

My Heart Now Lives: A Journey to Restoration

By SarahPraiseGiven 2019

Table of Contents:

Introduction

A Necessary Foreword

Chapter 1: Recounting What Happened to Gain Perspective

Chapter 2: Call It What It Is: Abuse!

Chapter 3: Getting Out of Abuse

Chapter 4: Recognizing My Part of the Problem

Chapter 5: Exercise & Creative Expression

Chapter 6: A Minimum Standard of Living

Chapter 7: Accepting Myself & Others

Chapter 8: Learning to Think Positive

Chapter 9: Learning How to Work Around a Disability

Chapter 10: Envisioning Success

Chapter 11: Dream and Imagine My Future

Chapter 12: Getting to Know God

Chapter 13: Forgiving Myself

Chapter 14: Forgiving Others—That is, Everyone!

Chapter 15: Value the Journey, But In a Letting-Go Sort of Way

Chapter 16: In Closing

Dedication: To God first. Then to my Mother, who made me who I am today.

Introduction:

This book will chart my experiences through healing from abuse, anxiety, and depression. I'm hoping that others who find themselves in a similar situation will be comforted in the knowledge that there is the possibility of healing. Perhaps the territory ahead will feel easier to traverse if people know that the path has been treaded before. When I was at my deepest depression, I did not know that it was possible to heal. I had never heard of anyone who got through anything similar. The possibility of ever being happy did not occur to me. Despite my best efforts to recover, it seemed that a lifetime just could not be enough time to get over all that happened to me. I did not give up, but I did what I could each day to get in touch with my feelings, to express myself, and to survive. My coping mechanisms were not always healthy, but they did get me through. There were two very supportive behaviors instrumental to my survival: One was exercise and the other was creative expression. With these, and a host of other strategies I will share, a full recovery became possible. Not only was I restored, but also my mother was too. I credit God most of all, but I believe every little bit I did helped. The support from others was a godsend, and formal therapies were pivotal as well.

A Necessary Foreword:

I was a happy child, just turned 5 years old, when the great change happened in Mom. I do believe my Mom's personality shift was spurred by two major life stressors: My parents bought a house in Hicksville and were in the process of moving when I became deathly ill. My appendix burst after a doctor misdiagnosed me as having a "stomach virus." The clinic did not do the bloodwork because the lab was closed. I had appendicitis actually, but then peritonitis developed when my appendix burst. My mother rushed me to the hospital after she read an article in a magazine about the symptoms of appendicitis.

My last hospital memory of Mom before she fell ill: My Mom told me, "Here is the call bell. Try to go to sleep, but if you need anything, ring the bell and the nurse will come." Inside I was filled with wonder. Wow! A magic bell! My mother left the room and sat in a waiting area, wondering if she should really go home. I was only 4 years old. I immediately rang the call bell as soon as no one was around. The nurse came in and turned on the light. "Are you OK?"

"Yes."

"What do you need?"

"Nothing."

I did this three times in a row to the poor nurse. My mother came in and said, "I can't leave you alone. Jonathan! Get my lawn chair from the garage and bring it back to the hospital. I'm sleeping here." Dad did just that. Mom slept in that lawn chair for almost four weeks, right next to my bed.

When I came home after my surgery to the new house, I healed a couple of weeks, and then it was my 5th birthday. My Mom made baked clams and threw me a big party. I loved it! But after the party was over, Mom was not the same. She yelled at me and my brother every day for no real reason. After a couple of weeks of that, I had a terrible, terrible dream:

My Mom and I were on opposite sides of a huge chasm in the earth. I saw her and waved excitedly, “Mommy! Mommy! Hi, Mommy!” She looked at me with a blank stare, seemed to not recognize me, and wandered away into the woods. I awoke crying. It was then that I knew I would never see my real mother again. Truth said, I would see her again, but it wouldn’t be for about 20 years.

My Mom was never formally diagnosed with schizophrenia. She did not see a doctor during her psychotic break. Her inability to self-evaluate, her rage, and sense of self-sufficiency prevented her from getting the help she desperately needed. The law states that Americans have the right to refuse treatment. So that was that. I use the word schizophrenia because of her symptoms: paranoia, hallucinations of all five senses, disordered thinking, unpredictability, and massive shifts in mood and temperament. She described her own condition as “nervous” and “aggravated,” always attributing others’ behaviors or needs as the cause. She believed there was a “rip in the Universe, causing logic to no longer have any association with poetry and statistics.” She was very paranoid that I might get raped. When I became a teen, it was always a big

problem if I wanted to leave the house. I lost many an argument when I pleaded to go out with my friends to a local flea market. At her worst, she spoke in a nonstop, booming loud voice that hurt my ears. She became infuriated if anyone interrupted to respond to anything she said. She chain-smoked and did crossword puzzles all night instead of sleeping. Then she slept for most of the day. She flew off the handle if anyone made a sound. She even spent time throwing rocks at birds because of their singing, which tortured her mind to no end. She was severely irritable and became angry whenever I presented any of my normal child's needs. If I needed help with anything, it was better to suffer than ask. She became incapable of going shopping in stores because of guaranteed arguments with cashiers. The housework, shopping, and errands fell upon my father, brother and me. She did drive herself to the beach every day. Mom cooked sometimes, yelled often, threatened my father with divorce regularly, and.... she raised me.

Chapter 1: Recounting What Happened To Gain Perspective

It was an unhappy childhood, but being that I knew no other life, I couldn't figure out exactly what was wrong. I wondered how my life and my family should be different. I did not know yet that my mother had mental illness, nor did I know that she was an abusive parent. You may wonder how I could be ignorant of such basic facts. I was in denial perhaps. Or maybe I just did not know the definition of abuse. Everything seemed like it was familiar. I knew something was not right, but actually, I suspected the problem was me! My mother had told me I was the problem, and she told me quite often. Now I believe I was brainwashed to think I was the problem. Over and over she ranted about me. "Maybe she is right," I thought. "Perhaps there was something about me or my behavior that causes my mother to feel angry." That is precisely why I was in dire need of a new perspective! (Or two or three.)

Having a best friend in junior high school really helped. Josie listened to me recount so many conversations with my mother: "She said..., I said..., then she said..., what do you think of that?" Each time, my best friend said, "That's crazy!" This made me feel better, because I thought the conversation was crazy too; but even then, I just didn't get it. I didn't/couldn't/wouldn't dare take "crazy" literally! The thought of being under the control of an imbalanced person is terrifying! Maybe I just couldn't handle that. So I went into denial. I protected the abuser. But the only way my logical

mind could really do that was by believing that I was at fault, not my abuser. That was the beginning of a horrific journey through more than two decades of self-hatred and suicidal feelings.

I thought I caused my mother's unhappiness, I internalized her criticisms, and I also inflicted abuse upon myself (physical, emotional, and psychological). I took her view of me much further....into absolute blackness. How does anyone recover from this? I will pause for a moment of silence for the abused children of the world.

I will not expound upon just how bad it got. It is just too sad, too scary, and too inhumane, how I treated myself. My perspective of humanity degraded into: We are all just like roaches upon the Earth. I suffered severe mental illness, unable to reconcile my feelings about humans with my mother's assertion that people should be treated with respect. I mimicked respect, but I sure didn't experience it.

