heard my old boss in the hallway, saying "she's not qualified to try I case because she has never tried one." So, I decided to let this woman try it as she winked at me. I wondered how in the world I was going to pay her. Anyway, though my mother was never served, she and her lawyer were too ignorant to realize that they didn't need to show up. When the hearing began, my attorney announced ready. My mother's attorney said "no trial, your Honor," to which I said "Objection, Your Honor. They waived service by appearing in person." My step-father got up and slammed the chair down, cursing me, and then slammed the door against the wall, temporarily leaving.

As the proceedings began, my attorney began to question my mother. My mother immediately turned on her husband, saying what a depraved human being he was and called him every terrible name in the book. I couldn't believe it. I had never heard some of these words. She blamed him for everything and took no responsibility. And then my attorney questioned me and I simply recited the facts that led to me filing a Protective Order against my Mother. I told the judge that on the night that I went to retrieve my son from my mother's house, my step-father grabbed my arm and shoved me and that I grabbed his suitcase and walked out of the house.

I was barely able to finish the story when the Judge made her ruling. No other witnesses were questioned. The Judge granted the Protective Order, stating her reasoning, “Neglect.” “Neglect, I thought. How in the world could I get a Protective Order based on Neglect?” Protective Orders usually require recent family violence. “Oh, well, I thought. At least she is *finally* being held *accountable* for her behavior! Justice has been served.” I would later recant that desire. I suppose the Judge’s ruling of neglect in my dream was God’s way of saying that her true guilt lied in failing to get help for her mental problems so that she could raise healthy children.

In the dream, as I sat hugging my grandmother, with my mother right there trying to get close, the Bailiff said “the Order has been entered, it’s time to separate”. As I left the room, knowing I would be taken to jail if I stayed any longer, she chased after me, crying and wanting me. And my step-father chased after me, saying “I’ll get you if it’s the last thing I do. I’ll be waiting for you when you least expect it.” I was terrified, so I ran to my father, who was sitting in a chair. I stood behind him as the Bailiffs drug them away on their faces, kicking and screaming. My father was giggling and laughing. I remember thinking, “That’s not very funny.” Suddenly, I somehow knew where they were going—Hell. Immediately, I woke up and said “Father, forgive them, for they did not know what they were doing.” That gave me the chills. That was the same thing Jesus said when He was crucified on the Cross.

As I sat back contemplating the dream, God showed me several things. It had nothing to do with my step-father. She and my stepfather were the Jekyll/Hyde sides of her. But, she was not the only one with a Jekyll/Hyde personality. I was once very much like her--the person that I swore I would never be like – UGH! In reflecting on the dream, I believe that my father in the dream was my Heavenly Father. He was laughing in a way that was giggling, but almost hilarious. But this situation was not funny. I think that my Father was giggling in my dream

because I felt like a child and He didn't want to frighten me to death. I read in the Bible that on Judgment day, God's laugh will not be a giggle. It will be a loud, thundering, mocking laugh for all of those who do not accept his Son. It will be a terrifying laugh that will frighten a person until they shake, waiting for judgment to come down. In His wrath and yet, mercy, God allowed me to experience a taste of what Judgment one night. He said "You have offended me! I showed you so many things—things other men would die to see. And then, you turned your back on Me and My Son. My Son died a horrible, humiliating death on the Cross for you! How dare you take that lightly! I'm going to show you what it feels like to sit in the Judgment seat and wonder if you'll still be given the Mercy Christ came to give you. Then, maybe you'll trust me."

And so He did. It was the most AWFUL experience that I have ever had in my life. I felt like I was going to puke. I couldn't eat or sleep. I shook all night long, wondering what was going to happen to me. I knew that "*God will not be mocked; whatsoever a man sows, he shall reap.*" I was waiting for my harvest. I trembled and cried all night long, begging for the sun to come up, so that I would know the judgment would cease. I literally thought He was going to strike me dead. Then, I remembered that Christ died for me too and I wasn't so bad that Christ couldn't redeem me too. I had complete confidence in Christ's love for me, but I was terrified of the Father.⁷ I had to read a lot of scriptures in the Old Testament to be confident that God the Father is a patient, loving God. I had to get to know God the Father and his heart. He does not punish without a lot of warnings, but I had a lot of warnings. I had so many warnings, I can not count them. I read the Psalms and how God rescued the Israelites over and over again, after which, they would return to worshipping idols. Yet, he continued to have mercy on them and after they had suffered a while, when they cried out for God, He was faithful to deliver them over and over again. My sin was idolatry too. I finally believed that

if He could forgive them, He could forgive me. So, around 4:00 a.m., I laid down to sleep, still frightened, but resolved to trust. Worst night of my life, bar none. But as I saw the sun rise, I knew I had a second chance. And, I no longer wanted Justice for what my mother had done to me. I prefer Mercy!!! So does God, incidentally. The Bible says that. He is very patient, slow to anger, and that his mercy endures forever. I think I may have been getting pretty close to forever. I would not listen, so, He had to spank me hard!! I get it now!!

In going through this experience of judgment with God and also seeing the gentleness with which he shattered that fortress of mine, I learned many things about God's character. He is kind, compassionate, and a very loving Father who is always there for his children. But He is also the most fierce, powerful, frightening person I've ever met. Put it this way, "you don't want to get on His bad side." Sometimes God talks to me gently, like a child who needs a Father. And sometimes He talks to me sternly as a Father executing discipline. My father never disciplined me growing up, so I am unfamiliar with how that feels. It scares the hell out of me. I now realize that God is both. He's kind and loving, but He is a force to be reckoned with. He's the God who offers a sick child a cough drop and says, "Honey, do you want cherry or lemon?" But, He's also a God of wrath, who takes His Son's death very seriously.

