



The Prison Gates

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BROKEN

Rhonda Lea Snow

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Dedication Page

This book is dedicated to those who have been Ton this journey with me, those who have prayed for me, and especially those who encouraged me to keep plugging away and get this book published. Especially to my best friend and Editor, Ruby Sand who has stuck by me through it all, I couldn't have made it without you. To Becky Born, who so lovingly encouraged me to see the truth. To Wendy Clontz, who has continually, over the last decade, prayed for me, fought spiritual warfare for me and encouraged me to publish this book. To Cassandra Hamilton, who was instrumental in helping me begin my writing career. To my children, Nick, Joe & Amber, you are all such a blessing to me and I love each one of you. ***And most of all to the Holy Spirit, who gave me the inspiration to write and the timing to do so. Without the Lord, this would not be possible, so thank you Jesus.***

Introduction

I began writing this book about my life on February 4, 1997. It started out to be just a therapeutic journal for me to put my feelings on paper, but soon after I began to put pen to paper, I began to hope to someday share my pain and triumph with others. All of the names have been changed to protect the innocent.

My prayer is that God will use my story "The Prison Gates Are Broken" to heal the readers who so desperately need to know that there is hope for the weary, the abused, the addict, the drunkard and sexually immoral. May the Lord be with you on your journey as He has been with me on mine. He will never leave you or forsake you. God Bless!

Chapter One

Where It All Started

I was born in 1965 to a family of hurt, rejection, and abandonment issues. My mom came from a very religious home where they lived by many rules and laws. My dad came from a very strict Orthodox Jewish family. They had to elope to avoid the conflict of religious ceremonies. I began my life in confusion over my religion and beliefs. Both of my parents rebelled against their religions leaving me with no real foundation. Both my mom and my dad were spending all their waking hours, while not working, drinking to fill the void that they had in their hearts.

My brother John, who was about five when I was born, had already the warning signs of a very confused and damaged child. My sister Lisa, who was exactly thirteen months to the day older than me, was already on the road to being a perfectionist.

I was born last. There were never any baby pictures taken of me, so I used to think and believe that I was adopted. I think my parents really tried to love me, but they had so much pain of their own. My dad owned a tv repair shop, and he worked all the time, which left my mom with the responsibility of caring for very young children. I know that was tough, although she had help from my grandmother and her boyfriend.

I estimate that when I was about two years old, my grandmother, who we called "Nana" and her boyfriend "Papa Mac" started coming over. Also, Mom and Dad would take us over to their house. Usually, they would watch us for the weekend. I assume so mom and dad could go out and drink.

I have always been a strong willed outgoing person and because of that, I got in a lot of trouble. At the time, Nana's boyfriend would discipline me for my wrong doings. The way he did it was unacceptable. He would sexually abuse me. He always did his "disciplining" in the bathroom with the door locked. My brother and sister would hear me scream, "no!" "stop!", but they thought I was just getting a spanking. Not true; I was getting abused (sodomized) and having my childhood and my whole innocent self ripped, no, stolen away from me. I don't know how long he would do this for, it seemed like hours, but I do know that I would just concentrate on something else, so that I wouldn't feel the emotional and physical pain of what I was going through. I would disassociate myself from the present situation. I call it escape from reality, because that kind of reality is too much for a preschooler to handle. When it was over, I would totally forget about it. I would block it out like it never happened. It didn't change how I acted. It didn't change my friendliness to other people. But on the inside, mainly in my stomach, I became a very sickly child. I started biting my nails when I was around three years old. I started biting my toenails too. I bit them until they would bleed because I figured that if I hurt myself no one could hurt me. I also ate until my stomach would hurt. Again, if I was already in pain, then he couldn't hurt me. It's amazing that a young child could think that way.

This man died sometime when I was three. After he died I didn't have to go through the physical pain anymore, but I had to live with the emotional pain. And there was so much of it, that I just became a very sick child. I would catch every germ there was. I got pneumonia twice and I started getting stomachaches a lot.

Finally, I told my mom about Papa Mac when I was five. She told me to quit making up those lies, and that she never wanted to hear that out of my mouth again. So from that point on, until

I was thirty, no one ever did. I totally blocked it out of my mind, like it had never happened to me, but my insides never forgot. They trembled in fear day in and day out. My destructive behavior continued. I continued to bite my nails until they bled and instead of biting my toenails I just ripped them off until they bled.

Well all I remember about the ages of four to ten was just being sick all the time and lying around and watching a lot of television. My mom would give me chocolate milk shakes to cheer me up. The best thing that ever happened to me was when I was ten years old. I went to a church camp with a friend of mine, and I accepted Jesus Christ into my heart. I had no idea what I was doing, but I believe I was sincere about it. I know that at that moment I was saved, but because I had to go back home I got lost in the shuffle - spiritually speaking.

Chapter Two

Satan's Playground

Shortly after I returned home from church camp, my life turned around again - Satan took hold of me in a major way. I was hanging out with my brother and his friend, a boy who lived in the house behind us. He was about sixteen years old. He was developing film and he asked if I wanted to help him. Of course, I thought it would be a really cool experience, so I did. We went into a darkroom, and there was a piece of plywood over the light switch. I was sitting next to him wearing a cool-lot (unfortunately this provided easy accessibility). He reached down the front of my cool-lot and fondled me. I didn't know what to do except reach behind the plywood and turn on the light. I couldn't say anything. I just ran home and my sister, Lisa asked what happened. She had tried to warn me to get out of there, because she sensed something not right, but I was way too stubborn to listen to my big sister. So I told her that he messed with me and he was a pervert. But as in the past, I acted as if nothing happened, and so I was the same I always was. But again my insides were trembling with fear, guilt, shame and confusion.

Not long after this incidence, I was introduced to Marijuana (pot) over at my friend Sharon's house. We were all in one of her sister's rooms. There were several of us, including myself, Lisa, Sharon and my other friend, Cindy. And believe it or not, even the dog and the cat. We all sat there and got high smoking out of hookahs (big round bonges), and even the pets were getting high. Remember, I was ten, and in a lot of emotional pain. I found my relief. Pot was my escape out of reality. It was great. I immediately became an avid pot smoker. I loved it so much it became who I was - a pothead at age ten. I was already addicted to cigarettes, so pot was just another addition to my already bad habit of smoking.

My new life began. I could escape life any time I wanted by smoking weed. It was totally awesome, or so I thought. I started getting high all the time. Day, night, mornings before school, evenings before bed; whenever I could get away from life, I did. Life did not get easier however, it just kept getting harder.

The emotional pain was so overwhelming and the abuse kept escalating to different levels. When my family and I went on vacation with friends, one of my friends brothers fondled me while I was sleeping on the couch in our rented vacation cabin. Of course I immediately blocked it out of my mind with drugs. I brought plenty of pot on vacation with me that year. Life went on as usual and my pain got worse. All of a sudden, pot wasn't enough. Alcohol didn't quite do the job. I soon started experimenting with other drugs at age twelve. I started smoking PCP and taking LSD, while also staying with my drug of choice at the time, pot. I partied all the time. I drank, smoked, snorted and popped everything and anything. The only thing I didn't do was inject it with a needle. Thank God, because I'm sure I would have liked that too.

I got arrested frequently between the ages of twelve and sixteen. I believe I got in a total of twelve serious car accidents by the time I reached the legal drinking age. Throughout my very early teenage years, I was date raped several times, usually when I was passed out on Jack Daniel's. People who didn't even know me sexually molested me. Some I knew, some I didn't, but never in a million years would I have let them touch me if I was awake. As usual I didn't let it bother me, at least not on the outside. Inside I just wanted to scream so loud for someone to come and rescue me. However, I had learned at a very early age to never show my pain or express that I was hurt. So I didn't, I kept up my mask of happiness underneath horrible pain

that was eating me away.

I had a lot of relationships where I thought I was in love. I would wait two weeks before I had sex to make sure these guys were going to stay with me, and boom, right after I finally did it, they were history. Some would even tell me they loved me up until they got what they wanted. This was a pattern I couldn't quite figure out, but got burned by every time. All I was looking for was someone to love and someone to love me. I just wanted a true love and thought each and every one of them was it. In my heart I really believed they loved me, but one thing we all had in common was our love of getting high. So even though they used me for sex, I used them for drugs.

Then I met a guy named John, who I thought really loved me. He was gorgeous and nineteen years old and I was about thirteen. I thought he could take me away from the hell in my life, but he made it much worse. He took complete control over my life. He abused me physically, mentally, verbally, emotionally and sexually. He took who I could have been sexually and distorted it to pornography. He made me say things while having sex. He made me move certain ways and scream certain ways. Everything about me was dictated. He treated me like a dog. He told me what to do and how to do it. Once he suffocated me because I drank too much after he told me to slow down. I didn't stop drinking, and I passed out. The next thing I knew, I couldn't breathe. He had his hand over my nose and my mouth. Afterwards, he made me have sex with him. There were several of these abusive occasions.

Another one in particular was one night when my parents were out of town. John came over, along with some mutual friends. I was talking on the phone while sitting on the floor against a refrigerator. The next thing I knew, John threw a peach pie in my face for no apparent reason. My instant reaction was to hit him with the phone I had in my hand. This was a big mistake! I ran outside and he started twisting my arm behind my back. I managed to break free and ran inside and took a shower; not letting him see my tears. I believed if he couldn't see me cry he really couldn't hurt me.

Our friends thought that he needed to be humiliated after doing such a good job of humiliating me by throwing a pie in my face. While he was banging on the bathroom door, these guys took his clothes off and threw him into the bushes outside. Guess who paid a price for that one? He came back in pounding even harder on the door this time. Of course, I didn't know what had happened to him because I was taking a long, emotional shower. I was so afraid to open the door but I felt if I didn't, he would break it down and beat the life out of me. So I opened it up, and he started throwing me against the wall and calling me a gutter slut. I don't remember exactly how that night ended.

I can remember sitting in John's living room watching television and all of a sudden, he would punch me in my chest as hard as he could, while calling me a gutter slut. The abuse went on for at least two years.

I ended up getting pregnant from him twice. The first time I was around fourteen. He had his friends say that they were the ones who slept with me, just in case my parents were going to press charges of statutory rape on him. They didn't but my dad did threaten him with it in order to get him to pay for the abortion. Afterward, the guilt of having an abortion ate at me every day. I stayed with him at that point not just out of fear, but also out of guilt.