I do believe that everybody has a dark side. And if you knew me now, you would perhaps be surprised at the thought that even I could have a dark side too. What happened to me was a clear example of denial, and it was also a great example of magical thinking, which is a psychological term that means I believed in something that is not possible. Magical thinking happened when I came to believe, in my child's mind, that I had caused my mother's illness simply by my existing and being present near my mother. I knew I had not actually done anything to make her angry. I was a good child, very calm and patient in temperament. But I imagined

that I must have some special power to make people miserable, angry, and cruel. How else could my mother have transformed in such a short period of time? This seemed like truth at the time.

Schizophrenia was not a term I knew. I had never been exposed to real mental illness. No one would teach a child about such things. How could I have known? There was no one to explain, because everyone else in my family was confused and bewildered by Mom's personality change. No one said anything about it at all, in fact.

All I really knew for sure was that I liked sleeping. I would rather be asleep, even if I had bad dreams. Anything was better than this. So in the summers and weekends of the school year, it was not unusual for me to sleep 12-14 hours a night. No one else thought that was unusual either. Later I came to learn that oversleeping is a symptom of depression. I was sick too.

Nightmares plagued me. I had dreams of running from someone who wanted to kill me. I also had a repeating dream of being swallowed by a tidal wave. I spent countless hours, awake and alone, in fantasy and deep thought. My fantasies were sometimes a mirror of my current situation. I cried alone, and feared leaving my room. There was so much fighting out there. So much rage and harsh words were bantering back and forth between my father and mother mostly. At times, my brother was yelled at too. But we never spoke together about our situation. We just kept

isolated, hiding in our separate bedrooms from the war that raged outside the safety of our bedroom doors.

To make matters worse, I wasn't very popular in school, to say the least. I had quite a few arch enemies. I didn't have friends at all in the 5th grade. I didn't want any. Kids were so mean to me because my hygiene was poor and my wardrobe was all hand-me-downs from the sixties. Additionally, my body developed sooner than anyone else's in my class. I caught a great deal of taunting for that. I didn't even know why women had breasts. Once I tried to ask my Mom what breasts are for. She laughed at me and never answered my question. That was the worst year of my life. I was like a little Shakespeare, pondering: "To be or not to be?" I contemplated suicide in an obsessive way. I was only ten years old.

Thank God school gave me a distraction from the suicidal thoughts. You would think that I'd be failing. But no, actually, I excelled in school. I excelled because I liked school work. I also excelled because I was afraid of what my mother would do to me if I didn't excel. She expected a lot of me. I'm glad at least I enjoyed most of the challenges school provided me with. I was in gifted and talented classes with straight A's, except for gym and social studies. I managed a B in social studies usually, but in gym, I got my B solely because of the fact that I was prepared with my gym suit every gym day. I was clumsy, slow, and uncoordinated when it came to being physically active. Now I look back on that with some measure of pity and amazement. I am surely a unique and strange bird! :)

Everyone develops in their own time, and their gifts show in time as well. But it was hard because nobody wanted me on their team. I couldn't throw, catch, hit the ball with the bat, or run. When I did hit the ball with the bat, it went straight into the pitcher's glove! He didn't even have to move. He just squatted motionless in his place with his glove open. This happened several times. Instant out! The only person who ran slower than me was an obese girl with severe asthma. I was one sorry gym player!

Looking back, of course I couldn't do any of those things!: I never practiced at home. I had other interests. I liked to draw. I was exceptionally good at copying pictures, and spent hours copying cartoon characters or illustrations from the encyclopedia. I also spent hours breaking rocks. I wanted to see what the rocks looked like inside. I especially loved to break quartz. I would throw one rock at a time against the rock pile. Often that rock, or a piece of it, flew up and hit me in the body or the face. That did not stop me. I was absolutely amazed by the results when I successfully broke open a rock. Some looked like diamonds to me. I had a rock collection and knew all the names of common rocks. I was an artist and a "rock hound;" not an athlete.

Most rocks look ordinary and even ugly on the outside, but inside are the crystals, like those highly valuable minerals artisans carve for ring-stones. Perhaps I was like those rocks. I felt so ordinary and ugly, but little did I know that once I was broken, something precious inside would reveal itself. I continued to aggressively smash rocks, like others

had smashed me, literally and figuratively. I sought desperately after the beauty within those rocks, because I couldn't see any beauty within myself. In the end, the prophecy of the rocks told true. There were many gifts inside me which blossomed years later. Compassion for those suffering would be among them.

Chapter 2: Call It What It Is: Abuse!

What is abuse? I would say that it can be any behavior that makes someone feel less than what they should esteem themselves; that is: a child of God. There are physical abuse and sexual abuse, but there are also verbal abuse and psychological abuse. The latter two are more subtle to recognize, because the damage they cause is invisible. The damage happens within the mind, cutting down the self-esteem, which is a very real thing. In addition, anxiety can become screamingly intense.

Being that I did not know I was being abused, and my mind was protecting my abuser, it was not possible for me to admit my situation. It took a year of therapy at age 25 to be able to say that I was abused. I felt so unsure of myself. My perceptions always had caved in to my mother's perceptions. If she said something, it must be true, I thought. In therapy with Tammy, I never really had an "Aha! moment." I just gradually came to accept my true situation over the course of a year of grueling once-a-week sessions. This was painful for me to a point that I nearly reached my threshold of emotional pain. It was almost enough to give me a nervous breakdown every session I had. But it was necessary and I knew it. I went to each session with the attitude that it was my mission to recover. I often ate frozen yogurt after each of my sessions, because I needed the comfort. Food was one of my coping mechanisms. It worked; somehow it worked.

Chapter 3: Getting Out of Abuse

During the time I was working with Tammy, my Mom was living in Delaware. She had left my father because she had a delusion that he was beating her. My father would never do that!! I was living with my Dad. Eventually Mom came back after I moved out. She then stated that my father was her "knight in shining armor." I did later visit my parents at their home in Hicksville, after her return, but these were very uncomfortable visits. Mom spoke non-stop in a booming loud voice. I had to put cotton in my ears. She chain-smoked while criticizing me. She talked about her hallucinations and delusions. She saw faces in the air and heard dogs barking, when there were no dogs barking. She heard music that was not playing. She smelled unpleasant odors in the air, which no one else smelled. Food tasted poisoned. All loud noises were amplified in her perception. Sounds tortured her. Even the sound of the birds singing grated on her nerves so much that she would stand at the door and throw rocks at them, hoping to silence them. She was unaware that there was anything wrong with her, but she directed her perceptions of something being wrong onto the world: She told me, "Things that used to be funny are not funny anymore. It's because there is a rip in the Universe." She said this with a sort of dazed, overwhelmed look on her face. She thought that there was nothing she could do about it. I felt sad. How could I help my mother? I spent hours and days and months turning the problem over and over in my head, trying to come up with a solution. No solution came to me. The situation was impossible for me.

She did not know she was sick and she did not want help. No one, by law, could force her to get help, unless she was a danger to herself or others.

One day I went over for a visit to the house in Hicksville, and I had a visit that went fairly well. By the time I got home, a message was on my answering machine. It was my mother speaking in a wicked, cackling voice accusing me, "You little bitch!" I forget what else she said, but it was enough. I smashed a nearby coffee mug to the floor. This message of abuse was the last straw for me. It was hard to believe that she would leave a message like that after we had such a strangely pleasant visit. I stopped speaking to her for several years after that. That was my way of protecting myself. And it worked. I was able to do some healing. I went to 12-step meetings, saw my therapist, and wrote in my diary. I was living with my boyfriend at the time.