He's also very serious about His commands in the Bible. We are to love God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds and love our brothers as ourselves. In knowing that He wanted for me to forgive my Mother and Honor her, I dismissed my lawsuit against her yesterday---on her birthday and sent her a bouquet of flowers, anonymously, as if to say, "Happy Birthday, I'm Sorry, and Forgive Me." Somehow, after all of this, I really know that I am forgiven.

BEST ACTRESS?

*Start spreading the news,
I'm leaving today
I want to be a part of it - New York,
New York I wanna wake up in a city,
that doesn't sleep And find I'm king of
the hill - top of the heap..*

The nominees for Best Actress in the documentary, “Who am I?” are Candice Lee Schwager and Mother. And the Oscar goes to.....Mother! Sorry, Candice, you are runner up again! Before I could truly close the door and grieve the loss of my mother, I had to know who’s who in our relationship. Initially, it was her, until I decided to give her a dose of her own medicine. Then, I stopped this behavior and said “enough”, but she did not. My Mother says that I am the horrible one. She provokes me to anger and then says, I told you so. Recently, I saw a photograph of her taken at Disneyland. She was standing in front of a huge sign saying “Grand Prize, Best of Show.” Finally, I knew what I thought all along. Mother was the ultimate actress. Now, I know that despite my faults, she wins the Oscar for Best Actress. The problem is—my mother does not know this. Someone very close to her recently remarked “If she were to meet herself, she would not like her.” So poignant, yet so true. He showed me that much of her life has been a show because she does not know who she is. While I have seen so much good in her, I have also seen so much bad that I no longer know who she is. But, how could I expect to know who she is if she does not even know?

While she certainly has both Jekyll and Hyde sides to her personality, I now see a lot more Hyde. It was not until I saw that she was going to destroy the life that I had managed to build that I was able to say “goodbye.” She damaged my ability to trust as a child and crushed my ability to trust her in trying to ruin my life as an adult. I suppose I never trusted her, but I now KNOW that I cannot trust her. It is no longer worth the risk to have her in my life. I love

my husband and children too much to put them through what my I went through. I couldn't see how she distorted my thinking until she was gone.

After giving up on the fantasy of having her in my life, I recently called my mother to see if I could visit my dying step-grandmother, Viva. I knew that she would say no, but I had to try because I really loved Viva. She said that I could come only if I agreed to let her back into my life. Since the answer is no, she would not allow me to visit Viva and said she prepared a death bed tape of Viva telling how wrong I have been for disowning my Mother. Will she ever stop? I have no plans of watching such a sick and abusive ploy to manipulate, shame and guilt me. Ultimately, the call consisted of her screaming at me until I started raging, crying, and had to call my counselor. I became confused all over again. Who was the bad guy? Was it me? Was it her? Suddenly, I was as crazy as she was, all over again. My counselor reassured me that it was her "whirlpool of dysfunction and insanity" and I am fine. I suddenly knew that my therapist spoke the truth. While I was certainly bad, she beat me again. That is fine by me because this is not a title I wanted to win.

REMOVING THE MASK

*Why? Why are you still here
with me?*

*Didn't you see what I've
done? In my shame I
want to run, And hide
myself.*

Yeah, but it's here I see the truth,

I don't deserve you.

*Barlow Girl, I need you to love
me*

Not along ago, I heard the word, “identity theft” and realized that I am the one who stole my own identity by sitting on the fence with God for so many years, repeatedly fleeing to alcohol and drugs, and forming an alliance with the enemy to beat my Mother at her own game. I abandoned myself and became the very thing I despised in my Mother. The scariest part is that I did not know who I had become.

I did not know until now that I have been wearing a mask. Now I see that my mask contains all of the things I thought you wanted to see in me: strong, popular, funny, smart, pretty, loving, and kind. I never stopped to think that maybe some of these things were already part of me. I created a mask because I was ashamed of who I was – WEAK! Regardless of how illogical this may seem, I felt weak for not being able to extricate myself from the insanity in which I lived as a child. I also felt weak for not being able to defeat my addiction on my own. While I thought the mask contained only the good things that I thought I needed to have to be loved and accepted, little did I know, some of the things I despised the most managed to find their way into my mask anyway. Maybe it's the distorted image that I had seen for so long through the mirror of others. Maybe the despicable things came in when I decided to play the game with my Mother. The “game” couldn't help but rub off on me because I learned how to play it. I had no intentions of playing that game with anyone but Mother, but somehow it

became a part of me.

I want to take the mask off, but I fear that there is nothing left of me. If there is something good left, I fear the vulnerability that comes with removing the Mask—because in my world, intimacy is synonymous with danger. What’s going to happen if I take the mask off? Will I die? Every time I try to take the mask off, I feel as though I’m dying—I am. But that’s a good thing. My false self is dying because that is not who I am. There is a lovely woman underneath, almost childlike—but not a child. She has the fear of a child, so her fears don’t make sense. It’s terrifying and yet maybe it’s terrifying because she has lived in a World of predators for most of her life. She doesn’t any longer. She’s safe. Pinch her. She’s real. She isn’t a demon. She isn’t an angel. She’s a Girl, Interrupted.

A VAMPIRE SLAYER

*I've been running in your
direction For too long now
Lost my own
reflection And I
can't look down
If you're not there to catch me
when I fall If this is the moment I
stand here on my own
If this is my rite of passage that somehow leads
me home
I might be afraid
But it's my turn to be brave
-Idina Menzel, Brave*

I have finally found the real me—a Vampire Slayer! The first Vampire to be slain is me—the false self that I have been living for so long. In the bible, it says, “*Be crucified with Christ.*” You see, to find you life, you must first lose it. You must be willing to die to self, for to live is Christ and to die is gain. It’s a process called sanctification in which Christ removes everything from your life that stands between you and Him. It only happens with your cooperation. While I became a “new creation in Christ” the moment I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord, I didn’t understand that. Because I did not see change in my life, I assumed I wasn’t saved, so kept trying over and over again to get saved. I was confused about my salvation for more than 20 years. I suppose He allowed me to stay confused so that I would keep seeking Him.