There was a time when we were driving down the road and he was being his usual verbal

abusive self. After he told me what a cunt I was, he then put his hand between my legs. I threw his hand away from my body, and he put it back. Somehow, I got the courage to hit him over the head with a beer bottle. We then went to his friend's, and as usual I started playing poker with everyone, like nothing ever happened. He played the poor pitiful act of remorse on my sister Lisa and my friend, Sharon. I felt sorry for him and decided to go talk to him. I said to him, "Lisa and Sharon said you wanted to talk to me, so what do you want?" He proceeded to say "You killed my baby and you owe me the money for it." That was the absolutely most hurtful thing he ever said to me. It blew away any of the other abuses he thrust upon me. I actually believed him and bought into this horrible accusation. I stayed with John for several years because every time I got the courage to leave him and start dating someone else, he would manipulate me with guilt to come back.

There was a time when I started dating a guy named Danny, who was also a friend of John's. One night when Danny and I went out, John and their friend, Mark, happened to be in the car with us. Danny and Mark got to see first hand the abuse I had sustained in the previous couple of years. My ex started reaching from the back seat and punching me in my chest and ripping off my shirt. It was humiliating. For some sick reason we got back together again after that.

Anyway, within that time period of dating Danny I got pregnant again, this time it was in my fallopian tube, which almost killed me. I thought it was Danny's, but it wasn't because I had already been bleeding while we were having sex. The only other person who could have been the father was John. I called him and told him about it, and he was so supportive over the phone, but he never came to the hospital. When I was admitted they explained to me that I was one day away from my fallopian tube bursting, thus causing hemorrhaging and most likely death. I was in the hospital for eight days.

Chapter Three

First Attempt

I had a lot of time to think about and review my pitiful life while I was in the hospital. I had a lot of thoughts of suicide and wished it could just be over. I think in some ways I indirectly tried to kill myself, because even in the hospital I was getting high on cocaine. Friends brought it in and I snorted it up.

Shortly after that, I started seeing a guy named Jeff who I thought was different from other guys. I had known him for a long time, and he was one of my best friends. He was sort of like a brother, except we started having feelings for each other. Hence, a new relationship started. This one was very different than the last. He did not consistently physically abuse me. Instead, he cheated on me with many girls; some I knew and a lot that I did not. For the most part, he treated me pretty decent, except for his extra-curricular activities.

It wasn't long before things started changing. His real anger started to manifest itself, but not always in violence. He was a con-artist and a thief, and there were times when he would steal my car and get arrested and expect me to bail him out of jail. The sad part was I would feel so sorry for him that I would bail him out. Then, of course, I felt like such an idiot. He took advantage of me like that for about four years.

When Jeff got drunk, he acted as if he were evil. He was an alcoholic, and when he drank too much, his eyes would look like the devil himself. There was a time he was very drunk while on vacation, and he got very violent with me. It was one of the most devastating, fearful times of my life. He wanted us to have a four-some with another couple that he met at a bonfire on the beach. He got very angry that I said no, and he started throwing me down and got on top of me and choked me. I thought that he was going to kill me. I managed to run away from him and try to get help from a person walking through the dunes. The person rejected me, I assume out of fear. He put on his hood and kept on walking. At that point I thought I was dead. Jeff grabbed me again and started choking me even harder this time.

This was the first time that I really knew that God intervened in my life. At the very moment that I was being strangled to death, the entire island blacked out into total darkness. This snapped Jeff out of his rage and he started crying. God had saved my life! It was only by His grace and miracle that I lived that night. That night Jeff had the rage of Satan in him, and although I had seen him hurt many other people, sometimes ten guys at a time, I never thought he would hurt me. I was wrong; but I stayed with him out of pity. Somehow no matter what this guy did, I always felt sorry for him - like he couldn't survive without me in his life. I hated to be with him, and yet I felt guilty when I was not.

The only solution I could come up with was to move to the other side of the country. I made a decision one day while we were broken up (which had happened many, many times). I decided that I would move to California, which was almost 3,000 miles away. At the time I was nineteen years old and had never even lived outside of my parent's home. I thought somehow I could make it on my own. I was a girl on the run to find my life, or to run away from it.

Chapter Four

From the Frying Pan into the Fire

Off I went to Los Angeles, California with a friend of my bother's, Brian, who I didn't even know. It was here that I really grew up fast - a young girl from the suburbs of Washington DC, to the big city of lights. It was like going from the frying pan into the fire. It was a different life out there. California was so exciting, but very scary at the same time. I got to meet movie stars - I was even in a movie. But life wasn't as it seemed. It was overwhelming to be in the big city alone, so I started going to bars at night.

During the day I worked as a legal secretary and after work I would go to Gold's Gym in Venice Beach. I became a body builder. I went from weighing about 118 at 5'5 to, in six short months, weighing 155 pounds of pure muscle. It was pretty scary when, one day, I looked in the mirror and didn't even recognize myself. I looked like a brute, so I immediately stopped working out. But my body attracted a certain type of guys: body builders with 19-inch arms. They were all gorgeous but they had no brains and no ambition.

I'll never forget the very first of many one night stands. I was at a nightclub that Brian was a bouncer at, and a really good looking guy came up to me and asked me to take a ride in his limousine. I was so excited as it was my first limo ride. Well the next thing I knew I was in bed with this complete stranger. I remember coming home and taking at least a two-hour shower. I wanted to wash the dirt off me. I thought to myself, I will never do that again, I felt so used and like such a tramp. However, that night primed me for a future of one-night stands. Unfortunately I can't count how many there were. It got easier as time went on, and I started using men as they were using me. We had a mutual goal - have sex and never talk again. It became especially easy to have sex with a guy who was supporting my cocaine habit.

During my time in LA, I partied every night at a different club, went to Mexico on vacations, and had a blast. There were also some very difficult times as well. I got mugged outside my apartment, lost three jobs, and got evicted from my apartment. Eventually I realized life was just too tough in California, so I moved back home to Maryland, thinking I could pull my life back together and save money to go visit some friends in Ireland. My intentions were good but my cocaine habit, once again, took over. I got to the point of snorting cocaine in the bathroom at work and then immediately when I got off work, my friend Sandra and I would go to a bar, hook up with two guy friends and started a night of bingeing on cocaine. This went on for months.

At the time I had a boyfriend named Tim who loved me very much and was so good to me. I did nothing but treat him like dirt. I would make plans with him to meet him somewhere, and then never show up because it was more important for me to get high, than respectfully meet my commitment to him. He and I had made a promise that there would be no more cocaine, but from the very day that I agreed to stop, I continued behind his back, and he was nothing but a hindrance to my partying.

One day we went to a concert with Tim's friends, who were supplying me with cocaine. We were all in the car going to the concert, and they started cutting up lines to be snorted, and they handed it to me. Tim looked at me and looked at them and looked down at the lines and

said “No, we don’t do that anymore.” Well right then I made the decision that this drug was way more important than my relationship with him; so I grabbed it and said “Speak for yourself,” and I snorted it up right in front of him. As one can imagine, he was furious. He knew he was beat in this competition, so we broke up. This was great for me because I now had the freedom to get high whenever and wherever I wanted too. I did feel awful about what I did to him, but very shortly got over it because getting high could get me over anything, at least that was the way I thought.

But you know what else worked well to get my life together: moving - that was my answer. I applied for a franchise move to San Diego, California with the same company that I was working for, and it came to pass. So I moved to beautiful San Diego. I got a house right on the beach. I couldn’t have asked for anything better, but it wasn’t enough.

Even though Los Angeles was three hours away, I spent every weekend in LA. I would leave at 5:00 p.m. on Friday and stay at one of my old roommate, Kathy’s apartment. I would party the entire weekend, mostly all-nighters on cocaine. That meant staying up all night partying. I would leave Los Angeles around 4:30 - 5:00 a.m. on Monday morning and go straight to work. It was crazy, but I did it every weekend except for a couple of times when my friends would come to San Diego. Of course, they supplied my drug of choice.

This went on for about four months, until I was transferred to Anaheim, California, and I moved in with my Aunt and Uncle. I felt so lucky because my new boss was a cocaine addict, so I didn’t have to hide my addiction. Instead, we would get high together. That’s when things changed, and my snorting habit turned into a smoking habit with freebase (also known as crack before that process was given a name). Almost every night after work I would go to my boss’ house and party with him and his wife. He was probably in his middle forties, and I was twenty-one years old. When we got high, hormones started rising, and I began doing compromising things with my body. I had threesomes with he and his wife, and even one time, although under the influence of Quaaludes and freebase, I subjected myself to sexual pleasure with his wife. I don’t remember the event because I was so wasted, but I remember afterward feeling confused about my sexuality and I hated that feeling. I never again experienced that kind of intimacy; it was just not for me.

Although I was smoking cocaine during the week with my boss, on the weekends I would go down to Los Angeles, which was about an hour away. I would party all weekend snorting cocaine, not smoking it. As a matter of fact, people all around me would smoke it and I would get on their case about it. I acted as if I was totally against it, even though I did it all week long.

Chapter Five

When the Going Gets Tough – I Get Going

At that point, life got pretty out of hand, and what did I do when things got really tough? I split town. This time I went to Oklahoma to live with Tim, the same guy I hurt so badly when I had moved back home.

He flew to California and we were going to drive to Oklahoma to start our new lives together. But for four days before he came, I did nothing but get high on cocaine because I knew when I was with him I couldn't do it. I literally stayed up for four days and four nights getting my fill. When we drove out of Los Angeles I immediately fell asleep, or maybe I passed out. Either way, I slept for twenty-three hours straight. I think that if I hadn't, I probably would have died. My heart was beating out of my chest, and I could hardly see straight. It was very scary. It was the first time I think I almost overdosed, but God saved me, I know this now.

Here I was, a twenty-one year old cocaine addict, detoxing and withdrawing without any help. I was living in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and I was miserable. My relationship with Tim was the pits; he expected me to cook and clean for him and give him a beer and let him read the newspaper. It was definitely not my kind of life. I hated it, and I was withdrawing from cocaine so badly. All I did was shoot pool and play poker - not fun.

I got a job in sales, and I thought that this would be my freedom. My territories included Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee. About once a week I would go with my boss to these territories and present my products. My boss was approximately fifty years old and a very smart man, but a very perverted one too. He would convince me that the only way to really learn something was during the most intimate, vulnerable state you could be in. He said he backed up his beliefs with material from Harvard University. I respected him, and I was intrigued by his intelligence. We would be in our hotel room, and he would tell me to get undressed, and of course he would use the words "trust me, I would never hurt you," so I did. While I was receiving oral pleasure from him, he would ask me the five points of selling. This was supposedly the best way to teach someone these selling techniques. But, what he was really doing was controlling my mind, and he had control of my mind many years after parting. We ended our so-called work relationship when he "accidentally" had intercourse with me. He was married and his wife was about to have a baby, but only now did he think he had committed adultery. After all, if he didn't penetrate me then it was strictly business, and he was doing me a favor by teaching me at such a vulnerable level, or so he said. It took me years to realize that not only did he sexually abuse me, but he psychologically abused me too; he controlled my mind.