Not long after that, I wanted to leave my boyfriend. I told my brother; and he invited me to stay with him, on the condition that I found a job soon. I moved in with my brother in Queens, and then in 1995 I was hospitalized for severe major depression. I was at New York Hospital of Queens, where they applied me for PSCH housing (Professional Service Center for the Handicapped housing program). I knew my brother wanted me out, because I was still not working. My roommate in the hospital became my roommate in the PSCH apartment program. It was in those years that I did some healing. But I was still plagued by anxiety. I had to keep moving, faster and faster. I drove very fast in my car. If I stood still or sat still, it was like a tornado

would hit me. I'd start crying and my emotions would crash. So I kept constantly busy. And when I laid down in bed at night, my body hurt from the top of my head to the tip of my toes. I'd fall instantly to sleep.

Keeping busy was a coping mechanism. I did not even sit to eat. I'd be eating a hotdog on the way to the subway. Or I'd eat while driving. I was highly addicted to sugar. It got so bad that I stopped eating regular food. I ate only ice cream, brownies, cookies, cake, and candy. It was definitely a time I barely managed to get through. But at least I was not being abused any more by anyone. Only by myself was I being mistreated--I was my own worst enemy.

Chapter 4: Recognizing My Part of the Problem

I say that the abuser was a problem, and she was, but I also had a problem that complicated the situation. I believe I may have been born with a chemical imbalance--a mood disorder. I had a very difficult childhood, and I do believe that the resulting emotions take up space in the brain of an abused person. These emotions can rise at any time, with or without a triggering event. So this is the story of how I discovered I had a problem: I was about 13 years old. It seemed that every day, something bad happened.

Sometimes my mother would criticize and point out my pimples or my hair or my weight. Other days it was a person at school who would set me off into a sadness by some nasty comment. But this particular day, no one said anything awry to me. I was having a good day. I was just about to start a new activity, alone in my room, when my emotions crashed like an airplane flying into the ground. I suddenly started to cry and became suicidal for no apparent reason. That was the day I realized I had a problem, and it wasn't anyone else's fault. I had to own this and fix it. And I knew I needed help to do that. I sought a therapist in the yellow pages. I found one that was near my house. The ad said, "Sliding fee scale." My payment to see a social worker was my weekly \$5.00 allowance. My transportation was my bicycle. Anti-depressants did not yet exist. It was about 1984 back then. I got some relief by speaking to the woman, but I could not overcome my instability. I did not tell her that I had been experiencing suicidal episodes since the age of 5

years old. I told her that I didn't want my mom to know I was coming to her. I was terrified by the thought of what my mother would say about me seeing a therapist. I was sure she would stop me too. The social worker agreed to allow me to see her anyway. She never did contact my mother, even though she had my phone number. It was a blessed thing to have someone on my side to give emotional support; but, like I said, it did not fix my mood and the crashes I experienced.

Let's fast-forward to the age of Prozac. It came on the market in 1986, according to Wikipedia. I heard about it on the radio news when I was out somewhere. It was good news. It was some years before I tried it. It was about 1994. Psychologist Tammy referred me to a psychiatrist.

The anti-depressants build up in the blood over a period of about two weeks. They elevate baseline mood to a normal level, but they do not interfere with emotions from environmental causes. If my ice cream cone falls on the pavement, I will be sad, whether or not I am on Prozac. If I win the lottery, I will be extremely happy. If I go to jail, I will be extremely distraught. Prozac affects baseline mood. So if I am normally melancholy without Prozac, I will be raised to a neutral and normal level of spirit with Prozac. From that new baseline, I experience life's ups and downs. The quality of my life was improved by ten times! Prozac could not fix my instability however. I still had occasional crashes into suicidal episodes when I made a mistake, or when someone rejected me. I did not find a solution to this until I started reading the Bible much later.

After a while, I was changed from Prozac to a different anti-depressant because Prozac gave me headaches. I tried different ones. Paxil made me dry-heave all day. My throat would clench like as if I was vomiting, but nothing came. Zoloft gave me morning terrors and caused me to feel overwhelmed. I also could not concentrate at all at times, even to finish a thought. It seemed to "wash my thoughts away before I could come to a conclusion." But I did not give up because of mental and emotional side effects. I persevered. I worked as a team with my doctor and therapist. I informed them both right away as soon as I realized I was getting a side effect from the medicine. I allowed my doctor to safely wean me off Zoloft. Then I was given Nortriptyline, which was an older anti-depressant, they told me. I tried it and it has worked for me very well. I am still weaning off it at the age of 48. Weaning off is taking years. My side effects used to be dry mouth and constipation. These were a trade-off for a better quality of life with regard to my mood. I also took the suggestion to see a therapist once a week. I did for years. My more recent therapist, Allison, helped me with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder issues by using a procedure called a "rose." For nearly two decades, I'd experience severe terror every night while trying to fall asleep. Plus, I'd have the worst nightmares ever if I fell asleep on my back. The next night after the "rose," the terror was gone, and I was able to sleep on my back again. The rose helped me to process my trauma after all those years. Allison gave me her blessing in about 2007. She said I did not need to see a therapist any more. And she was right!

Chapter 5 : Exercise and Creative Expression

Exercise is known to help alleviate depression. I liked to ride my bicycle. This kept me out of deep depression for a long time. Although my pain still was there, it was important to keep moving. Moving makes a person to feel as though they have some action they can take for their well-being. It works stress and anxiety out of the body. It also produces endorphins, which are the body's feel-good hormones. Riding a bicycle also got me out of the house, which was a wonderful respite from the screaming and yelling, the fear and the worry, and the self-implosion that resulted from constant outside criticisms. By sending my focus outward, looking at the houses and people I'd pass by, I got myself out of my head. My head was a very dangerous place to be! But it was nice to see a world that showed some extent of self-care: lawns neatly manicured, hedges trimmed, cars being washed, etc. The world seemed for a moment like it was not such a bad place.

Creative expression is very important as well. Whether I am drawing a pretty house with a dog in the yard or a picture about how angry I feel, I am asserting myself to the world. It is so important to “keep current with one’s feelings,” meaning to deal with emotions as they arise. This way, all the emotions do not build up like a trash compactor until nervous breakdown occurs. I kept current as best as I could through talking to friends and writing, but I found it disheartening that in the past the world did not seem to be much interested in

my art. My creativity came to a screeching and despairing halt for some years. When I came to a day program for people with mental illness (IPRT) in 1995, I was encouraged to start doing art again. Getting back into art was very good for me. Our IPRT practitioner, Shirley, even arranged for us to do several gallery shows. We did one in an Albany legislative building, as well as several local shows. This made me feel like my work was being seen, which was very important to me. I did not want to feel like I was doing art for no reason. I couldn't do art just for me, because I didn't feel I had any worth at the time. I wanted others to see my work, which made me feel like I had done something positive in the world.