The other day, I was praying for a friend and afterwards, asked God, “Why didn’t something worse happen to me through all of my years of disobedience to you?” I stopped at a convenience store to get a soda and the cashier asked me, “Is this what you are looking for?”-- pointing to the year 1988. I suddenly heard, “because you were Mine” and then I knew

without a shadow of a doubt that I was saved at the age of 17 when I first asked Jesus to come into my heart and be my Lord and Savior. I keep hearing those words in my heart “because you were Mine” and feel a gratitude that is indescribable. But for the grace of God, there go I.

So, I am now letting go to endure the painful, but necessary process of sanctification. Letting go of who I was, while uncertain of who I am is a scary place. I suppose I am going through a rite of passage to lead me to my destiny. This is something I must do by myself. I am ready to say goodbye to the old me, the past, and fall into the strong arms that I know are waiting to catch me. I have been running in His direction way too long. I might be afraid, but it’s my time to be brave. So, here goes. I hold my breath and jump. I know He’s there to catch me. I trust Him.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

*You might say I feel lost and
found You might say I'm all
turned around
this is the first time that I know
who I am...
-Alyson Stoner, Lost and
Found.*

My journey to the Lord has been much like Dorothy's journey in the Wizard of Oz. Dorothy was a sort of prodigal, herself. Upset with her family, she dreams of escaping to a place "where there isn't any trouble." In doing so, she becomes lost and simply wants to find her way home. At the end of the movie, she learns that she has always had the power to go home—she just had to find out for herself. She also learns that if her heart's desire is not in her own back yard, it isn't anywhere. Curiously, I learned the same thing. I always had the power to go home. I was saved. Jesus was there. I had a family that loved me very much. I wasn't an orphan. My family never left--I did. I went looking for a family because I was unhappy with the family I had. As God would have it, I ended up with both—a new family and the one I've always had.

I now see that I was lost and found. I knew the right way to go, but went my own way and became very lost. I could not find my way back regardless of how hard I tried. Thank God, Jesus knew exactly where I was hiding and came and rescued me. Through my journey, God has shown me that while parts of me were lost, I was really just very confused. I am many of the things I thought all along: a wife, mother, daughter, sister, and friend. While there were certainly pieces of me that were lost or disowned on my journey, they are now re-integrated into my personality and I have recovered. So, in addition to being a lawyer, I'm a minister, counselor, author, leader, and visionary!

I know without a shadow of a doubt that I am a daughter of the Most High God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. I am slowly developing a strong relationship with God that just gets richer every day. For now, we're working on TRUST—absolutely necessary to be a part of the “real world.” The reason it took so long for me to surrender to God was because I was unable to trust. I was looking for someone who was always trustworthy, always loving, and would never leave me no matter what I did. I was looking for Him all along. No Person in the world could be the One I sought but Him. He was the only one capable of being God. People can fail us, manipulate us, lie to us—even without realizing it. But, God is faithful, trustworthy, will never fail us, lie to us, or leave us. He alone is God. I have finally found him and I shall never let Him go again. He is the love of my life. He is beginning to bring trustworthy people into my life and like the dove in Noah's ark, I was the one to announce that the storm is over.

After returning to the Lord, He led me to a video clip of the song “I don't need anything but you” from the Musical, “Annie.” For some reason, it seems that He has to show me everything. Maybe it is because I am in the habit of not listening. In the song, Annie is dancing on the feet of Daddy Warbucks, saying “I'm poor as a mouse” and He says “I'm richer than Midas”, “but nothing on earth will ever divide us” and they are singing about tying a knot that can never be severed—like a covenant. Seeing this gave me an image of the little girl in me dancing on the feet of God and how happy He was to have me as a daughter. It is truly amazing how different the Lord sees us from how we see ourselves.

A MOSAIC OF EDELWEISS

*Edelweiss,
Edelweiss Every
morning you greet
me
Small and white, clean
and bright You look
happy to meet me...
-The Sound of Music*

As I draw closer to Him, He shows me other very beautiful ways in which He sees me. Recently, He said “you are a woman who was once very broken and shattered, but now being crafted into a mosaic of Edelweiss. May you bloom and grow forever.” Incidentally, my name, “Candice” means pure, white, and brilliant, my last name is Swiss by marriage, and the National flower of Switzerland is Edelweiss. I suppose I am Edelweiss in His eyes. I dream of renewing my wedding vows with my husband in a little chapel on the side of a high mountain top in Switzerland with Edelweiss everywhere. But, I realize, it’s time for Rick’s dreams to come true. It is time to focus on my children, help them grow, and ensure that their dreams come true. If in the process I am blessed too, I will be all the more grateful to the Lord, but he has answered every prayer and fulfilled almost every dream that I have had. So, I am perfectly happy to spend the rest of my life helping other people’s dreams to come true.

*Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi
Lord, make me an instrument of
your peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let me
sow love; where there is
injury, pardon;
where there is doubt,
faith; where there is
despair, hope; where there
is darkness, light; and
where there is sadness,
joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so
much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we
receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to
eternal life.*

In some ways, I am a lot of things I already know. I am also many things which I abandoned a long time ago—pieces of me. You see, I was shattered and fragmented, like Humpty Dumpty. Slowly, He is putting me back together again. And, rather than brokenness, He is creating a mosaic that will reflect Him. After all, we were made in His image. So, one by one, I reclaim these lost parts of myself, trusting Him to integrate them back into my soul. Thankfully, He won't be using crazy glue to put me back together, but the skill of an artist's hand. After all, He is the Creator. After shattering my fortress, He gave me a very extravagant, yet undeserved promise from Isaiah 54: 11-13:

*O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not
comforted, I will build you with stones of
turquoise
Your foundations with
sapphires
I will make your battlements of
rubies Your gates of sparkling
jewels
And all your walls of precious
stones.*