Well as you can probably guess, life was miserable. Again, I stayed true to my motto: when the going got tough - I got going! So I moved back to Los Angeles and moved in with Kathy, my old roommate, who I used to stay with while visiting from San Diego. Now remember I was completely dry from all drugs for about four months.

The very day I got into LA, I started using all over again. I was actually thankful that the first people I saw were dealers. We all went to the Colorado River for Memorial weekend, and I got high every minute I was there. From the minute we got into a van we rented, through the entire

day, through the night, and as soon as I woke up the next day. I did so much cocaine that my nose wouldn't stop bleeding, and even that didn't stop me. I thought to myself, I would never go without that again. Life is too rough without it.

I got another job and started life over again. Kathy and I got our own apartment and began the partying there. I did my usual sleeping around; Kathy and I were very good at that. We would go out at night just to have sex.

One night I went to our usual bar and I saw a guy, and I thought to myself, "I want him." I would always pick the best looking guy and conquer him. Well that night was no different. I conquered him, and I went to his condo with him in Marina Del Ray, with every intention on sleeping with him, though he was moving a little too fast for me. We were in the elevator together and he started going up my skirt and then he dragged me into his condo. I tried to play it cool, although I was terrified. He got undressed and put on a robe. So I said to him, why don't you chill out and we'll drink a beer. Well he had no interest in that. He started getting very forceful with me. I knew I had to make a decision to either let him have sex with me or he would rape me and maybe kill me. So I did whatever he wanted. He forced me to have oral sex with him, and as much as I wanted to hurt him down there, I was terrified. The next morning he gave me a ride home and like an idiot I kissed him good-bye. I walked into Kathy's place, and I just busted out in tears - uncontrollably crying. I felt so powerless, and I knew at that moment that I would never let that happen to me again. That was my last one-night stand and that would be the last time that I would be date-raped.

After that incident, I found someone named Chris and fell madly in love, at least I thought it was love. We spent every day together and I stayed at his place until an event happened where he had to move into my apartment. It was Halloween night 1987 and we had a party at his house. There were a lot of people there, partying, but good people. And then this guy came in, who I had spotted and remembered that he was the one who had tried to rip off the house a couple of weeks prior to the party. I told Chris, and he told the guy to leave. The guy had a gun, so we called the police. They kicked him out, and this guy, who was a member of the Culver City gang, went home and made a bomb to blow us up and kill us. Instead, by the grace of God, it blew him up and killed him. I don't mean that God killed him—that is not for me to say, but I do mean that God graced us and saved us that night. Now I had no relationship with God at the time, but I knew, in my heart of hardened hearts, that God spared me, and because He spared me also spared those around me. I knew at that very moment that God was protecting me. Of course that thought didn't last very long because I continued to destroy my life.

Because of this incident with the bomb, Chris moved in with me, and a very short time after that, became my fiancée. We were engaged and trying to plan a wedding, but the problem was we couldn't save any money, because we spent it all on cocaine. We were both heavily hooked on this drug. He would steel money from work to pay for our habit. In turn, I would call my parents to ask for money for our wedding plans, dress, flowers, arrangements, *etc.* However, when they would send me the money, I would spend it on drugs. We got to the point where we would scrounge his van for laundry money. It was a sad site. And with no money to pay for our wedding, we started fighting all the time. He would have bouts of rage. He never physically hurt me, though I think he was capable. He had turned into someone I didn't even know. It was scary, very scary - the man that I was going to spend the rest of my life with was

out of control.

When Chris was with me and my friends he would be himself, and he would get high on cocaine. But when he would hang out with his other friends, who he had known for a long time, he would act completely different. They didn't even know he did drugs. He was living a double life, and he expected me to do the same thing. I could be a chameleon and act like anybody, anywhere. (I had the ability to change my personality to fit my circumstances). Even though I had this ability, I did not want to use it around his friends and he couldn't handle it. He couldn't be himself around them and therefore I think he was going crazy. Just like all of my other boyfriends, he had a terrible childhood and a horrible relationship with his father. That seemed to be the case with all my men. I guess it was a trend. Anyway, he really started losing it by getting very angry over the littlest things. I told him that if he didn't get help I would leave him. He started seeing a therapist. I believe she could have helped him, but his fake friends were influencing him and they told him to leave me.

I'll never forget it -it was Cinco De Mayo, 1988, and we were getting ready to go on a party yacht to celebrate this occasion. Any occasion was time for celebration! We were sitting in his green van, and he was in his usual quiet angry mood, so I said, "Are you OK?" He said, "No, as a matter of fact I'm miserable and I'm moving out. I don't love you anymore." Well those words echoed in my head like a drum, "I don't love you anymore." What was that supposed to mean? How can someone all of a sudden stop loving you?

Chapter Six

The Second Attempt

My life fell apart at that very moment when Chris left me. I could do nothing but cry and get high and cry some more. I remember being at work and typing and crying. I was out of control. No matter how drunk or high I got, I would still cry. I believe I crossed the line of no return. My drugs and alcohol were no longer working to numb my pain. I was truly a basket case. I felt that I could have very easily ended my life.

I decided to go to the therapist that Chris had formerly went to. Supposedly, she told him he was better and that he didn't need her help anymore. I knew that was a lie, but I wanted to find out why he stopped seeing her. One day she told me that if I didn't go to a cocaine anonymous meeting and get sober then she would not talk to my drugs and alcohol anymore. I was crushed - she was all I had left. She was my only hope for life. At least that was what I thought. I told her that I would stop on my own. I didn't need any program to stop doing drugs and drinking. I just needed to stop drinking on my own and that way I wouldn't crave cocaine any longer. I only craved it after having a couple of drinks, so I made a commitment never to drink again. That commitment did not last, however. Then the one night, more than anything, I did not want to drink, but I did. As a matter of fact, there were two guys at my new apartment and we were all getting high on cocaine. One of the guys left and the other one was conveniently left alone with me. I knew I didn't want to have sex with him, but he was supplying my habit, so I guess I felt obligated. We went into my room and began having sex. We were both so wired on cocaine that he almost died. His heart started palpitating and all I could think of is how I didn't want to do that anymore.

At that very moment I had an outer-body experience. I think I was dying emotionally, and God wanted me to see myself and where I had ended up. I floated to the ceiling and, looking down at myself, I could see this guy I didn't even know, laying on top of me having sex with me. I was sick and I wanted him off of me, and I just wanted my life to be over. I had nothing but sheer hatred for myself. Seeing the view from above my body was so very real. The next day I just wanted to sleep forever and never wake again. I was absolutely miserable. Everything I always wanted or everything I could have been was gone. I was nothing and I wanted to die, but I didn't have the guts to do it. The only thing that saved me was my therapist. Actually it was God, but at the time I thought it was my therapist.

That next night I finally woke up from the escapade of the night before. I was sitting in my apartment alone, and was watching tv. All of a sudden I saw a commercial of a rat in a cage and on one side of the cage was food, and on the other was cocaine. The rat kept eating the cocaine, not even touching its food and running around in circles in its cage. Then all of a sudden this rat died right there in front of me. I was terrified. I knew that was me in that cage, and if I kept doing what I was doing, I was going to end up just like that rat — DEAD. It scared me enough, together with my therapist threatening to discontinue our relationship, that I called a friend who was an eating disorder therapist. I also had a compulsive overeating disorder. She and I would go out partying, snorting cocaine and drinking. But because she was a therapist, I thought maybe she could help me. She gave me a number, and I called Cocaine Anonymous.

Chapter Seven

The Beginning – One Day At A Time

On August 28, 1988, I went to my first Cocaine Anonymous (CA) meeting. I started my new life over on that day. It was a struggle, but my stubbornness and pride kept me sober. I continued to see my therapist at a cost of \$1 per session, because there was no way I could afford to pay the usual \$100 per session. She knew how much I needed her. I went to at least four meetings every day. I went to all the functions: dances, conferences, anything that people did sober, I was there. It was hard at first, but I replaced my partying friends with sober friends. The problem was that most of them were even sicker than my using friends. When you take drugs and alcohol away, you still have very hurt, sad and angry people. That doesn't change, in fact it usually gets worse. The truth is, I started hanging out with sober losers. They had no morals or ethics, they just were sober. These people were much worse than my old friends.

For instance, I needed a roommate because I wasn't making it financially. So I took in a roommate who thought he was Scar Face. He was an ex-big time dealer in LA, who, at one time spent literally millions of dollars on his crack habit. I had been sober for about four months, and I went home for Christmas as I did every year. When I was home, my roommate started smoking crack again, so when I came back, I kicked him out because he started dealing again. I was not going to fall because of him. I really was worried about him though, so I called him all the time. If he didn't answer the phone, I went over to his new place to check on him to make sure he was alright. I became a hindrance to his life. Instead of telling me to leave him alone, he made a plan to have me killed through his Mafia friends, because I was "interrupting" his life. He somehow changed his mind, and yet again I believe God intervened. Once again I was spared.

That brings me to a good subject: God, who was He? When I first got sober, I thought God was my car, because it got me to places I had never been before, such as CA meetings and sober events. You see, when you get into these 12-step programs; you have to find a God of your own understanding. Mine was my car until one day I was at the beach and I looked at the ocean and saw the waves. And no wave could be stopped, so I knew then that there was a power greater than myself and greater than my car! There had to be a God. I didn't know him, but I knew he was powerful. However, I really didn't want him in my life, I just wanted him to change my life.

While dating a guy in the program, I met two wonderful girls, Tiffany and Rachel, who were roommates. They were a gift from God, and they were different than anybody I had ever met. They were genuine, non-judgmental, loving, caring and non-addictive. Only God could have put us together. They taught me about true friendship. Shortly after meeting them, I ended up moving in with them for about three weeks. I then had an overwhelming desire to move back home, probably because of my \$7,000 debt and having the desire to go back to school. The day that I decided to sell my stuff and move, everything was sold - all in one day. I call that divine intervention. I was going where I was supposed to go for the first time in my life. I think I was finally doing God's will, not mine.