My friend Timothy did artwork with me. Sometimes we stayed up very late drawing. My suicidal depressions usually made me feel that I wanted to be alone, but this friend encouraged me to draw with him even if I was feeling suicidal. That was very healing to me, even though he later told me that he felt kind of scared. At the time, the message was: "I want to be with you no matter what you feel." The art I produced when I was suicidal was intense. I sliced up the paper with a razor blade instead of self-harming. I drew a beautiful view from a rooftop, because I wanted to jump off. I drew pictures of ugly things because I felt ugly inside. And the picture of the ugliest thing sold! I believe it was Jon who bought it. It was a colored pencil drawing of an Indian paint pot with a sunflower stem in it. The head of the sunflower was broken off and gone. I wrote various despairing thoughts across the background, with the sentences written in different directions:

“The Dinosaur”

People wait to see the colors I bleed.
I'm telling you, I always wanted to die,
Even in the midst of euphoria.
They said I could do great things.
Why was love destroyed?
Will I die for my cold-heartedness?
To live: It's a question of obedience.
I thought it looked like a dinosaur,
But really it was a piece of garbage.
It didn't hold any meaning.
It was too old.
It was too bright.
There are too many pictures in the world already.
When it's done, what should I do with it?
It's a warm object in a cold place.
This is no place for me no matter where I go.
There are no more dinosaurs.
Why are they trying to save me?
It's a clear blue day, but it's raining inside.
There is no place to go.
I'm in the colors now

When I learned that someone wanted to buy it, I was puzzled. I think I took about \$60 for it. The same man bought my favorite sunflower watercolor as well. It was a side view of a sunflower that made it look like a hilly landscape. It was mostly royal blue and pristine yellow. The seeds looked like a chain-link fence sort of, going into the distance with perspective.

It was a great experience for me to have my work sold. Even if you are not a great artist, and nobody buys what you make, it is very important to keep doing art. Someone may in the future cherish your work because they cherish you. And just like exercise, making art is a positive action that releases anxiety, tension, and other emotions. Keeping current with what we feel is vital to mental health.

Chapter 6: A Minimum Standard of Living

When I came out of the psychiatric hospital in 1995, I did not love myself yet. I tried: I tried in therapy, I tried in 12-step, and I tried with positive self-talk. I was able to find friends who saw me in a positive light. This was a start, but it had an Achilles' heel. I could be happy and love myself when I saw myself through the eyes of my friends, but what happened if I upset my friends? This put me in a bad position. My only positive self-esteem came from the person who was currently angry at me. And the result was that my self-esteem took a massive dive into a suicidal episode. It didn't happen that often, but it was often enough to make me an unstable person. I did find a solution to this problem, but it wasn't for a few years. So I lived my life with roller coaster self-esteem: Up, down, even, up, up, down, even, down, even down, down, down. Every down was a danger to my life. It was so painful to hate myself again. Yet, I was helplessly barraged by negative feelings, active self-hatred, and memories of my past. I felt that even my mother never really loved me. I remembered the voices of earlier classmates who used to laugh at me. The memories of their laughter and derision echoed inside my mind. Before long, I was transported to a place I called "the Wasteland." It was a mental landscape I imprisoned myself into after I managed to get myself alone. Usually I would just go home and lay in bed. Then the Wasteland would take over. It was a mental landscape of a desert just after dusk. Everything was gray and barren. The wind whistled through my hair, reminding

me of just how alone I was. There was no help for me then. I'd stay there until I fell asleep.

Sleep was a reset for me. Most of the time I woke up with some emotional well-being. Then I was able to go to school, or wherever I was scheduled to be. Life went on, and I had another chance to learn how to live.

I read about minimum standards of living in several situations: prisons, jails, and mental institutions. Although these may not have applied to my life situation directly at the time, they gave me clues as to what were supposed to be human rights. I had a right to eat, a right to speak to friends and family, a right to write and receive letters, and the right to be free from abuse. I decided this was a good starting place with learning how to treat myself. It was a beginning out of abuse and self-abuse.

Someone asked me, "Do all people have the right to be loved?" I said, "No; I don't think so." I was thinking of someone perfectly wretched that I did not like. It was an IPRT practitioner, Brad, who had asked the question; and he told me that yes, everyone has the right to be loved. I was bewildered by this. If that were true, then how could it be carried out in this less-than-perfect world? Perhaps that perfectly wretched person I was thinking of did not receive love, and that is why today they are perfectly wretched. That made some sense. But how could it be made to work, I still did not understand. If my mother did not love me, then how could she be forced to love me? Perhaps she should be allowed to have her negative feelings, but she could let

someone else try to give me the love. However, would that feel adequate? I don't know that anyone's love could be interchanged for a mother's love, but it can't hurt to try. Without love, people become bitter (or perfectly wretched); and I was determined to not end up that way.

I will always remember what it was like to be unloved, and I will forever jump forward to fill the gap for those who are in that same situation. So in a way, my experience gave me a burden for those who feel unloved. I think that is a positive outcome, considering my situation. "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade," as the saying goes. Great idea!

For much of my teen years and adulthood I had poor eating habits. I would overeat one day and eat very little the next, skipping many meals. This was how I maintained my weight and my love of overeating, especially sweets. At one point in my 12-step recovery, I came to a program that suggested I eat 3 meals a day whether I felt like it or not. This became part of my minimum standard of living. At first, it did not feel very good. I was on a fasting day, planning to skip breakfast and lunch. I realized that I must eat breakfast for my recovery, even though it was not my habit at that time. I poured cereal and stuffed it into my mouth. It felt like self-abuse and forced feeding. But I continued eating. It tasted good. After a while, I got used to the idea and liked eating three meals a day. I had broken the cycle of self-starvation. I still liked to overeat, but I reserved that for special events once in a while, rather than every other day. I did gain some weight, but was still close to normal weight. At the same time, I quit sugar! I weaned myself off of it by substituting

fresh fruit, dried fruit, and frozen grapes and frozen bananas. I went through a month of terrible withdrawals. I had extremely low energy. I had stomachaches, some dizziness, and constant cravings. After a month, the withdrawals were over and I was free!!!! My quality of life increased dramatically with these small changes.

Chapter 7: Accepting Myself & Others

Part of my journey was to become well-adjusted to who I am. I had to accept my physical body, my sexuality, my shortcomings, and my areas of weakness. I also had to respect my process of finding myself. I wished I could change my physical body. I did not like being short in stature. I hated having stubby thighs! But worst of all, I hated being female. I equated being female with being weak, stupid, and victimized. I had to befriend women and get to know them. I had to learn about pregnancy and childbirth, how special they are. I came to realize in time that I was not stupid; I was just two years younger than my brother. That's why, when we were children, he could do things that I couldn't. It all just took time to grow. I can't say how I came to accept myself, but I can say that it took years. I just had to persevere. Life can be awkward. Awkwardness is part of development; just push through it!

God put us here. Living the life He gave us is obedience to Him, plain and simple. For me, obedience to God was a coping mechanism. Let me explain how I came to the conclusion that living through trials is a necessary obedience to God: The fifth grade was the worst year of my life. I had no friends. I was teased and criticized mercilessly at school. Sometimes I was beaten up by boys. I was screamed at mercilessly at home. I just wanted to die. I prayed, "God, when will my life be over? Soon, I hope."
No answer.

“Is suicide a sin? What about my family? Will they be devastated? I think so. Then it is WRONG. I must not die by my own hand. It has to be You, God, Who makes the decision!”