Thank God that He is able to build beauty out of rubble. Like a kid in a candy store, I watch in amazement to see what He'll make. I have always loved sapphires and the rubies, turquoise, sparkling jewels and precious stones don't sound too bad either! But then, what girl doesn't love jewelry? I am finding pieces of me in the oddest of places. I recently went to visit

my Sister and met her friend, Kandice Leigh. In many ways, meeting Kandice was like meeting myself before I began drinking. I wanted to be so many of the things that she is--a doctor, therapist, musician, singer, and I even spelled my name like Kandice for a period of time. I also realized that I had lost the little girl in me, so I decided to reclaim her. I found a blouse, sandals, and a purse that were as hot pink as I could find and felt prettier in a weekend. Since visiting my sister, I have been constantly *Pretty in Pink*. I even tried on a pink sundress! Still working on the dress thing. I started singing lessons last week, plan to begin taking piano lessons again, and will begin ministry school in the Fall. There is a spring in my step and a song in my heart constantly. I'm singing in the car, the elevator, parking garage, and in my office constantly—after everyone leaves at night!

*I see your true colors
and that's why I
love you
so don't be afraid to let them
show your true colors
true colors are beautiful
like a rainbow
-True Colors, Cyndi Lauper*

AN EAGLE

*My heart beats, standing on the
edge But my feet have finally
left the edge...*

*-Francesca Battistelli, I'm
letting go.*

After all of the smoke cleared, God showed who I am growing stronger and stronger to be. His vision is that I mirror him and be an Eagle. Eagles can see great distances. They are visionaries, leaders, and find their own way. Instead of running from storms, they look for them. While lesser birds look for cover, eagles soar to the greatest heights by the powerful drafts flowing from the storm. They don't run from challenges. They are fierce, and yet, the most gentle and attentive of all birds to their young. At just the right time, mother eagles begin to teach her eaglets how to fly. She gathers her baby on her back, spreads her wings and flies high. She drops the baby temporarily to let the eaglet know what its wings are for and then catches it. If the eaglet is SLOW TO LEARN, she returns to the nest and tears it apart until the eaglet has nothing left to cling to and she nudges him off the cliff. And he learns to fly. That is what God did to me. He tore up my nest and pushed me off the cliff and said "FLY!" And, so I did. My wings aren't very strong, but I'm starting to actually enjoy the storms! Maybe I always did! Incidentally, because Eagles live at such high altitudes, they have few predators. Thank God for that.

*But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew
their strength;
they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and
not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. Isaiah
40:31 (KJV).*

Two Thousand Ten is the year I would truly gain courage and learn to fight. The only problem was that I forgot to let the Lord lead. My son was discriminated against and our family

defrauded and retaliated against and I have never felt such rage in my life. I could not let it go. Even though I knew that when I chose to sue my District and 22 people in federal court for racketeering, fraud, discrimination, and retaliation--I was choosing Zachary over my job and would likely lose it, I was ready to fight! I could not look Zachary in the face and say I did not fight for him--that I allowed someone to hurt him and did nothing like a coward!

Almost immediately, I heard the Lord say "Don't you think I feel the same way for you? Do you think that I, the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Great I Am—would cower and not fight for you? You are my child. I see your tears, just as you see Zachary's. Do you think that I would allow someone to hurt you? I will seek vengeance for those who hurt children—especially mine. I have more endurance than you. When your strength is gone, I will be standing. Even if I must carry you, I will be fighting for you. My Angels have been assigned to fight for you and protect you. You didn't know you had a bodyguard, did you? If you could only see Him—He's a bit scarier than Dave. The Angels assigned to your family to fight are the most fierce spiritual warriors in the Heavens. Thanks to the women I have placed in your life who *pray*, you have even more to fight for you now. These Angels listen to their commands when they speak my Word. But, you have not been speaking My Word. You know spiritual warfare. **ARISE AND GO FORTH IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!** Grab the Sword of the Spirit, the Word, and command the situation.

Begin to walk by faith and not by sight! You are an Eagle now, not an eaglet anymore. The only reason you see predators is because your eyes have not been on ME. Your predators have no power over you. No man can take away what the Lord giveth. I gave you that law license to fight for these children and no man is going to take it from you. Keep your eyes on the Cross and take one step at a time, one day at a time in Me. You are being tried and you shall come forth as pure gold. My daughter! You found Me and now you have found your

calling. I said 'more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband'—speaking of these special children that would also be yours to love. Zachary taught you to see the child, not the disability. You have a gift and you will help many children because you no longer see the disability—you'll see the child. Do I not make all things work together for those who love the Lord and are called according to his purpose? I am not a man that I should lie. My Word is my covenant with you.

I have you in the palm of my hands and I need you to TRUST me with everything in you for the 1st time. I will bring you forth victoriously! Though you are up against a powerful principality, I am all powerful and I am with you. I want you to walk with Me as we plunder the enemy's camp and taking back what has been stolen from these children--their voices and abilities. I will raise up a standard! Your job is to do what I say. The Kindgom of God suffers violence, but the violent take it by force. I command you to be bold--the eagle I created you to be. Do not fear. No weapon formed against you shall prosper and EVERY TONGUE THAT RISES UP AGAINST YOU IN JUDGMENT SHALL BE CONDEMNED. **THE LORD GOD HIMSELF SAYS 'I AM FOR YOU'**---not one is able to stand against ME. When they attack you, they are fighting ME. The enemy has had dominion in this area for many years, but I am the GREAT I AM.