Thus, I moved home on March 22, 1989; another new beginning. This time I don't think I was running, I think I was returning. Pain started seeping into my consciousness. Not more than a

month before moving back home, I went to my usual noon CA meeting. It was actually my six month sobriety anniversary, and I was picking up my six-month chip. I was sitting at this meeting and a girl started talking about how she had been molested by her father and became pregnant. I felt something stirring up inside me. Then a guy started sharing how when he was younger, he had molested his sister. Well I was sober and didn't have anything to stuff my pain, so at that moment I fell apart — the floodgates opened — and I felt that I was going to die inside. My body was trembling with pain as I started having the memories of when I was molested by my neighbor when I was ten. After all, I had literally blocked this out of my memory, and now it was going on thirteen years of repressing this painful memory. I was in so much pain, and I could only find one thing to help me feel better: food. I was too prideful to get high again and break my six month sobriety, so I decided that food would become my drug of choice. That way, when life got tough again, I could just eat my way to happiness. But I never let it get out of control, at least not externally. My weight never got out of control. Because you see, I was the one controlling my eating habits. I could control eating a lot, and I could control not eating anything at all.

When I returned home after five years away, I thought I was in control again, but in reality, I had only switched my addiction from drugs and alcohol to food. No one, except my sponsor in California and my friend, the eating disorder therapist, knew. I sometimes think that was one of the subconscious reasons I moved back home. If nobody knew, then they couldn't call me on it and therefore I had my secret addiction that kept me together.

Then one day the pain of my childhood got so bad that I had to move out of my parents house and into a sober home. I remember being in so much pain at that time. I had started seeing another therapist, who stirred up feelings that I wasn't used to. I was in this house alone, in overwhelming pain. I made some macaroni and cheese and gorged the entire bowl and was not even conscience of it. Then in the middle of it, I stopped and saw myself out of control and prayed to a God I didn't know to help me - I needed His help so badly. Actually He was helping, I just didn't know it.

Then about a month or so later I moved into my friend Amy's condominium. She had been a friend of mine since I was in junior high school. We used to party together, but she never got out of control like me, and she totally respected my sobriety.

At that time I was dating a guy named Jason, who had about ten years of sobriety, but unfortunately he was an angry, insecure sober person. He was a very gentle, wonderful guy when we started dating. As a matter of fact, I felt like he really treated me like the lady that I was, but that didn't last very long. His real personality started to surface, and it was not gentle or secure at all. Fortunately, he never physically abused me, but I feel he may have been capable of it, due to having been abused by his father while growing up. Instead of physical abuse, he emotionally abused me, a form of abuse I never even knew existed. He tried to make me seem that I was a very insecure little girl and for about ten months, I believed him.

At this point, I started going to Codependency Anonymous (CODA) meetings. I learned a lot about how insecure and codependent I really was. This was the first time that I really took a look at who I was, and what made me tick. I realized it certainly wasn't going to be a walk in the park back to health. He and I played these insecurity games for a long time; until one day he said he didn't know what he wanted. I'll never forget it. It was a life changing miraculous moment in my life. I was working and he called me, and I said, "Hey let's go out tonight," and

he said his usual, "I don't know." So I said "Do you still want to go out at all?" And again, the usual – "I don't know." Well my usual response to this game was, "Oh come on - what's wrong. Did I do anything to hurt you?" Then came an entire list of wrongs I had done. I said "Well you know I can understand, but I can't accept it anymore. Either you want to be with me or you don't, and if you don't know, well, I don't know either. Have a great life, but were through." I tell you when I think back on this boldness, I believe those words kept me going for many years. I actually took care of my needs and myself, and I stopped being a doormat for abuse. It was a monumental day that I cherish always. I never saw Jason, who I thought I was madly in love with, again. I've realized that my "love" for him was really just need. I needed someone to need me so that I could take care of them and they could treat me however they wanted. It was wake up time and I made a promise to myself that I would never get into a situation like that again, and I meant it.

Approximately three days later I decided it was time for a vacation, so off I went to the beach with my sister and Amy — no man, no responsibilities — just fun. I did not have any interest at all in men. But when I got to the beach, I ran into a very old acquaintance, and his name was James. He came on that same vacation with Amy's brother and his family. He and I hadn't seen each other for approximately eleven years. We used to hang out in the same crowd of people, and we knew each other but not really well. As a matter of fact, he was seven years older than me. What he was doing hanging around a fourteen-year-old is a running joke. But his response was, what was a fourteen-year-old hanging out with a twenty-one-year old? No one would give in on this joke.

Chapter Eight

I Think He's The One

This started a whole new chapter in my life when my sister and I drove up and I saw James — who I hadn't seen in several years. I just got out of the car and gave him a big hug. I really didn't even realize what I was doing. Remember I was heart broken and pretty much hating men at the time. But for some reason I gave this man a hug that I didn't even know was in me. James and I quickly got re-acquainted during that vacation. I actually drove home from the beach with him, and boy did I give him an ear full! All I did for the entire three hours was re-live my relationship with my very recent ex who had used and abused me. I yelled and complained and moaned about this guy for three hours straight. When I think about it now, it was one of the healthiest things I had ever done as far as expressing my pain. It had only been six or seven days since the break up, and I had real, raw pain instead of suppressed pain. So that three-hour ride was a real cleansing time for me. And James, who I was driving with, was so attentive to my pain. I really felt like he listened, and I really felt safe and cared for. He unconditionally understood my pain and that was the first time I ever felt safe to share my real feelings. I was not a superficial doormat anymore. I was a woman with real feelings, and he respected that in me and shared some of his own pains in life. It was truly an intimate moment, without sex. I didn't know moments like these even existed. Intimacy without sex was a foreign concept to me, but it was something I had always dreamed about.

Now it was time to get back to work. At that time I was managing a pool hall. It was a very descent and respectable place that I enjoyed working at. James dropped me off at my apartment and as far as I knew there would probably be another fourteen or so years until we saw each other again. The next day I was at work and I couldn't stop thinking about him. When I got home that night, I realized I had lost a \$50 bill. So I used it as an excuse to get in touch with James. When I called him, he said "I don't have it, but I'm glad we hooked up again after all these years."

Well the next day I went to work and guess who showed up, yes it was James. So we started talking about old times as we played a game of pool. I was really good, as I was taught by the pros. We must have played 8 or 10 games in between customers. Then we started betting on our games. Of course I won, and off we went to eat dinner and see a movie. We had a great time and just talked and talked and talked. I certainly felt comfortable with him. Then he came over my apartment and we must have talked until 2:00 a.m. in the morning. It was so refreshing just talking to a guy who didn't even try anything. The next day guess who showed up at my work again? I was wondering why he didn't work. He explained to me that he did work and actually had a very good job. That was a first in my life, a guy who had a great personality that actually worked for a living. I thought I was batting a thousand, but I was also very scared.

I told him that we would have to see each other after work hours. That lasted a day or so. He came in a couple of days later, actually just killing time because he was waiting to be sent to Northern California on a contract. I said, "While your killing time let's shoot some pool." I won yet another dinner. While we were eating, he was just about to order a beer when he asked me if I minded if he drank, which I thought was very thoughtful. At first I said no then I started to think to myself, you know, if I start really liking this guy, and we start going out then I really don't want him drinking around me, which could really cause me to go back out and drink. I got

really brave and said, "Yes as a matter of fact, I do mind." Now he could have said, "Well that's the end of us," or he could have said, "OK no problem." I had no idea what he was going to say, but he said "OK, no big deal, it's time for me to stop drinking anyway." Can you imagine how that felt to me - that was the absolute nicest thing that anybody had ever done for me! He didn't just say OK no problem, he vowed at that very moment, that he was never going to drink again, because he knew how much it meant to me. I tell you only God could have given me the guts to be so honest that day. I guess we officially started dating right then.

I had just gotten out of an emotionally abusive relationship, and I was very confused, and I didn't know what to do. I wanted to be with this guy, who treated me like I was supposed to be treated, but I didn't want to get together with him as a rebound relationship because I knew that would never work. I was very torn so one day we were at my apartment, and I told him how I felt. It was on a Sunday and he came over to spend the day with me. I felt confused and scared to get into a relationship, so I laid it all out on the line. I told him that we shouldn't see each other anymore, and that I needed some time to get over the hurt from the last relationship. I told him we needed a serious break. Now most guys that I knew would have said, "Whatever, have a good life." Right when I was getting ready to justify my reasons for our split, he said "I understand and I can respect what you need. I would rather let you go now and maybe we could have a future some day. Why try to fight it and ruin it forever?" I was in such shock. He actually agreed with what I wanted to do. It completely blew me away. It was so out of character from what I was used to. We did separate ways for about two days. I couldn't stop thinking of him, the way he listened to my pain and still accepted me for who I was. The way he opened up my car door when we went places. The way he stopped drinking just because I didn't feel comfortable around alcohol. The way he respected my wishes when I broke up with him. I couldn't let a genuine guy like that go! I felt I would regret it for the rest of my life if I let him slip away.

It was a Tuesday night, and I was going for an interview to work at a nail salon. It just so happened that the salon was very near James' house, so I called him from there and asked him if I could come over. I think we were both in shock from the phone call. He said, "Yes of course you can," and he gave me directions to his house. I was about five minutes away. I immediately started praying to my higher power and I hoped I was doing the right thing. I was trying to pray to the God of the universe. Actually I really just felt like I was talking to myself - I just wanted somebody or something to know my feelings. So I drove over to his house, and he was sitting outside waiting for me. I'll never forget how my heart fluttered when I saw him sitting there. And I said to myself or God or who ever I was talking to, "Well here I go, please let me be doing the right thing." I walked up to him, scared, anxious and excited, and I told him that I felt all these feelings that I didn't know were possible after what I had been through lately. I proceeded to tell him that I couldn't stop thinking about him and I think I was falling in love with him, but that I was scared to death. He felt the exact same way. He had already fallen in love with me, and he was scared too, but it was worth it; because he couldn't imagine being without me.

Shortly after that night, he did the most amazing thing. One night I was at an AA meeting celebrating my second year of sobriety. I was up at the podium sharing my testimony, which you have already read in detail. After sharing I sat down in the front row waiting for the next speaker. All of a sudden, I saw James coming from the side door and onto the platform, and he had a bouquet of flowers with him. I totally freaked out. I thought, and so did many other

people, that he was going to propose to me. He didn't, and I'm not even sure what he said, except that I was a very special person and that he was glad that God had brought me into his life. It was the most beautiful moment, although he was terrified—his knees were knocking and his voice was shaking. I guess my higher power steered me in the right direction that night when I drove over to his house.