I paused. My guts wrenched.

“Please God, make the decision to end my life. Any way You want to do that is fine.”

No reply.

“Why can’t I exchange places with someone who is dying, so they can live? After all, there are so many people with cancer and so many people who die in car accidents. That could be me. They want to live. Let them live. I want to die. Let me die.” Each time I got in a car, I thought, “Maybe today God will take me in a car accident.” He didn’t. A month passed.

Back at the school swing-set alone, I asked God what happened. “You know how I am suffering. Why didn’t You take me yet?” Then I begged God to take me.

Needless to say, He did not. Even at ten years old I could draw a conclusion. My conclusion was this: “God must want me to be alive for some reason. But why?” I wondered. I later managed to answer my own question: “Maybe someday I will do something important. Perhaps I will save someone’s life or invent something.” It was hard to imagine what could be in my future. I could not imagine ever being happy. I didn’t even think I would ever grow up. I felt like I would always be a school child. God did not speak to me audibly, so I was at a loss for understanding. But I did understand the most important thing: God wanted me alive.

I determined to be obedient to His will for me, no matter how hard it was. And it was harder than I ever dreamed possible.

I didn't want to be friends with the other children at school, because they were always making fun of my body. One day my mother had to pick me up at school. I don't remember why. Maybe it was for parent-teacher conferences. As we were walking out, I burst into tears. I told my mother that I had no friends and everyone was so mean. She responded by threatening me. She told me that I'd better come home every day and tell her what I did that day to make a friend. I was very afraid of my mother, so I did what she said. I tried to be a friendly person for the first time in a year. It actually worked! By the 6th grade, I had a small circle of friends. No more anti-social behavior for me! I felt a small taste of happiness. I began to learn more social skills from that time on.

Chapter 8: Learning to Think Positive

In adulthood, I realized that negative thoughts were harmful and I wanted to re-train my mind. I wanted to overcome what some may call “old tapes.” This means old messages we received in childhood over and over still play in our heads. So I learned about affirmations from 12-step groups. And soon I was writing my own that were custom for my problems and situations. I posted about ten at a time on the wall in front of my bathroom sink. I read them over and over throughout the day when I brushed my teeth and when I washed my hands. I also read them if I woke up in the middle of the night to get a drink of water. This is a most suggestible time for the mind. The affirmations went straight into my brain! I revised and revised them. I kept writing new ones. Then I moved on to posting visualizations for myself.

Affirmations I Wrote For Myself:

(The reason I wrote the affirmation is in lower case & the affirmation itself is in CAPITALS.)

My apartment is messy/ hair tangled/clothes wrinkled, etc.:
THE MESS DOESN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT ME, A
CHILD OF GOD.

Self-conscious/fear of criticism:

I AM FULLY ACCEPTABLE IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD.

Self-punishing/fear of failure or mistakes:
JESUS PAID IT ALL, EVEN IF I FAIL.

Anxious to find out or know something:
I KNOW EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW FOR TODAY.

Crying out for freedom:
HOW CAN I GRANT MY OWN WISHES?

Others suffering- I feel responsible (irrational thought):
WE ALL SUFFER FROM SIN AND I AM SUPPORTIVE.

Fear I am contaminated:
EVERY PART OF ME IS IN CHRIST JESUS

Feeling that part of me is foreign:
EVERYTHING THERE IS AS IT SHOULD BE JUST FOR
TODAY.

I don't want to stop compulsive behaviors:
ABSTINENCE IS NOT A SACRIFICE, BUT INFINITE GAIN.

I imagine I am causing evil:
THERE IS NO POWER IN ME BUT CHRIST.

Need to change my focus:
I WILL DISMISS MY THOUGHTS AT WILL.

Emotions are unbearable/bottled up:
I CAN CRY ANYWHERE AT ANY TIME.

Self-esteem problem:

I AM WORTHY, A CHILD OF GOD.

Low self-esteem:

I AM FULL OF RICHES.

Made a mistake:

I WILL LEARN FROM MY MISTAKES.

Anxious:

GREAT PEACE AND LOVE LIES OVER MY HOUSE.

Feeling falsely responsible:

I AM NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANYONE ELSE'S
FEELINGS BUT MY OWN.

Feeling trapped in routine/trapped in general:

I HAVE FREEDOM AND I USE IT.

Poor body image:

MY BODY IS GOOD.

Focusing on others' lives/codependent:

I FOCUS ON MY OWN NEEDS FIRST.

Self-esteem:

MY SELF-ESTEEM IS DEPENDENT ON WHO I AM, GOD'S
CHILD.

Controlled by others:

MY VOICE IS STRONGER.

Others blame me:

I AM FORGIVEN BY THE MERCY OF CHRIST.

For growing self-love:

I AM ONE GREATLY BELOVED- PARAPHRASED FROM
DANIEL 9:23 NKJV

Strong feelings:

FEELINGS CANNOT KILL ME.

Other Affirmations:

I DON'T NEED APPROVAL TODAY.

I AM WORTH JUST AS MUCH AS ANYBODY ELSE.

I DESERVE TO HAVE VERY GOOD FRIENDS.

I AM NOT WHAT I DO.

I AM IMPORTANT.

IT'S OK TO REST AWHILE AND DO NOTHING.

I EXIST.

GREAT PEACE AND LOVE LAY OVER MY APARTMENT.

I HAVE FREEDOM AND I USE IT.

MY BODY IS GOOD. I AM GOOD, THEREFORE I CARE
FOR MYSELF.

I WAS NOT TO BLAME.

I ACKNOWLEDGE MY ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

Visualizations:

These are brief ideas of what I wanted to come true in my future:

I can always control my behavior.

I will have a career I love.

I am willing to release my compulsions.

I will use my writing and art as an outlet.

I keep current with my emotions.

I am able to meet my financial needs and wants.

I let my anger protect me.

I am growing in prosperity.

I will embrace my imperfections; They are an integral part of me.

I am full of riches.

I will let love in.

I will learn to do art work for myself.

Love is everywhere, and I am loving and lovable.

I can overcome my past in every way.

I have respect for myself, whether I do things right or wrong.

I am achieving my goals.

I can accept money and success.

I deserve to be happy.

What will I do for myself today?

I will find a balance in my life.

I will bring beauty to the world with my art and my talents.

I will inspire others.

I will not help others at my own expense; I will think first.

I will be needed by others in a healthy way.

I will decide my boundaries and enforce them.

I will get in touch with my anger.

I can go through training and fulfill my potential.
I will become independent financially.
I am worthy and deserving of a good job.
I will reach a point of healing.
I will learn from my mistakes.
I can offer my will and my life to God today.
I work well at a relaxed spiritual pace.
I accept the goodness of help.
Abundance is available to me.
I have the courage to change.
I allow my efforts to pay off for me.
My voice is stronger.
I can readjust.
I am making peace with imperfection.

In writing custom affirmations and visualizations for yourself, keep in mind that all words in the phrase or sentence must be positive words. For instance, instead of writing I WILL OVERCOME MY FEARS, write: I WILL FEEL A SENSE OF LOVE AND SAFETY. Do not meditate upon a negative word like “fear.” Re-phrase and use the opposite word “safety.”