Don't forget that. Remind yourself of the miracles you have witnessed, confess daily that Jesus is Alive! I am the most powerful force in the universe. Though you are up against a principality with these children, this battle is mine and I do not lose. I know you like to fight, so keep your eyes on me, speak my Word, and pick up your sword and fight. You have no predators. That is a lie. A predator is someone who is able to harm you. No power in the universe has the power to harm you right now for the Lord God himself fights for you! Do you remember the rage you felt when they hurt Zachary? Well, that, my dear, is merely a taste of

my Wrath for what has been done to these children. Justice delayed is not justice denied. You are right to perceive that you were made for such a time as this. For this is my time for disabled children!! It is time for judgment. It is time for battle. Do you feel a draft coming on? I'm ready to fly." This is a David and Goliath battle of epic proportions and God said, "The Battle is the Lord's." I have never known quite what to do with myself while He's fighting. Pray? Good idea. My character failing seems to be that I want to fight too. I like the fight. I just need to learn when to give Him room to clean house. I need to pray and honor Him more and know that it is by HIS SPIRIT that "these things are done. For without Christ, I can do nothing but with Christ, all things are possible to Him who believes." I believe. Though I have suffered job loss, a bar grievance, and retaliation for six months, requiring me to seek IV treatments just to get back up. Instead of praying, I just kept getting up and going back into the ring for another punch. I do think I got a lot of punches in and made an impression—a bit too much maybe? I could not stand the cowardice I saw of no one being willing to stand up and fight for these children. I do know they are afraid but if we do not speak for these kids—who will be their voice? I felt it was my turn to be brave. I know see my folly—confronting another fool in his folly. But, I would not change anything. I would do it all again—just soaked in prayer.

God is right. I used to see the handicap, but now I simply see the child. I see a child who needs help—and I can help him with the law license God so richly blessed me with and my big mouth. I pray as I go through being "on trial" in every sense of the word—having my livelihood attacked, **GOD FIGHT FOR ME! FIGHT FOR THESE CHILDREN! SEND YOUR WARRING ANGELS FROM THE HEAVENLIES AND LET EVERY TONGUE THAT ACCUSES ME BE SILENCED NOW!** As I wrote that my livelihood was at stake, I suddenly had to remind myself that **GOD** is my provider. He is my Rock, my Fortress, My ever present

help in times of trouble. My livelihood is His livelihood. My ability to help kids is His ability to help kids and He is not going to tolerate interference with the Work. My livelihood is not in the hands of the Texas Bar but Jehovah Jirah Almighty! For, it is He that giveth thee the power to get wealth. God is the maker and giver of every good and pleasant thing.

As I dismissed my federal lawsuit, I had a dream of a tree of sustenance and heard God said, I am planting this for you. A tree of sustenance is like an evergreen. It always provides and never drops its leaves. Zachary had a dream where he saw money on a tree--a possible confirmation. God told me to write a book about what I have seen in special education and publish it. And then a friend said "the pen is mightier than the sword." I believe the Lord is making a way where I do not have to charge families by providing a job and I will work for these kids for free. I have fought hard, thrown some pretty good punches, but been beat up like I never imagined this year. That's okay. It's a good fight!

THE WHITE RABBIT

I'm late! I'm late! For a very important date!

I remember now what happened, how my thoughts became twisted to think I grow up = people die. It was my birthday and I was 11. He left the note in the Bible with the story of how small creatures can do great things (the dove). Reading the note motivated me to excel but I misinterpreted the message. I felt a burden from that day forward that I was expected to do great things. I have literally beat this dead horse trying but it was never good enough. It's a heavy burden to think you're special, called to accomplish great things and not measure up! Re guilt re his death, that day when he arrived, he looked bad. Nanny was a nurse and said he was white around the mouth. She said, "George, why don't you sit down and catch your breath. It's over 100 degrees and you don't look well." he said "Nonsense! I am healthy as a horse. Just had a check up last week. So, Let's do what we came here to do, take Kellie and Candy shopping."

We went to only one department store before going to our favorite novelty store, Spencer's Gifts. Spencer's was a place we always visited when we went to Tyler, though we usually only explored and rarely purchased anything. We could spend hours in Spencer's, exploring hundreds of electronic toys that you could not find anywhere else. George knew I loved Spencer's and usually followed me through the store to watch and see what kinds of toys got my attention. After returning to Houston at the end of each summer, George would mail Kellie and I gifts from Spencer Gifts along with a freshly minted \$2 bill. In fact, George sent us so many gifts from Spencer's that I recall sometime after his death receiving an entry to win a huge amount of money simply by virtue of being such a prized customer. So, the tragedy that follows seemed all the more profound—because it was at Spencer Gifts. My mind seems to connect everything to discern significance, and this was no exception.

There are so many things that seem lost from my memory completely as if irretrievable, but not this day. I remember every detail until my mother arrived in Tyler to take me home—after which everything kind of goes black. I recall my absolute excitement as we entered the shop, going from shelf to shelf to see all of the trinkets and toys lit with neon and laser lights. It was fascinating. I recall George walking behind me and smiling to see the wonder on my face with each new discovery. He told Kellie and I to pick whatever we wanted and he would buy it for us. I chose a Blue Smurf and a tiny Koala bear that clipped on my shirt collar and was satisfied. While I didn't feel right to choose more, I also do not remember wanting more. I honestly did not like for George to be buying our school clothes or spending his money on us. He did not mind because he had no grandchildren of his own, but knowing my mother was using him somehow made the shopping more of a chore than anything else.

As we exited our favorite store, a strange clock caught our eye, so we all stopped to see it. The clock told time with dominoes and marbles, which was fascinating to all of us, wondering how someone designed it to work as it did. George, Nanny, Kellie and I were completely mesmerized by the clock and stared for what seemed like several minutes in silence. It worked like the game, Mousetrap, which Kellie and I played as children. Suddenly, George seemed clumsily to almost trip over his own feet, causing me to giggle for a split second—having no idea the horror about to befall me. He grabbed my shoulder as he fell with the most violent and abrupt crash I could ever imagine as his skull shattered on the tile floor of the Tyler Mall—right in front of Spencer Gift Shop.