Shortly after that night he moved in with me, and we started a long and very dedicated relationship. During this time my mom had been diagnosed with cancer (lymphoma). She was on a very strong and powerful chemotherapy regimen. She had been fighting this battle for about seven months and at that time she was winning. She was such a fighter. She was just about to go back to work, when out of the blue, she was rushed to the hospital because she couldn't breathe. When I got the phone call I thought she was going to die, and I remember just breaking down at work. She didn't die that day, but her life was over. She had been diagnosed, after many tests, with heart failure due to the chemotherapy. After all that fighting she did with cancer, which she was determined to beat, she ended up bed ridden with only 23% capacity of her heart. I'll never forget one doctor telling me that she would be dead in two to four months. I thought to myself, "How dare he say that, only God knows when you die, not some doctor." So she partially recovered and came home. At that time I was thinking about quitting my job and starting my own manicuring business - kind of a traveling nail technician. My current job wasn't going anywhere. I was either going to become part owner of the pool hall or I was going to quit.

You see I've always had a bountiful supply of ambition and if something wasn't challenging, then I would end up quitting. I had a theory about life. A person should do everything they want career-wise and then at age thirty settle down, get married, have kids, and stick with a career until retirement. I don't know where I got that from, but it sounded good at the time.

Right before I quit the pool hall, I was there playing pool with James. He was waiting on a contract to go back to California as I stated earlier. We started playing and I started winning, and then he bet me that if I won he would take me with him to Northern California. I guess this was his way of asking me to go with him, because he was going to be gone for two or three months. So I beat him, of course (since I was trained by state champions in pool shooting), and we started planning our trip.

Since I was resigning from my job, I decided to go to my parent's house during the day and take care of my mom. She really needed me, and I feel blessed that I was able to be there for her. She was so weak. I felt so sorry for her, but she was such a fighter and she wasn't going to let this get her down. Actually, I wish just once she would have. She never shed a tear about her condition. It's actually very sad that she didn't allow herself to feel emotion, but that was the story of her life. Everything was always OK. No wonder I learned the coping skill so well. Each day I would go over and lay on her bed with her and we would watch TV. We really didn't talk very much, because, I guess, we didn't want to talk about the inevitable.

Now up until this time, I went to AA meetings every single day, sometimes two to three or even four meetings a day. I couldn't get through even a day without a meeting. Then my time got utilized with taking care of my mom more and more. Before I knew it, I went a day, then a week, and then even a month without a meeting. I never thought I could do that, but God really took care of me.

Chapter Nine

The Big Question

One weekend, one of my ex-boyfriend's mother was getting married, so I asked James to go with me. I guess I could now call him my lover, because we lived together and had a sexual relationship. Throughout my life, I had many sexual relationships, but somehow this one was different. For one thing, we waited about two months before we ever made love. That was definitely a record for both of us. But we wanted it to be special, so we waited. When we finally did make love, it was beautiful. Anyway we went to this wedding together, which was the most unique wedding. It was outside on top of a cliff looking over the water, and the entire wedding party (except for the bride) wore shorts and was barefooted. And the reception was in a bar on the water, set on a dock. It was such a beautiful atmosphere. James and I took a walk down the dock, looking over the water and just enjoying each other's company. We were talking, and the next thing I knew he took out a ring of mine he had secretly acquired. Then he took that ring and he said he couldn't imagine spending the rest of his life without me and he asked me to marry him.

We began a journey of a lifetime on that dock. We started planning our wedding, and it was going to be beautiful. The wedding would be held at a beautiful garden in a gazebo. It was stressful, but it was done - the plans were final. One day he and I went to the garden to plan and organize how the ceremony would go and to take lots of pictures. We had a wonderful day, dreaming of our wedding. And at this very serene moment with joy, he knelt down on one knee and proposed to me again, this time he had the most beautiful ring in his quivering hand. Boy was I amazed to see this thing sparkling in the sunlight; it was gorgeous. I guess at that time I really believed this wedding thing was going to happen. This was October of 1990 and our wedding day was to be July 27, 1991. We continued to make the plans for this blessed day. As a matter of fact, the only thing left was to order the flowers. I figured that could wait until we got back from California.

Off we went to Northern California. It was an exciting adventure, but I was so worried about my mom. I couldn't stop thinking about her lying in bed, so I called her every day-just to hear her weak, frail voice. On the outside you would think I was in 7th heaven with not a care in the world, but on the inside I was a bundle of nerves. I was so worried about my mom that I couldn't even think straight to the point that one night I was laying in bed, and I couldn't breathe. I thought I was having a heart attack. James took me to the hospital and had my heart tested. The doctor said that my heart was fine, but he couldn't figure out why I couldn't breathe, so he asked me questions about my life. Of course, I had quite a history, but this was current anxiety. And that is exactly what was going on—an anxiety attack due to my mom dying at home. Even though no one was certain about her dying, I knew in my heart that she was.

I was right because soon after this attack of mine, the inevitable happened. My mother was rushed to the hospital again with heart failure and this time she had only 13% heart capacity left. I'll never forget the phone call. My dad called and said, "Rhonda, your mother is in the hospital again, she has had heart failure and she is not going to make it. You need to come home right now, and I hope she hangs on until you get here." These words rung in my ears like a cymbal. I immediately lost it. I just broke down into hysterics. All the thoughts that had been in my head and all the worrying that I had done was really coming true. I felt like a basket

case. I called my friend back home and told her what was going on and asked her to pick me up from the airport. I got on the first flight out of there. James couldn't come because he had to work, but I could tell he felt so bad for me. When I arrived at the hospital my mom was lying in a hospital bed in the Critical Care Unit (CCU). She was hooked up to all kinds of tubes with monitors, and I can't even count how many nurses were taking care of her. It was so hard to see her like that; she was so helpless.

The rest of my family were all handling this in their own way. For instance my Dad and my brother would just sit at home, when not in the hospital, and they would get so sloppily drunk and try to make themselves believe that mom was coming home. And my sister, well, she bailed. She would just walk away and not say anything. She just wouldn't deal with it. Then there was me; all alone and knowing that my mom was going to die. I went to AA meetings and cried. And all I would hear is "everything happens for a reason." Well that was the last thing I wanted to hear, so I didn't go anymore. I just kept going to the hospital and seeing my poor pathetic mother dying. I would call up James in California, and he would comfort me. I felt so alone and abandoned. I felt like I was the only one that was being realistic. It was crazy. They were crazy. My dad and brother felt that if they could convince my mom that she was coming home, then she wouldn't give up. But the doctors told us that she was dying and that she wouldn't be coming home. And then my dad would talk about my wedding plans, and my mom finally spoke up and said that she didn't think that she would be there for the wedding.

I knew it was time to make amends with her. You see she and I had never had any intimate talks and this would be our first. So one day, when my sister and I were in her hospital room she said to each of us, "I'm sorry if I have ever done anything to hurt you." For me, these were the words that I had waited all my life to hear. And for my sister, well she tried to let her off the hook. But for me, this was what I craved. "I'm sorry" meant everything to me. I also told her that I was sorry if I have ever hurt her. We both had the freedom of forgiveness. It was incredible. I cherish those words of hers. She needed to be free from the bondage of her mistakes, and I needed to be free from the bondage of resenting her.

One day, it was my shift to take care of her. We all took shifts so that she would never, not even for a moment, be alone. I woke up and I knew, for some reason I knew, this was going to be the day. I got on my knees, and I prayed to the God who was my higher power, and I asked him to take her quickly. She had suffered enough, and it was time for her to rest. The next thing I knew, I got a phone call, and I was told, "your mother has passed away." It was December 1, 1990. I was so sad, but I had joy for her, for some reason.

I walked into the hospital and a friend of mine who worked there, took me arm in arm to her room to say good-bye. She was lying there so peacefully, but so pale. She was an empty shell. I could tell that she had no soul; she was completely lifeless. I just felt so sad, and I started to wonder, now what happens to her? Where does she go? What does she do? I started having so many questions about the after life. My mind was just so curious. All I could think of was, "Does she go to heaven or what, and where is this place, what's it all about?" This opened up the door of a different kind of spiritual faith that I was afraid of, but anxious to know. My mind was in a whirlwind. My mom had just died, but I could only think of where she might have gone. Maybe this was a way of dealing with her death, or maybe this was a new chapter of life - real, true, eternal life. A friend of my mom's had given me a book. I began to read it in the hopes of finding out where my mom went after she died. But instead it opened up my mind

and heart to spiritual knowledge about Jesus Christ, whom I had no desire to learn about or know. As a matter of fact, I usually cringed when I heard His name in the AA rooms. When someone would say I'd like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I would just cringe. I hated Him. But for some reason, when I read that book that my mom's friend gave to me, and when it mentioned that name, I didn't cringe for the first time in my life, and my heart began to accept it. But I still had my higher power and I wasn't ready to rock my foundation yet.

The funeral arrangements were made and it was a very sad, confusing, unsettling time. I actually felt the pain of losing my mom. There was no escape that could take away this pain that was so devastating. A few weeks after the funeral, James came home. It was Christmas and it was a very solemn one. The one thing I had to look forward to would be my future husband coming home. You see he couldn't be here to comfort me during mom's last days, but we talked on the phone almost every day.

During one of our conversations on the very day that she died, I told him that I didn't want to have our wedding in Maryland anymore. I felt that I just couldn't handle all my mom's friend's being there, but not her. So he agreed with me, and we decided to get married that very next month in California. Now I was fine with eloping in Vegas or Reno or something like that, but he wanted it to be really special. So I said, "I have now, in my life, planned two weddings that haven't happened yet - the first didn't happen because he left me, and the other I canceled because of my mom dying. So if you want a special wedding, you're going to have to plan it. You just tell me when and where and I'll show up." He took me up on it and planned the entire thing. He got in touch with my friends Tiffani and Rachel in Los Angeles, the ones I lived with before I moved back home. Together, they planned the most beautiful, fairytale wedding. I could never have even come close to the class and ambiance they captured. It was a dream wedding; of course I had no idea what was planned, I just knew that it was going to happen on January 26, 1991, and it would be at 4:00 p.m.

After James came back from California for Christmas, we started making plans to go back again. He had about two more months left on his contract. We arrived in Northern California - except this time it wasn't sunny California; instead it was a rainy, foggy and somewhat cold California. This time I had nothing to do. I would sit in my hotel room while James was at work, and I would just dream of what this mystery wedding was going to be. Of course I tried to get him to tell me, but there was no way. I just had to wait patiently for the day to come, (definitely not my strong point). I am not a patient person. I drove him crazy with questions and possible scenarios, but he was faithful not to tell.