Chapter 9: Learning How to Work Around a Disability

I once went to hear a Catholic preacher speak. Patrick A. Martin was blind from a young age. He wrote a book called *Log in a Stream*. I have lived and taught the principle of the book for many years. The idea is that, when you have a disability, you should not beat your head against the wall trying to do what you cannot do. Instead, do something else, something you CAN do. Get really good at that skill/those skills. Eventually you will overcome. You cannot go through your disability, but you CAN go around it! I did! I was good at learning. I learned all I could while I was on Social Security. I took writing courses, attended 12-step groups, and went to IPRT. I also read many very great self-help books. One of my favorites was *Boundaries* by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. Eventually, I went back to work in 2004. I went off Social Security just as I had hoped. I became a recreation therapist for a year and a half, and then I became an elementary school teacher for special education students. I was a Teaching Fellow. The Department of Education put me through graduate school, and I received my master's degree from Pace University in 2008. I taught for three years and then made a career change to nursing!

Chapter 10: Envisioning Success

My dream of becoming a nurse seemed crushed before my nursing education even began. In my last year of high school I was applying to colleges. I told my parents that I wanted to be a nurse. They both said no. My mother had gone to nursing school and dropped out. "It just isn't a good profession," she said. I cried a lot. I had no idea what else I would do with my life. I just kind of floated here and there after that. I tried all types of summer jobs from snack bar attendant to clothing store cashier to warehousing picker/packer. I received a full scholarship to Long Island University at Southampton, but I didn't know what to major in. I took a lot of science courses, but then ended up getting my degree in fine art. That's a story in itself. I continued to wander through different types of jobs. I even tried meat-packing and warehousing. I tried to forget about wanting to be a nurse. And I succeeded in forgetting for some time.

In 1995, after a hospitalization for depression, I went on Social Security disability benefits and lived in a PSCH housing program. Professional Service Center for the Handicapped persuaded me to attend their IPRT, a day program for people with mental illness. It was hard to accept where I was at. I wanted to be useful to society. I wanted to be able to work. I remembered that I wanted to be a nurse. I tried to go through VESID (Vocational Education Services for Individuals with Disabilities), but it didn't work out. Although I was accepted to a private school, VESID (now called ACCESS) would only pay for the least expensive

school. I was at a loss to know which school was the least expensive that I could apply to. My VESID counselor would not tell me, nor would she any longer take my calls. I was new to the city and Internet did not yet exist for me. How could I know which is the cheapest school?! So that was that. My dream of becoming a nurse was again crushed. If I couldn't do that, then I just didn't know what else to do! I thought that maybe I could marry a rich man, like my grandmother had always advised. Then I also thought that I might be on SSI for the rest of my life, as one counselor suggested at the IPRT. "Most likely, every single client of this IPRT will be on Social Security the rest of their life." That was an even more crushing thought. I found it to be quite an assumption. I decided later that the counselor was wrong, at least in my case. I was determined to work just as soon as I possibly could. But the question was: Is it possible for someone in my situation to recover? I just didn't know. I did not know anyone who had been in any similar situation. The possibility of impossibility plagued me.

Then one day I saw a sign on the wall of my IPRT day program (IPRT stands for "Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitative Treatment). The sign said, "People with mental illness enrich our lives." Below that statement was listed many names of famous people who had made incredible accomplishments despite mental illness. Many of the names were unfamiliar to me. I didn't know who Sylvia Plath or Oscar Wild were. However I knew Lincoln, Beethoven, and Michelangelo. I found the sign to be most encouraging. I wrote down all the names immediately. I proceeded to read a biography on each person. These were

all famous people. Maybe I'd be famous too one day! If only I could invent something, write something, or do some amazing art work. I learned that success is possible!

Envisioning my own success was a powerful pre-cursor to my career. It really helped! I found a great positive image: It was a photo of several smooth stones piled upon each other, each getting smaller and smaller until the top stone was smallest. "I am that top stone!" I thought. I meditated upon the top stone. I did not know what I would do to get to the top, but I knew how I'd feel when I got there! I'd feel on top of the world!

I also imagined what it would be like to meet a truly great mate. I wanted a man who would respect me, be kind to me, and be a partner to me. I envisioned that my great partner was somewhere out in the world right now; I just haven't met him yet. I put up a personal profile on www.OKcupid.com. I also used other dating websites as well. I spent a lot of time searching through profiles, messaging men, and chatting with people.

I was living in a basement apartment with one window that led to an airshaft. The apartment building went up three stories before I could see the sky. I had a door to the airshaft. One day, I went out into the airshaft court by myself. I don't remember why. I found a porcelain statue on top of a broken lid that may have belonged to a porcelain box. It was beautiful! I picked it up. The statue of the prince came off the broken



lid easily. I took him inside and examined and washed him. He was lined with gold. He was a Caucasian prince on bended knee, apparently proposing to a woman. He had short hair and was very handsome. I said to myself, "This is a good omen of finding a mate soon!" Only a month later, on a dating website, I met the man who would become my husband. We texted for two weeks before we met. Today I have the greatest mate!!! Positive thinking really pays off. And the statue I still consider to have been a message from God, falling from somebody's window. I still have it!

Chapter 11: Dream and Imagine My Future

It is so important to dream, and dream big! What would I do for the world if I could? What fruits can I bear? How would I want to be remembered if I passed on? Could I leave a legacy to the world? What would that legacy be?

"Praise God for Vision!"

These dreams are living:

Glowing, growing, flying.

They are filled with blessing, power, lightning

These dreams are pulsing, pumping, breathing.

Do not squash them!

They may fight back, struggle, push,

And rise up before us, always rising again.

Frenetic, energetic, expanding!

How can the world hold them?

And yet the world was made for them

And for me....

If I only spread my wings to dream;

God's gifts, those dreams, go everywhere!

Suddenly miracles lift up my very feet!

Then God's will is made flesh in me.

I always wanted to bring comfort to the hurting, the sick, and the dying. That's why I wanted to become a nurse. I didn't end up becoming a nurse until the age of 42. I was glad it finally happened, since it surely seemed an impossible dream. In 2007 my mom passed away. In 2010 my father

agreed to help me become a nurse. He lent me about \$25,000 over time for tuition and rent. I worked as a home health aide throughout nursing school as well. My aspiration was fulfilled when I graduated LaGuardia in December of 2013!

There is nothing else like achieving a life dream! It feels like being in the one-and-only GROOVE! Can anyone understand why a person has the dream they have? It has to do with psychology. The ideas of healing, alleviating pain/discomfort, and helping people make me feel special like nothing else can. When I help someone, I have a feeling of deep satisfaction, like I have fulfilled my life purpose. I wanted to be a psychiatric nurse because of what happened with my mother. However, I couldn't find anyone who was willing to train me for psychiatric nursing. So I went and worked in a jail for ICE one year and then went into a school nursing career.

I still feel in my bones that I am a psychiatric nurse. So I created www.darknesstolight.info. It is a suicide prevention website. I believe it has helped many people. The website was getting about 350 hits a month at one time. I made business cards for the website and I give them to homeless people along with a dollar or a granola bar. So ha! In my mind I am a psychiatric nurse!