My sister began screaming as loud as I have ever heard anyone scream but I couldn't move, scream, or even process what was happening before my 11 year old eyes. I was paralyzed in fear and though I became angry that people in the Mall gathered around as if to gawk at

George, I could not speak or move. I watched as my grandmother removed his false teeth and amidst blood splattered everywhere, with pools of it on the Mall floor, began to give George CPR and mouth to mouth resuscitation. This went on for about 20 minutes as the paramedics arrived and took over and all I can remember is standing there in shock while everything seemed surreal, as if I was having an out of body experience. It was as if I could no longer hear what was going on—voices just everywhere. I could only watch in silence. It was the strangest experience and I don't think I have ever experienced it since then.

The near trance I was in was interrupted, bringing me back into the scene and I moved towards my grandmother, desperate to know if she made any progress, knowing even then that she had not. His head so violently shattered, I somehow knew it was hopeless. My grandmother suddenly stopped and layed him on the tile floor as she looked at me with a seriousness I will never forget. Her eyes said it all—he's dead. I knew she felt so sorry and helpless, but even amidst that horrible moment, she did something so shocking, I still have trouble believing it. As the paramedics ran toward us, Nanny grabbed his wallet and removed the \$200 he brought to take Kellie and I school shopping. Appalled, I looked at her in anger—at which time she said, "He wanted you to have it."

I could not believe that in the midst of the blood, screaming and ultimate realization that he was dead that Nanny was still thinking about money. I was so completely appalled, there are hardly words to describe it. I did not say it out loud, other than yelling, "Nanny!" But, inside I was screaming, "I don't want the damn money!!!" I was so angry—almost enraged, thinking, "It's the damn clothes!!! Why did he do this? He knew he didn't feel well!! Nanny knew he did not feel well!!! Why didn't he go to the hospital instead of pushing himself!!!!!" Then I knew, it was because of me. He did this all because of me.

I was so enraged at my mother!! I was so angry at Nanny. Why did they use him like this? They were so completely fixated on MONEY 24/7. It was ALL THEY EVER THOUGHT ABOUT. I knew Nanny loved me deeply and my mother to a lesser degree, but I rarely saw them truly love or care about other people unless the person could benefit them financially. If she could get money, Mother could almost “tune in” to another person’s subconscious to get what she wanted—money. For years, my Mother raged at my father, demanding money for “going without and living on food stamps as she put him through law school for ten long years.” It worked for a while before my dad said “Enough!” and refused to listen to her broken record of pity. She also felt cheated by her father’s severe alcoholism and ambivalence to her suffering to the point of constant rage. While Nanny would occasionally give in to her relentless nagging with small amounts of cash, she quickly set her sights on the many men in her life to give her what she wanted—jewelry, money, and material things.

And then she found George Wilmont—the perfect sitting duck for mother’s charm. George owned a plant nursery that my mother frequented in Tyler. My mother loved growing plants and has the greenest thumb of anyone I have ever met. George loved the nursery and could spend hours taking me down the aisles, describing every plant as if each had its own personality. On some level, I can see how their near obsession with plants sparked an instant connection that was almost fate. I recall Mother taking us to the Nursery to pick out a plant and meeting George that day. He seemed like the happiest old man. I would later learn that he was intensely lonely, living a life of near isolation as his wife and her sons brushed him aside. He was an outsider in his own marriage and was clearly just tolerated for the money he made.

As weird as this seemed, the next time I saw him, my mother had already adopted him as the father she never had and he seemed happy to reciprocate. Mr. Wilmont quickly became much more than the old man at the Nursery in our lives too. By extension, he gradually became

“something like a grandpa” to Kellie and I however awkward the whole thing felt. It was hard to think of him as my grandpa because he wasn't. It was equally hard to believe that my mother really thought of him as a father—maybe it was because I instantly saw that she was overly dependent upon him for money. Mother seemed to always be asking Mr. Wilmont for money. His income was limited, so he gave her what he could. His vicious wife was also usually looking over his shoulder—which was probably a much bigger impediment to my mother getting large sums of cash than she otherwise would have. Mom told me about Mr. Wilmont's life—how mean his wife and step-children were and that he had no children or grandchildren of his own. I felt sorry for him and gradually thought it was okay for him to become part of our lives. But he still did not feel like a grandpa.

One of the main things I remember about Mr. Wilmont was that he smelled like fertilizer and usually kissed me right on my mouth. I did not like this at all, nor did my sister. It was the primary thing I began to dread each time I heard he was coming to Nanny's. So much so, I remember a time when Kellie and I hid from him to avoid being kissed. George frequently came to Nanny's house to make dinner for Kellie and I, which was we appreciated. He was so kind, it was hard not to think of him as a big teddy bear. At the same time, there was something quite creepy about him that made me uneasy. Outwardly, he was equally loving to Kellie but, inwardly, I knew that he was fixated almost entirely on me. He tried to hide it, but I felt it and didn't like it. I still don't understand why, but I knew I was special to him and everything I did seemed to fascinate him. That made the strong, smelly kisses all the more gross to me—to the point where I just could not handle it anymore.

At the same time, I rarely felt as if anyone loved me as much as Mr. Wilmont. He was probably the first person who seemed to care only about what made me happy or think I was truly special. When I was 10 or 11, he gave me a Bible with my name engraved in gold—and a

dream that made me think God chose me to accomplish something big—so big I could not even imagine what it might be. It was my birthday and George sent the Bible to me in the mail. He enclosed a note, with a poem and a message that changed my life. The poem said something like, “Because I can’t be with you on your birthday this year, I shed a tear. Maybe we can be together next year.” Then, he quoted Genesis and the story of the dove in Noah’s Ark, stating “Never forget, small creatures can do great things.” I was certainly small, but why me?