During this pre-wedding time, we had some really great times. We went to Lake Tahoe and had a blast. As a matter of fact, I played the slots and won \$1,600. It was such a needed gift at that time. We had our ups and downs as does every couple, but we had one problem that had started to develop right after we came back to California. You see, he was the only person, in my life that I made a lifetime commitment to. There was the ex fiancée, but that was more of a needy thing than true love and commitment.

But with James, this was the real thing, real intimacy, not just the pornographic performances in bed. This was forever! It was so scary, to the point where I was terrified of intimacy. Our wonderful fantasy sex life turned to real lovemaking, and that freaked me out. I mean, I could have sex and do all things that come with it, as long as it was on a superficial level. But marriage was heavy, and I just freaked out.

Two weeks before the wedding, while together in bed, I had a flashback of sexual abuse from my past. I told him that I was terrified of him touching me, and I didn't know how long it would take to get through it. I said that I would do everything that I could to work through it, but it could take literally years. I really didn't know. I knew I had a long journey ahead of me. He said that it was ok, and that he understood. I took him on his word. It got to the point that every time he touched me intimately, I would cringe and push him away. Now remember, this was two weeks before our wedding, and I couldn't control this fear that completely took over me. It felt like I was being violated, but not by him, but by the many who had violated me in the past. This was really bad timing for all this pain, fear and anxiety to happen. So I told him that I honestly didn't know what to do. All I knew is that every time he touched me, I completely freaked out. I told him that if he wanted to call off the wedding I would totally understand. I kept telling him that it could literally be years before we could make love again. Now either God deafened his ears to those words, or he was in denial. Either way he wanted to go through with our plans.

We decided that when we got back home we would find a therapist to help me. Our intimately distant relationship began that night. As with any traumatic experience, you have to go through the times where it gets worse before it gets better, and it definitely did get worse. Each night leading up to our wedding was so scary for me. I mean I knew that I could trust him, but I started sleeping with a nightshirt and under clothes. I just needed to feel safe. Every night I laid there wondering when he was going to touch me and how could I avoid it. Our hotel room was an efficiency suite, so it wasn't like I could go into another room. But I did use the "I've always wanted to see this on tv," excuse every single night. He woke up very early so I knew he wouldn't stay up too late. I could usually get out of the intimacy thing during the week. Weekends, well, they were tough. He probably thought that I was just nervous about the wedding and that I was just losing it a little, you know pre-wedding jitters, or maybe it was PMS. He didn't have a clue, and I really didn't either. All I knew was that I was terrified of intimacy, and I didn't have any idea why I thought I was going crazy.

All this was disconcerting because I knew how to please a man and yet I couldn't even get close to him in that way. And the poor guy was used to me being very active and uninhibited. We used to have a great time and then all of a sudden, it seemed like out of the blue, it was over. I could not do any foreplay, because I would have flashbacks, not necessarily visual flashbacks, but bodily flashbacks.

Chapter Ten

The Anticipated, Exciting but Fearful Day

Even though we were dealing with our “feelings” myself with fear and James with rejection, we had the most beautiful storybook wedding. It started like this: My friends, Rachel and Tiffani picked me up early in the morning on January 26, 1991, and we went to Fisherman’s Wharf to kill some time. They filled me with clam chowder, because they said having a full stomach would help with my nervousness. That’s the kind of girls they are—always thinking of everything.

After that it was time to head to Sausalito, California, where the wedding would take place. This was the most beautiful place in California that I had ever seen. It’s located before the Golden Gate Bridge that goes into San Francisco. This little town is located in Marin County, one of the richest counties in the United States. We went to this old beautiful hotel that was built into the side of a mountain in 1885. As I said these girls took care of everything. They did my make-up and my aunt from California did my hair, as she was a beautician. I mean I was treated like a queen. There were only fourteen people at the wedding, but it was perfect because my dad came. Even after my mom dying, my dad made it to my wedding. That was so special, and he got to give his little girl away in marriage. The staircase banister was wrapped with very elegant, gorgeous bouquets of flowers. As I walked down the stairs, the music from the movie “Somewhere In Time” played. As I got to the bottom of the staircase, my dad was waiting to walk me into the wedding room. This room was just under the top floor of the hotel, which over looked the San Francisco Bay. It couldn’t have been a better day regarding the weather. So as my dad handed me gently into my almost husband’s arms, the minister began to express her opinion of he and I. It was very impressive. Next, she then had Tiffani read the scriptures about love in the Bible. Tears filled her eyes as she read these words which pierced all of our hearts. And then the wedding vows were spoken.

After this storybook, fairy tale wedding, there was much more to come. For instance, we left this hotel and went to the Fairmont Hotel. You may recognize the name, because it is the same hotel that the show “Hotel” was filmed in. It was absolutely gorgeous. Everyone said I looked like a princess and boy did I feel like one. Our first stop was a piano lounge where we had drinks (non-alcoholic) and small snacks. This was in preparation for our meal, which was on the top floor of the hotel - I believe it was the fourteenth floor. Glass windows surrounded the entire room; on one side you could see the Golden Gate Bridge and on the other was Alcatraz. It was an incredible scenery. The food was fantastic, a complete menu with all the ambiance to go with it.

After we ate we went to smoke a cigarette. Can you just imagine a beautiful princess dressed in white, with a cigarette hanging out of her mouth? Pretty tacky, but I needed my nicotine fix. James and I were sitting on a plush velvet bench in front of the elevators just enjoying the moment, and I said to him “every thing is perfect except I wish my mom was here.” Then, something very strange happened. At that very moment the elevator doors opened up and yet there was no one inside. I really felt like mom stepped off the elevator and joined our precious moment. Even though it was my imagination, it completed my dream come true. After that, we left this extraordinary restaurant. We all went down in the elevator to the Tonga Room. This

room was decorated in Polynesian style. There was a pool in the middle of the room, which had a kind of boat in it. I'm not sure what you call it but it transported the band from the middle to the other side of the pool. When the band would be slowly traveling across the pool, there would be rain and thunder and lightning in the pool. There, we did all the wedding traditions: the first dance, father and daughter dance and all the other traditions of the garter and flower tossing.

We stayed there until after midnight and then off to our honeymoon, which was back at the hotel where we started, where the wedding was held - starting in the Katmandu Room (the hotel was all theme rooms). I was terrified. I thought to myself, "How am I going to get out of this predicament?" Now is the time when I'm supposed to consummate the marriage. Of course I didn't view it that way. I just thought Oh, my gosh, I have to make love and not be afraid. It was very scary, but God really came through for us. We were able to make love and enjoy each other for a moment, but as soon as he would move me a certain way or any way for that matter, I would just freeze up and become completely paralyzed with fear. All I could think about was I couldn't wait until he was done so that I could go to sleep. I can't believe I felt like that on my wedding night. I just wanted to cry except I didn't want him to know how I was feeling, so I faked it long enough to get through it. But when I think back on this now, I am grateful that we had even a moment of true intimacy, because that is a miracle and only God could make it happen, and He did.

The next night we stayed in the Sun Room. It was decorated like a summer cottage: bright yellow decorations with wicker furniture. It was really soothing, such a serene place to be. Unfortunately I still had a tremendous, paralyzing fear of intimacy. I didn't know what to do; this was our honeymoon after all. So I did the only thing I knew how and that was emotionally and mentally escape while my body felt all the pleasures. It was very difficult to be able to come back and focus, but I did it. I faked the emotional part for the sake of our circumstances, but the physical part I didn't have to fake, because no matter how much fear I experienced, I always experienced physical pleasure. That was a mystery I never understood.

Chapter Eleven

The Real Husband Came Forward

The beginning of our troubles was when we got back from our honeymoon, my dad was with us and he asked if he could use my car in Maryland since I was in California. His car was broken down, so of course I said yes, after all it was my dad. James got really angry and displayed a major attitude. He began to be very sarcastic and abrupt with the way he talked to me. I can remember leaving our hotel room and slamming the door and walking over to a nearby shopping center. I remember feeling like I had just made the biggest mistake of my life, and I wished I had never married him. I came back and he proceeded to tell me that I had no right to give my dad permission to drive my car, and that it wasn't only up to me anymore. I remember feeling so controlled at that very moment. I felt like maybe he was right and I felt guilty for saying yes to my dad.

This was the beginning of his controlling manipulation through guilt. This was the moment that I bought into the guilt and shame that he thrust upon me, and I dealt with it by overeating then working out everyday. I began this sick cycle of punishing myself because I felt like I was the worst wife that ever lived. The way he explained what I did by saying yes to my dad was it's like I've hurt him more than anybody ever has in his entire life. He would look at me with watery eyes and tell me how unimportant he felt in my life. He would say that can't I just think about him sometimes? Doesn't it matter how he feels about something? This was just the beginning of the emotional abuse. I bought it hook, line and sinker, but he gave it to me so packed with guilt and shame that I truly didn't know what to do with it. I began very early to own his feelings and hate him for every bit of it. He controlled my thoughts, my feelings, my moods, accomplishments, and my successes all through guilt.

We got back to Maryland, and I started major therapy. This time it would be with a specialist of sexual abuse survivors. I began seeing a man therapist, but over time I learned to trust him. He never betrayed my trust. Through my many hours of therapy, we discovered many different incidences of abuse starting with the one when I was 10-years-old from my neighbor. Now remember I had already, previously, dealt with that one. So we moved onto the very abusive boyfriend, John, who physically, mentally, verbally and sexually abused me. It was a very painful process. He would have me imagine the times of abuse, and I would start sharing the horrible details. I remember once being in his office, and we were doing some kind of trans-like therapy. I was remembering the first time John abused me sexually. As I was sitting there talking about it, I remembered hearing a noise of a vacuum cleaner and at that very moment I actually heard that sound - there was a maid in the office building vacuuming the floor above us, and this triggered the entire memory in detail. I really believe that God ordained that moment because that was my very first break-through in therapy. This opened up an entire dam of abuses, pain, fear and all the other emotions that I never allowed myself to feel.

I worked really diligently to get through these issues. For example, there were times during this therapy process that my therapist would have James and I do exercises - a kind of homework. We would sit face-to-face looking at each other and say wonderful things to each other, and the most terrifying things would happen. His face would distort into all these different guys' faces - he would actually be transformed, in my mind, to look like a monster.