My other aspirations are still floating around in my head, but I am fulfilling them little by little. All in good time! I want to be a peacemaker, an evangelist, and a faith healer. I want to invent something, do another musical recording, and learn to

play an instrument with greater skill. I'd love to write a hymn or devotional song. I'd love to make money with my art work. I want to be an author, and a children's evangelist. I feel I am fulfilling some of my goals now. Others are a big step away, but I believe I will find a way in the future to realize all my dreams.

Chapter 12: Getting to Know God

From a young age I always thought to myself that life must be some sort of test that God was conducting, so that He could see who He wants in heaven. At times I lost sight of this, but eventually came back to the realization that there is a bigger picture to life. Yes; there are accomplishments to be achieved, but the most important one of all is to make it to the kingdom of heaven.

My testimony goes back to when I was 12 years old. I was walking through the mall with my parents and some people were handing out free booklets. I received the Book of Luke in its entirety. I read it and loved it so much that I did not want to put it down. I finished it at 2am, reading it by flashlight with the bedcovers over my head. (I was not allowed to stay up that late.) I was enthralled by the powers of Jesus to heal various incurable sicknesses and maladies. I prayed that Jesus would give me this power to heal others. I wanted to be like Him. I wanted to make the world a better place where people did not have to suffer. I committed myself to Jesus and was saved.

So the next Sunday morning, I requested my mother if I could go to church on my own by bus. Her eyes opened wide and she looked fearful at the thought. She said, "No! Church is not a good place. That's where they indoctrinate people! I know; I went to Catholic school. No, Sarah; you cannot go to church." After some debate which, as usual, I lost; I went in my room and cried. I promised God that

someday when I am older, when I am free, I will return to church. I did remember my promise always, but it was many years until it could be fulfilled.

When I went away to college, there was a church service 8am on Sunday mornings, but I never did go. I knew I had need, but I was depressed and unmotivated; I just wanted to sleep in.

When I got into PSCH housing program, I went to church a few times. And when I got my own apartment through Transitional Services, I woke up one day, and realized that I wanted to sing praises to God. I chose a Catholic Church and joined the choir. I was in that choir maybe 6 months. Then someone offended me because they felt I sat in the wrong pew. The choristers had unmarked pews for sopranos, for altos, and for bass singers. They also did not like it that I had to get up twice to get water because my pill got stuck in my throat. That was the end of that. I never went back. No one had my number so no one called me. A few months later, a neighbor invited me to her church. It was Doreen inviting me to Flushing Seventh Day Adventist Church. I went and I loved the Doug Batchelor film seminar I attended! I stood for baptism at the end of the seminar. Everybody was so happy about that! So I studied with the pastor, Pastor John, at my home and attended that church on Saturdays. I decided that I wanted to read the whole Bible before getting baptized, and I did. I read on the subway, I read at home, I read everywhere I went. I was very hungry for the truth. I was baptized in 1998 at 27 years old.

I want to read to you a Bible verse that changed my life just before I was baptized. It did nothing short of a miracle for me.

At that time, I was still involved with some of the most odd and sinful individuals (and some were supposedly sober individuals from alcohol or drugs). Some were abusive, usually merely because of their disease of addiction. It's not a pretty picture. I sought to improve my choices, and I did, little by little make better choices. However that was intellectual. The ceiling I hit was purely emotional. I didn't feel right being with an upstanding person. I couldn't describe why. It was a self-esteem issue. Also, I was extremely bored by upstanding, "normal" people. I found them not fascinating, not interesting, and not familiar. Therefore, though I had corrected my mood, had corrected many behaviors, and was seeing a therapist, I could not make the leap I was wishing for. Does God do miracles for us today? My testimony is that yes; He does! Here is that precious Bible verse that convinced me that God loves me, and also healed my self-esteem:

Daniel 9:23

"At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, *for you are greatly beloved*; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision."

Daniel was fasting for three weeks and confessing his sins and the sins of his people. He knew that a prophetic period of 70 years of suffering for the Israelites was coming to an end, according to the prophet Jeremiah. The Lord's answer

was a vision given by the angel Gabriel. Gabriel was detained by Satan 21 days, while Daniel fasted. Now in the above verse, the angel finally arrived to tell Daniel that his prayer was heard from the start, and he is greatly beloved of God.

God's love for Daniel was easy to understand. You see, I already knew a little bit about the Daniel that the angel was speaking to. So I knew why he was beloved to God. Daniel prayed at his window each day, kneeling and making supplication for his people. Not only did he do this, but he was honest in all that he did. Not only this, but he had a most excellent spirit. He was positive, bright, helpful, and trustworthy. I realized that the only thing Daniel had that I didn't have was that he prayed on his knees every day. This was something I could do. It sounded easy enough. So why wouldn't God love me? Why not me? I determined to be that person that God would love.

Daniel 9:23 gave that leap of faith to me. It was God's love that healed me. I decided that I would from now on see myself through the eyes of God, rather than through the eyes of my mother or my peers. And from that moment, I really didn't care what people thought of me. I only cared what God thought of me. I no longer needed approval of others. I only needed approval from God. I quit being a people-pleaser. I became a God-pleaser and servant of the Lord.

This healing did not instantly solve my attraction to odd and sinful people. I thought it was okay to date a sober

alcoholics/addict. I'm sure there are many noble ex-alcoholics and ex-addicts, but God finally taught me a lesson I'd never forget. He put me on a roller coaster ride! And the lesson was this: Just because the man wants to be sober, doesn't mean he will stay sober. And even if he does get sober, if he doesn't work on himself and find God, a sober alcoholic can do just as much damage as an active one! And that's another whole story. It was a roller coaster that took me across the country and caused me to hit a "bottom" that was financially devastating, emotionally despairing, and frankly embarrassing.

I can tell you that I had to actually force myself to associate with normal people, no matter how boring they seemed, and no matter how uncomfortable I felt. I did this, and did it until I found that normal, upstanding citizens are not actually boring. Once I got to know them, I found that each person is a universe of potential, and a great support, a repository of talents, a character to be admired, and not abusive. I became attracted to people who could teach me new things. I learned to love stability in others. And that was it! I healed to be the person I am today.

My healing is a victory not many who were in my position will ever see. But I believed it was possible. I trusted God. I put in effort. And I allowed the Holy Spirit to guide me into all truth.

Chapter 13: Forgiving Myself

I made it through the most difficult times by obsessing about someone of the opposite gender. In the 5th grade, I fell in love with Josiah, a boy one year older than me. I loved him from afar, from the lonely swing-set no one ever used but me. He was so far away that he seemed like an ant, but I could make him out even from that far. I just stared and stared and swung on the swings every day. Although this worked for me to help me to survive the loneliness, it came to be a problem in many ways later. Obsessions are never good. I learned that I'm better off "deciding not to obsess" before an obsession begins. I had to forgive myself at some point for the pain obsessions caused me. I had to get myself into some kind of balance mentally. I later tried other coping mechanisms: alcohol was an occasional one. That I gave up completely when I became an Adventist. Looking back with compassion on myself, I can only say that I'm glad I somehow survived to see today.

Chapter 14: Forgiving Others- That Is, Everyone!

At the age of 34, I forgave my mother. Today I thank God that she was well until I was five years old. Because sometime before a child turns five, there is a very important formation of character: A child learns to trust others. Without the ability to trust, I'm not sure I'd have friends or would be in a church today. After all, I had to trust God. I had to trust therapists and people who were trying to help me. And I had to be willing to open my heart to the unfamiliar kinds of people who made me so uncomfortable with their kindness.