I still don’t know whether this message was a blessing or a curse. It has helped me to accomplish great things I never imagined possible because it gave me an unstoppable drive that would not take no for an answer. But it has also been an incredible source of pain and bewilderment in relentless failure—most poignant the failure of not being extraordinary. Don’t get me wrong. I never wanted fame or fortune. I just wanted to change the World—the perfect unattainable task. While all of this led to much confusion, I ultimately decided that Mr. Wilmont was truly good and even thought maybe God sent him because He knew I needed him. I ultimately brushed off the kissing and just felt sorry for him, thinking he’s just a lonely old man who needs a family and tried to not think about it. The one thing that made me decide that George was truly good was the Bible. So, I settled the issue for good—or so it seemed. I grew to love George almost like a grandpa.

As soon as I made this decision, the rug was violently pulled from beneath my feet and I was left screaming at God, “Why!!! Why did you take him from me!!!!” I’m not sure I had ever acknowledged this even to myself, but I thought George was going to lead me to God and I was desperate to know Him. Suddenly and violently, he was gone—and certainly not quietly but with the loudest skull shattering, blood spattering crash I have ever heard in my life. I could not believe my eyes and was horrified.

Suddenly, I was filled with rage and guilt! I was so angry—at everyone and everything, but mostly at my mother for doing this to George. I thought, “It’s the damn clothes!!!! I didn’t even want them!! Why did she do this to him!! Why did he push himself like this over clothes!” And then I thought, “It’s all my fault. He was sick and needed to go to the ER. But for me, he pushed through it and he DIED! The shopping was really about me. He bought Kellie stuff too, but was drawn to me. Undoubtedly, everything he did was for me, not Kellie, not even my mother who used him. He put me on this pedestal and for what!!! This is blood money. I do not want it. It symbolizes the reason he died—for me.”

“Why did he put me on this pedestal? Why did my mother tell me that sickening story about my big green eyes and people always stopping her in the store to gaze in my eyes and fawn over me like that?” I knew it was wrong. It was bad. Why didn’t they stop? I never wanted this. Then fear filled me, wondering if a man whom I idolized as a child and believed was going to lead me to Jesus was a pedophile? I was terrified and simply could not go there. Thoughts swirled and I felt insane.

I could not bring myself to think of this again until 2010 when I was in the midst of a deep inner healing session with two ladies leading me in prayer at Theophostics. It was probably the most intense spiritual experience I have had in my life with the Lord. I still remember it like it was yesterday, it was so incredibly profound—and healing. It was also the first time I understood God on a heart level. I wanted to know from the Lord if George abused me. I felt desperate to know, but sick at the same time, thinking maybe it’s best if I do not know. Each time the thought entered my mind, before I could verbalize it or even complete the thought, Jesus rebuked me, saying “stop trying to make people all bad or all good.” I could not let it go, but I also could not say it. Jesus ultimately would not tell me what he thought about Mr. Wilmont. He knew what I wanted to know, but he simply would not answer me. Silence. The silence made me feel like

maybe he did and Jesus was dodging the question because I couldn't handle the answer.

All Jesus would say is "It was a lot bigger than you. You could not fix it." What was bigger than me? I kind of need to know. Then I thought God took him because the answer was bad and all over again, I felt like it was my fault. I now know that nothing was my fault because I was just a child. There were so many things I never understood. No one was there to explain things and in my childlike thinking, I came to the wrong conclusions over and over again. And then, in the midst of my grief, Christ revealed something very simple to people with common sense—that I simply could not grasp—God.

He helped me understand that I was like a 2 year old, afraid to grow up. I thought if I grew up, people would die--my parents. In the way a child thinks, I thought my growing up would make them die. I was stuck. I could not move forward. I was terrified. I had raw feelings stuck inside that I never grieved. They were crippling me. It was terrifying to walk through those feelings. I didn't know what would happen. I felt I would lose control, something bad would happen. But he slowly coaxed me out of hiding over 1 ½ hours—in sheer terror each step. He had to reassure me that it was safe to come out and that He was safe. He kept saying everything was going to be okay, I was not bad, it wasn't my fault, said stop being so HARD on myself, said I had me under a microscope searching for flaws.

He made me see that a man I idolized as a child was an ordinary man. I was desperate to know if he was bad or good. Mr Wilmont gave me the Bible with the Dove story that confused me and also gave me hope, but he frightened me. I was his favorite and he idolized me like a doll. I thought it was bad. I became desperately confused again, thinking "was he bad or was he good" like a two year old—black and white thinking again! So, someone is bad or good and life gets real confusing when someone merely makes a mistake or is human. Any sign of betrayal, I'd run. I kept begging Him—"tell me was he bad or good?" He kept saying "stop trying to make people bad or

good. No one is all bad or all good but Me". I thought Mr Wilmont was going to lead me to God, so I had him held very high. But, I hid from him. I didn't want to be kissed. Jesus said "old men should not kiss little girls." My mother used him to buy our school clothes. I felt used, like I had to let this man kiss me because I was a pawn for my mother to pry money out of a lonely old man's hands. I resented it. Then, he died, beating himself like a tired horse for ME!! How could I be so selfish?

Yesterday, the trauma hit me again. It was the car accident. The motorcyclist Victor had blood coming out of his head. He was gasping for air gurgling blood. I cried out to God, "please don't let him die!! I cannot watch him die again," thinking I was going to see a man die and it was my fault. Somehow, this got twisted with Mr. Wilmont. I felt guilty for hiding. I felt pain. I never got to say goodbye. It happened so fast. Just like the accident. It happened so fast. I threw my head in my hands, wind knocked out of sails, and said, "What am I going to do now?" I was afraid to grow up, thinking somehow my growing up would cause people to die. I screamed "WHY! WHY! Why did you take him from me?" God would never answer that question. He just said, "I'm sorry. I know you are hurting. I've seen your pain. But it had nothing to do with you. It was not your fault. This is bigger than you." I cried, "I couldn't make him live, I couldn't fix it." He said "you're right. You could not fix it.. just like the accident ..you could not fix it."