And of course with my honesty, I told him what was going on, but this only added to his anger and resentment.

Even though I was having so much success in therapy, in reality, James and I were farther apart than ever. He felt rejected and angry and never talked about it. He just lashed out with disrespectful, unkind words. Every time I broke through some major or even minor barrier, I always shared it with him, but when we talked about my progress, all he could say was “Well that’s fine for you, but we’re still not having sex.” I felt like he only cared whether we were making love or not. His response only solidified my hatred of even the idea of sex with him. The idea of him touching me intimately made me cringe, but it wasn’t because of all the people that hurt me in the past. Now that was definitely an issue, but that was not what was making me cringe. It was how heartless and selfish and non-feeling he was about the whole intimacy thing. I felt so used and so alone and unloved—and always felt that from him from that point on.

I asked him to get some help to deal with the rejection that he was feeling, but he wouldn’t talk to anyone about it. I told him that I was doing everything I could to get through this as fast as I could, but his response was always, “Well that’s great, but you’re still not making love to me.” Oh, that hurt so much and so deeply. I felt like no matter how much pain I was in emotionally, no matter what memories I was remembering and reliving, no matter how agonizing this whole process was, all he cared about was the fact that we didn’t have sex.

Chapter Twelve

Wow, Not Quite Ready For That One

Because of having abdominal pains caused by endometriosis, and having surgery to remove scar tissue and cysts around my ovaries, my doctor told me that if I ever wanted to get pregnant I would have to do it right away or else maybe never get pregnant. So there I was, terrified of intimacy but wanting a baby. I was already scared of intimacy from my past, and I was angry and disgusted with James and his so-called support. I had to make the decision to conceive a baby with this person who treated me so badly. It was either leave, or stay and have a baby. But did I really want to have a baby with him knowing how he treated me when he was hurting? I didn't want to have a baby with him, but I wanted a baby. I knew that with my medical problems, I had to just live in this hell to have my hearts desire. So I did. I stuffed all that pain and concentrated on getting pregnant. I hated the idea of this man touching me, so how were we going to conceive?

Well because we were trying, at least talking about trying to have a baby, we decided to move to my dad's house, the same house I grew up in. After the move, however, things got worse. It was a very stressful time in our lives, because we were also trying to buy a house. There was just so much going on. Our marriage was full of stress and anger and no real way to make up from all our fights. We were living in the miserable, depressing house that I grew up in, and you could just imagine the stresses of a house and baby planning.

One weekend we decided to go to the beach. It was our six-month anniversary, and we were at the same place and with the same people that we were with when we first got together. It was kind of a reunion of our reuniting. This vacation was supposed to take our minds off of all the pain we were suffering in our marriage. But it wasn't, it was a reminder of what we would be normally doing on a vacation with friends. We should have been having fun, eating lots of good food and having lots of good sex. But we were not having fun, we were too poor to eat good food and I'm sure you can guess that we weren't having good sex. As a matter of fact, all we did for four days was argue. He wouldn't talk to me, and he would put me down if he said anything at all. I couldn't understand what I had done. We were on vacation and it was miserable. There was so much anger and resentment already built up in a very short six months of marriage that you could cut the air with a knife—the tension was so thick.

So of course he brings up intimacy. He said he thought it was great that I was getting help—but when was he going to get some? He also stated how he felt rejected, and then came the guilt trip of how a man needs sex. I was trying. I couldn't help the pain I was in from my past. I tried as much as I could, but knowing there was no love made it thousands of times harder.

So there we were, at the beach in July as miserable as could be. Then one day we were fighting (and fighting about how much we were fighting) and yelling and screaming, when all of a sudden we ended up in each other's arms crying and caressing one another. By a miracle, by the beautiful grace of God, we made love. It was passionate, intense and extremely intimate. It was so intimate and intense that I started to cry. I was overwhelmed with emotions. I felt a vulnerability that I had never felt in my entire life.

It was an intense, passionate lovemaking session, but you know - this was all in God's hands,

because in this one incredible, blessed moment of passion, we conceived a beautiful baby. This was truly the grace of God. We in no way deserved such a blessing. I had prayed to my higher power every day about getting pregnant. And God chose to bless us.

About a month after we conceived and didn't know it yet, it was my three-year sobriety anniversary, and we were continuing a tradition of having a crab feast to celebrate. This was a celebration for me, and James couldn't say anything nice to me at all. He could only complain and make nasty remarks all day. When everybody came over; he wouldn't even talk to me. He worked really hard to destroy my special day. He said "Why don't you just enjoy yourself, because you really don't care how I feel anyway." Supposedly all I cared about was having a good time. I could care less how much pain he was in. And, hey, I got my crab feast so who cares about him! I felt like the most selfish uncaring wife in the whole world. I felt like I was manipulative and only cared about myself. I remember that day like it was yesterday. I bought into that guilt and shame all over again – hook, line and sinker. That day was terrible, and again I felt that I made a mistake in marrying him.

Finding out that I was pregnant did not lessen the stress in our lives, actually, it intensified with the addition of pregnancy hormones. So there we were approximately married for a half a year and expecting our first baby and living in my dad's basement. We were scared but we never talked about it.

Now I was married, pregnant, and getting ready to buy our first house, (a beautiful condominium with a pond) with this man that I couldn't stand to be around. He was always depressed and angry. Yes it was stressful, but that's the time that married couples talk and plan and enjoy the whole process of buying their first home. Not James, he was absolutely miserable. He was constantly stressed out and very nasty. He was verbally abusive, and he would always start blaming our intimacy on the way he behaved.

Things were good when he was gone, because he worked out of town during the week and came home on weekends. My dad and I got along great. We went to crab feasts every Wednesday night together. I liked hanging out with him and my brother. And then on weekends when James would come home, I would again be walking on eggshells. I could not say anything right. He would get mad at me and pour on the guilt every single weekend. It was miserable.

During this time I tried to work, but I had morning sickness that lasted all day; at least for the first trimester. During that time I began a lifetime of home business ventures. I became a beauty consultant. I loved the products, but I could never promote the business. It happened that one day I had a very productive presentation lined up. After we moved into our condo, I was preparing for this successful show, when all of a sudden, I started to get back pains. I'm not one to suffer with back problems so I decided to rest a while. As these pains came and went, I decided to start to time them.

You see a week prior to this, James and I went to our first child birth class, and we had heard about a woman who had back pain that turned into labor – so with that in mind I started timing these pains, and sure enough they were contractions, ten minutes apart. At this time I was approximately thirty-one weeks pregnant. Not quite time to deliver but definitely getting there.

I was rushed to the hospital and put on a drug to slow down contractions and, for the next four to six weeks, I was on complete bed rest, and totally depending on James for food, drinks,

everything. Did he lovingly take care of me? Did he talk to me and comfort me or even show the slightest bit of love and concern about me? No, he complained about his job, and he treated me as though I was a nuisance in his life. That's what I got instead of love and comfort. I got grief, guilt and anger. I had to withstand this hell everyday because he worked the night shift, and when he was home we weren't getting along. He was having a tough time on his job and was taking it out on me. And while I was miserable, I took it out on him. It was not a pretty picture in our house.

The highlight of my day was when James would leave for work and my dad would come and stay with me. At least then I could have conversation with someone. It was hard lying in bed watching my house fall down around me. But it was certainly worth it. I was under constant care from someone – whether it was my husband or my sister or my aunt or my dad, someone was always with me. I had to depend on everybody else for anything I needed. That was really tough for me - especially since that included my husband.

Chapter Thirteen

The Blessed Day

At 40 weeks of pregnancy, I went into labor. There I was, in the hospital with excruciating pain, having contractions every minute and, instead of trying to be supportive, James would just complain or not talk to me at all. Then he went to get something to eat and spilled it on himself. Instead of having concern about my well being, he got so angry about spilling his spaghetti on his shirt, he decided adamantly that he was going to go home and change his shirt; the drive was about 30-40 minutes away. I was in hard labor having his baby, and all he cared about was himself. He almost missed the birth. In my opinion that was the most selfish, prideful thing that anyone could have ever done.

All that medicine, monitoring and bed rest was worth it, because on April 13, 1992 at 3:32 in the afternoon, God blessed us with a beautiful son, weighing 8 lbs, 8 1/2 ounces. Our son, Justin was truly a precious miracle. Our whole lives were about to change.

We took this bundle of joy home, and one would think that our relationship would change for the better, due to this blessing. In several ways it did. Our son brought so much joy to our lives, but it didn't change my fears and my husband's anger. What our son did do was give James and I someone to love. We weren't able to show our love toward each other, but James just loved our boy, although he still wouldn't give me the time of day. He was always angry with me, but would pour out his love to our son. It got so bad that when he would walk in the door, which I dreaded, we wouldn't even look at each other, and we would stay on separate floors. I would stay as far as I could away from him because I couldn't handle his abusive words or his sarcastic remarks or dirty looks.

Our relationship began to deteriorate even more. Not only did we have so many communication problems, we now had responsibilities to go with it. And James grew up in a house where responsibilities were always commanded with unresolved tension. So any time I asked him to do anything, he would get angry with me and lash out with uncalled for, disrespectful remarks. He was a very angry man - angry from his past-which manifested itself into our marriage.

I stopped nursing Justin when he was about six months old and when I stopped, I started having pains in my abdomen again. It turned out the endometriosis was back and put me in horrible pain. I went to my doctor, and he told me to try to get pregnant again, because that could clear up the endometriosis. He said that if I didn't, then I most likely would never be able to get pregnant again. As a matter of fact, I was definitely heading for a complete hysterectomy.

James and I were not getting along, and we were already struggling financially. I thought that if we were going through this much financial struggles with three of us, I couldn't even imagine what it would be like with four. But we had to make a decision to get pregnant then or never. It was a really difficult decision for me, because I knew I didn't want to be married to him anymore and live in the misery that I was living in, but I really wanted a playmate for Justin. I made that decision once again to stay and get pregnant even though he was so emotionally abusive towards me.

I recall a time when Justin was really little and I wanted to take a picture of him on James'

shoulder. I was trying to aim the camera, when all of sudden he, in such a nasty way said, "Just hurry up and take the damn picture." It really hurt my feelings. When we would talk about his attitude towards me, he would say that other married couples were making love, and I would say that I needed him to communicate with me and love me and help me feel safe and loved, and I'm sure I would be able to be intimate.

When Justin was about seven months old, I'd had enough, but I was scared to raise him on my own, plus I was trying to have a baby with this man that I could not stand. I just wanted to die. I wanted out of this hell called marriage. I couldn't take the emotional abuse, the sarcasm, the put downs and the complaining. I hated him, and I wanted him out of my life.