My healing was just the beginning of miracles the Lord would do in my life. When I said I forgave my mother, this meant that I suddenly became able to pray for her for the first time when I was 34 years old. "At the beginning of your supplications the command went out." -Daniel 9:23. Well, God actually answered my prayer. At her age of 56, after 29 years of rage and break from reality, my mother's schizophrenia and hallucinations subsided. She became nearly normal. She was still eccentric, but she was quite a lot like I remembered her being before I turned five years old. Before the big personality change, she was a good person, an honest person, a generous and a helpful person. I learned that her true character was obscured by her illness for all those years. Her goodness was always there *behind* her illness. This I did not know when I prayed for her. I did not know what was possible, but God knew. I forgave her as a simple decision. I made the decision for me and my own

sanity. If I want God to forgive me, I have to forgive others (Matthew 6:15). I simply owned all the consequences of abuse as being my responsibility now. My problems were my property. I let go of all right to blame. I mentally set my mother free. "What's yours is yours; what's mine is mine." That was my decision. Then I prayed for her well-being: "Lord, please grant my mother good health and happiness." I frowned, turned over in bed, and fell asleep. I didn't expect her to get better, and I didn't expect to ever have a good relationship with her! But God had better plans for me and for her too. By an act of forgiveness, He set her free from her illness. "Whatever you loose on Earth will be loosed in heaven." -Matthew 16:19. I believe Mom repented before she died in 2007. I just may see her again in heaven when Jesus comes.

My mother was my Goliath. I feared her all my life. I didn't need to slay her. I just needed to pray, and the Lord took care of the situation. Who's your Goliath? What are your biggest detriments? Can you see past them? Can you see past your enemies and personal shortcomings? You can. Look beyond, like St. Stephen. When he was being stoned, he looked into the sky and saw Jesus in the clouds of heaven. Keep your eyes on God, no matter what the world is doing. Heaven is your prize. Do not give up your crown, but run the race and run it well.

Can you trust God? You can, even if you were abused from before the age of five. Perhaps psychologists say no. But can you see beyond the psychologists? Look up at the sky. There is a God in the heavens Who can do all things!! If He

could heal me, He can heal you. To any observer, there must have appeared to be no hope for me. But I'm here! I could have died so many times. But I didn't. You have endless potential when connected to the one who created endless potential. You have that universe of emotions, mental capacities, and spiritual powers inside you. You have a repository of talent. But the blessings will be endless only if you choose the Lord. Then He will give you everlasting life. He will give you the power to overcome all those detriments. "For you are greatly beloved." So He will give you power--power to "understand the vision." (Both quotes are from Daniel 9:23). Power to make your vision for yourself reality, by the Bible verse He has for you. Choose to find your verse in His word. Choose His power. Choose this life, and the next. Choose Him because He is worthy of all praise, for He saved me and you. He saved my mother. He had mercy when no mercy was deserved. Unleash those you hold in the bondage of resentment. What you loose on Earth will be loosed in heaven. What if your forgiveness frees someone from the fires of hell, and opens the way for God's mercy? Alleluia, yes, then your forgiveness is indeed service to God!

Chapter 15: Value the Journey, But In a Letting-Go Sort of Way

I have a book which is a collection of all my poetry. I have saved my accumulated poems since I was a child. I still write poems to this day. Recently I separated the poems I wrote in the last few years. I did this because I noticed that these poems rang so positive that they were drastically different than the old poems. So the old poems are now in a separate binder called *My Heart Dies—Reveries of My Past*. The new book is called *The Comeback: A Woman God Built*. Here is a relic of my past called “Answers Upwind.” Although it is part of me, I let it go, and archive it in the pages of *My Heart Dies—Reveries of My Past*.

“Answers Upwind” 8/14/97

In vain my life is
 Calling into oblivion
 For all resolutions.
 Such a waste
 I cannot flutter
 Into all the minds
 I cannot comprehend.
 Maybe there is no place
 I'd rather be.
 For here I stand
 Rotting in my query.

Kind Lord,

Cast a silver light
 Into the reaches of my mind.
 Wither the silver thread
 That holds me to my head.
 Free me from
 Life's dire trade:
 A quizzical spirit,
 I wait all eternity
 For carrier pigeons
 Who never returned.

From *The Comeback: A Woman God Built*, here is a contrasting poem that is also about having a question:

“We ALL Have Questions” 12/09/16

If you have a question
 That perplexes all your mind....
 You tried to ask in prayer,
 But still feel in a bind.
 Perhaps your faith is hinged on it,
 Teetering back and forth;
 Or maybe the pain of not knowing
 Threatens your whole self-worth.
 Maybe your trust in God
 Is shaken at its core.
 Yet hold to your faith!
 That's what faith is for.
 This is your victory:
 To hold that question tight;
 And stand for all the years,

Righteous in His sight.
Believe that there's an answer
That supports His holy Word,
Reinforces all its meaning,
Even the sermons that you heard.
Live as if you know;
The answer's in your reach,
Your worth is without question,
You're still qualified to teach.
Go and preach the Gospel,
Never looking back. (Continued)
Stand like Job the hero,
Amidst scorn and lack!
If you have perseverance,
Then someday you may sit
At the feet of Jesus,
Face shining with eyes lit.
You can ask any question
As a tear rolls down your cheek.
He will give you the answer;
No more do you need seek.
And when you see His wisdom,
His design and kind intent;
You'll love Him more forever,
Just the way He meant.

This poem speaks of my new life in which I have become a person who encourages others. I look forward now with a mission in my heart. Although I still keep my art that I created in my previous painful past, I have something more and better to offer now.

Chapter 16: In Closing

Writing this booklet has made me feel I am “paying it forward.” I’m returning to the world what has been done to help me. So many people helped me that I want to help others. My ability to trust has been vital to my recovery as a whole. Keeping an open mind in everything has also been a foundation for my resilience. An open mind helped me let in new coping mechanisms, use new tools, and take suggestions from others who’ve been through it all before. With an open mind, I was ready for God’s miracles. I cared for myself by exercising my body in as many ways as I could. Exercise and creative expression of all kinds were vital to keeping my emotions from building up. I also kept current with my feelings by talking to friends. Thank God for friends!

Always be thankful to God. See yourself through His eyes, which are the kindest eyes that ever were. Nurture yourself through self-education; and nurture yourself emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Accept yourself for who you are. Be amazed by the person God has created in you. Dream, visualize your dreams, and say your affirmations. Be as positive in your thinking as possible, working around any disability you may have.

Forgiveness is paramount to recovery. I urge you to forgive everyone, including yourself. The Lord is with you! You are never alone. Jesus promised to be with us even to the end of the age; and here we are in Him. Open your heart to others. Make friends by being a friend. Join groups and

interact with people. People are not as a dependable source of self-esteem as God is, but they are a great resource in many ways. People give love, people share wisdom, and people can lift you up if you allow them to. I pray this book has helped you in more ways than one. Now work as a team with God, doctors, therapists, friends, family, and fellow Christians. You can regenerate. Watch God rebuild you from the bottom up! You are truly the crowning act of creation in this world the Lord has made. He redeemed you. You are his. Value yourself, because you are a precious child of the King!