He showed me my faulty logic, cause and effect thinking, thinking if something bad happened, it must be my fault. I must have done something wrong. Why can't I just stop being bad? If I could be good enough, everything would be ok. But I failed. I realized I can't be good enough. But I also saw that I am not the cause of everything bad that happens either. I have no control over virtually anything. It was a lie. Magical thinking. I thought Mr. Wilmont was going to show me God because I trusted old people. I only trusted old people and adopted an elderly couple next door to parent me. They were retired. God said "stop trying to make him bad or good. He was just an ordinary man." He was reading the thoughts in the back of my mine, my subconscious that could

not let it go.

Then I felt 2 and knew Jesus was there but could not completely open the door. I was afraid of Him. I thought I'd be punished. I thought I'd come to love Him and He'd abandon me eventually. I couldn't bear that kind of pain again. I had Him in my life but was still holding back. I was absolutely STUCK for decades!! He said something very obvious to people with common sense but it was profound to me. He said, "**I'm not like people. I'm safe.**" He must have told me it's going to be okay more than 20 times. He said that "people will die, including your parents. But I'll be with you. People will turn their backs on you as they have now, but I'll be with you. People will hurt you. But I'll be with you through it all. You can do this." (be a grown up, mom). I said how? I have no one to show me how. I'm visual. I don't understand if I'm told, I usually have to watch and see how things are done, have someone to show me. He said He'd be my teacher. I'd learn as I go. It's not that hard. Suddenly, my tears were no longer about growing up and people dying--my parents. They were about my children needing me the way I needed a mother. I wept with grief so strong. He said, "you were very confused. No one was there to explain things. You tried to understand on your own and reached wrong conclusions. You are not bad. You didn't do anything wrong. You didn't make bad things happen. Sometimes, bad things just happen. Stop being so hard on yourself. You have yourself under a microscope."

I said "I'm flawed. Something is wrong with me." He said "everyone is flawed. They're human." I suddenly understood God. He's different. Pictures make Jesus look like a man. But He's not. The pictures sort of helped but sort of made Him harder to understand. How stupid am I that I could not understand God? I do now. Why am I such a slow learner? I memorize but don't always understand. He told me over and over that He was safe. He said "everything's going to be okay. Wait and see."

Life has been brutal in large part—like an assault. As I listened to “The Prayer,” the idea of life being kind is foreign. But I'm looking forward to it. When Jesus spoke, it was as if He breathed every word. He spoke slowly, thoughtfully, waiting to speak at times. He was slowing me down. Suddenly, I felt as if I was suspended in time. Time stood still. I think that was the peace that passes all understanding. Everything became very slow. He even slowed my racing mind and thoughts to a near standstill. It was like floating in space in slow motion.

I woke up today for the first time in my life not feeling drawn to sadness, loneliness. The videos I created with the lonely little girls in them, begging for forgiveness and hiding behind a mask of shame were suddenly repulsive to me because I no longer felt that way. I am dumbfounded that two days ago, I felt like a small child, terrified and covered in shame and I could wake up only two days later feeling completely different. I not only couldn't relate to the children in my video. I didn't want to see sad pictures. The first video asked the Lord, “Why are you still here with me? Didn't you see what I've done? In my shame I want to run and hide myself...I don't deserve you, but I need you to love me tonight. I won't keep my heart from you this time. And I'll stop this pretending that I can somehow deserve something I already have (forgiveness)”.

In the second video that I made the next day, the healing started and I realized how grateful I was to have women in my life who loved me in a way I had never experienced—unconditional. One woman in particular—my Godmother Kinny—reached out from across the Nation to me, a stranger, and helped carry my burdens when I was too weak to do so alone. She must have spent 4 years on her knees for me and that kind of love is beyond comprehension. In the video, I still felt like a child and she was Joan of Arc, a warrior fighting my battles—simply because she loved me. I could hardly comprehend that until I loved her back.

The next day came “The Prayer.” The video was all about letting go—of George and the dove. It was about grieving the loss with Rick by my side and having the strength to say goodbye.

It was also about a journey and life being a journey to places we cannot see yet. But, peace filled me and I felt strong. I also felt like an adult for the first time. Day four ended with a spiritual high that was unimaginable. Jesus led me to “You raise me up” by the Celtic Women. It’s the most bizarre thing--like waking up a different person. I feel like I grew up overnight, from 2 to somewhere between 30 and 40. I was suddenly repelled from sad photos of little girls alone to groups of women. I loved that band Celtic Woman. I’m Irish and Norwegian. Chloe says that Irish people have a song for everything--drinking, sadness, happiness. I guess I do too. I saw how the Celtic Women stood side by side and belted out how Jesus raises them up in the most powerful harmony. In the song, they sing of the Lord coming to them in times of trouble. I was suddenly okay with the idea that bad stuff can happen and life can hurt because I knew He’d be there. **At a critical point of grief, He said, "I love you!!!" Whoa the tears of a heart accepting that to be personal.**

As I reflected, I began to pray and confessed my sin of idolatry once more to God. I have done so probably 1000 times but I truly meant it from my innermost being. I acknowledged my egocentric thinking, Him as God, and me not. Then, I said “I am so very sorry Lord.” He said, "I've been waiting for you to say that. I'm not mad. You've been through a lot. Be gentle with yourself. Recover." Suddenly, I suppose I felt Him take my grief because I had awareness that He was feeling my pain. It was as if for a moment, I could feel Him grimace in pain. I have some grieving left to do and I'm not sure of myself at all. I feel like I'm starting from scratch, like what now? I still don't know if I will ever find out the answer to that burning question that Jesus would not answer or why he wouldn't tell me, but I realized that maybe it does not matter anymore. Maybe I already know all there is to know and it's time to move on. I trust if He thinks I need to know, He will tell me when it's time. At the end of the tear-jerking session for everyone in the room, which consisted of two prayer ministers and me, they said “Jesus showed up!” I blurted out, “I thought He might.” We all burst into laughter and tears!