But no matter how I felt, I still entertained the thought of having another child. I had to know exactly when I would ovulate, because it was a real hit or miss thing. Our relationship was so bad that I wanted to know the exact day that I would have to subject myself to making love to a man that never showed love towards me. We tried the mathematical way of finding out when I would be ovulating, along with taking my temperature every morning before I got out of bed, but my temperature would go up and down like a mountain. I never knew when or even if I was ovulating.

During this time I was still monitoring my ovulation, but I couldn't ovulate. I was in so much pain from the endometriosis, that my doctor put me on bed rest and scheduled surgery again.

While waiting for my surgery date, we found out that James was getting ready to lose his job, so we decided to start our own business; that way I could run it during the day while taking care of Justin, and James could meet with clients and make deliveries. It was going to be the answer to financial freedom. He put together a business plan and we got a loan for \$15,000, which bought us twenty-three home business options, a computer, a printer and a fax machine. We got the loan, but he wouldn't help me with the business at all. He just left me with trying to run a business, suffering physical pain from the endometriosis, and taking care of a baby.

Along with all that, I had the responsibility of coming up with \$300 per month on my own for the loan payment. It was so overwhelming and stressful, and each month I would freak out about how I was going to pay this payment, but some how God always provided. He knew I was trying everything to make it work, so He blessed me with the payment every month. Of course, this put even more distance in my marriage.

I continued to see my therapist during this time, to help me to be intimate with James and conceive. But, we lived a miserable life together and if it had not been for Justin, and the fact that we were trying to have another child, we would have split up. I was miserable and felt like something was missing out of my life, but I didn't know what that was. I mean I was married, had a baby, and trying to have another, and I had a higher power, what more was there? Well I'll tell you, it was the higher power part. Who was this God of my own understanding, anyway? He was so distant - just this big giant God of the universe.

Chapter Fourteen

The True Beginning

One day I was talking about my higher power with my sister. She was one of those “born again Christians,” and she started talking about Jesus and church. Usually I would have told her that I didn’t want to hear that crap, but this time it was different - this time I listened, and then she dared me to go to church. So the rebellious, cocky person I was, who never turned anybody down on a dare, took her up on it and went to her church. It was the first church service I had been to in probably twenty years. I actually went there opened minded. It was a huge church, probably around fifteen hundred to two thousand people there. Something happened there that changed my life - at least the beginning of a divine change and healing. As I sat in this school auditorium amongst this massive crowd of people, I felt something I had never felt. I knew at that moment that God was going to heal me of my fears of intimacy, and that I would be free. Well as I said, this church was massive and I’m not one to be shuffled into the crowd. I needed to know people and I needed people to know me. I felt really uncomfortable at this church for that reason, and James wasn’t with me, due to football games and whatever excuse he could come up with to avoid church. I felt all alone around all these people. I just wanted something smaller that I could call home, but I didn’t want to stop going to church. I was really starting to understand and desire to know who Jesus was - scared yes, but determined. So I went to Lisa’s church approximately four times and then I started my own journey looking for a church.

The next Sunday I went to a church a friend had recommended. This was a very traditional church (the kind I grew up in). The kind where you sit in the pews and listen to someone singing opera next to you - boring - not my style at all. So I left that drab place, knowing I wouldn’t be back.

I didn’t know what to do, I was miserable and I was at my wits end. I hated my life; I just wanted everything to be over. I started thinking about using drugs again. I thought that if I could get high, I’d feel better, but if I got high I would feel even worse, because I would break my sobriety. I just didn’t know where to turn, so I drove. I didn’t want to go home to that hell house. So as I was on my way home, but not wanting to go there, I passed a sign of a church that was held in an elementary school. I drove past my house and I turned around. I was in such despair realizing how miserable I was, and at this time, James was about to be laid off his job. I just felt doom. So I pulled into the parking lot of the school, where the church was, and I walked in. At that time the service was already over. I walked in, not knowing anyone, and I spilled my guts to the pastor. I told him that my husband and I were about to split up and that he was getting ready to loose his job. I didn’t know this man, but for some reason I trusted him, and he comforted me and told me that he would call me. I really felt that he would call me and he did. He called me and asked if he could come over. Now I knew how jealous James was, but I didn’t care. I really thought this pastor could help. So I agreed and he came over. He spent several hours at my house and we talked about my life, the past, the present and the future.

We discussed in length the subject of God the Father, who I thought I knew and felt comfortable with, and we talked about God the Son, Jesus Christ. Now this was not comfortable for me, but the pastor showed me a different aspect of Jesus that I had never known. Jesus was my friend, and He loves me and cares about what’s going on in my life.

Jesus, who I had never even given a chance, loved me and wanted to save me from the pits of hell that I was in. He wanted to help me, and wanted to change me and heal me. And even though I couldn't see him, all I needed to do was trust him. I needed to repent for all my sins, which were many, and I needed to accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior and turn my life over to him. And that is exactly what I did on January 21, 1993. I became one of those "born again Christians" myself. And this was truly the beginning of my life. This was not a quick fix of moving or getting the right job, or being the exact size or having the perfect something. This was what I had been missing and longing for all my life. I had tried to get this through drugs and alcohol, through relationships and success. But nothing compared to the love of Jesus Christ.

From the very first day of salvation, I never went on cloud nine, as some have, I just believed that I was saved by faith and that the Lord was going to heal me. Even though there were no real changes on the outside, I was being transformed into a new creation on the inside - a child of God of pureness and righteousness. I started attending that church at the elementary school faithfully.

James was starting to get curious about this church thing, but he still made up all the excuses why he couldn't go, "I'm a good person, I'm going to heaven, why do I need to go to church?" No matter what I said, it came out wrong, because I didn't know what I was talking about, and he had an attitude no matter what I said.

Since I was going to church, I was in consistent contact with Pastor Gary, and he would tell me things like "You have been chosen and God's really going to use you. And you have a very special relationship with God, and you have special gifts, and God will really speak to you." I didn't know what he was talking about, and I just assumed that he said this to everybody, so I just ignored it, but stored it in my heart.

After I accepted Christ I was still in a painstaking time of trying to get pregnant while fearing intimacy and at the same time trying to convince my husband to accept Christ. Nothing was working. One day the pastor called and I told him that I had a desk I wanted to donate to the church. He came over to pick it up, but this time James was home, and he met the man I had been telling him about. At first he was very abrupt with Pastor Gary, but then as they started talking about the men's softball team at church, there was a sparkle in James' eyes. This was something that interested him. The only catch was that he had to attend church two or three Sundays out of each month. Although he didn't want to have anything to do with church, he did want to be on the softball team. He had never been involved in organized sports before. I think he would have done anything to belong somewhere, doing what he liked to do.

The next Sunday would have been his first time at church, but it snowed. Since we had church in a school, we had to find another alternative. And we did, we had church at the pastor's house. There were only seven of us including our son and it was kind of cozy, but a bit uncomfortable. The pastor's wife asked if anyone needed prayer, and I said, "Yes, my husband needs to be saved." Now that was really overstepping my bounds, but I didn't know it at the time. All I knew was if he didn't get saved, I didn't know how long I was going to stay with him. James was angry, and because of his anger, there was no way he was going to accept Christ that day. But he did agree to go to church so he could play softball. We went every Sunday - we came in late and stayed in the back. I probably went up to the alter sometimes two or three times in one service for prayer—prayer for my husband's salvation, our finances, our

relationship and prayer for me to get pregnant.

You see even after surgery, I still didn't ovulate. Before the surgery my temperature chart looked like a mountain, and afterwards, it looked like a horizon —flat lined. It wasn't going to happen. And of course we fought so much that we couldn't be close —time was running out. James wasn't saved; life was a big black cloud in our house, but Justin was always loved and never neglected.

One day when we were in church, sitting in the back, I went up front to be prayed on for my many needs. And as I did, James sat in the back and said to God "as far as I know, I'm just talking to the air, but if your real, please help me, I have nothing left and no where to turn." He accepted the Lord that day. I don't know the exact day, but I know it was sometime in March of 1993.

He seemed to experience that "cloud nine" experience I'd heard about. He had so much joy. He was always in a good mood and high as a kite on life. It was a wonderful sight except where there is an up that high, there's a pretty deep low. I was so afraid he was going to crash and burn. He continued this high for quite a while, and I was on a low. I was so depressed because I couldn't get pregnant. I wasn't even ovulating. This was about the fifth month of trying to get pregnant, and we had the threat of time running out because of the endometriosis.

I even started taking fertility drugs to help the process. It was supposed to help me ovulate, but instead, it backfired and landed me into the hospital with ovarian hyper-stimulation, which made my only ovary, the left one, be about ten centimeters in diameter. It was extremely painful. So after I got out of the hospital, I went to see my doctor to start with fertility drugs again. But he wouldn't put me on anything, because my ovary was still enlarged. He said, ""I don't know what to do with you Rhonda, your ovary is too enlarged to take fertility drugs and you're not ovulating and your endometriosis is causing you so much pain that we're going to need to schedule surgery. All I can tell you is you better pray." So I took him up on that.

You see I knew I was going to get pregnant, because of a dream I had. It was the Lord giving me a chance to repent for my abortion. I had this dream and relived the entire abortion, except this time I felt the emotional pain that I never allowed myself to feel during the actual procedure. When I woke up from the dream, with remorse in my heart, and repentance on my lips, the Lord assured me that I would conceive.

One night the pastor's wife, Janet, had her monthly ladies meeting, so I decided to attend. I went there and all the ladies, about ten of them, laid hands on me and prayed for me to get pregnant. I had the faith at this point that I would conceive. I had the power of the Holy Spirit, which rested upon me during their prayers. And I knew, that I knew, that I knew that I would miraculously get pregnant.

The day then came for me to take my usual monthly fertility test. It was Justin's first birthday. I woke up and started going through the motions of taking this monthly, emotionally tormenting test. I was not even paying attention, I was just on auto pilot—doing what I did month in and month out. Except this time, when I went to check it and then quickly toss it into the trash so as not to haunt me, it was a miracle - the liquid in the tube was pink! I couldn't believe it; six months of taking my temperature daily and taking this test monthly and having surgery, it actually was pink. I was in shock. I screamed and told James "This is it; we're going to get me

pregnant!" I didn't have one ounce of fear of intimacy in my entire being. I had true faith, and I knew I would conceive that day. I knew it in my heart that this was our one chance. This was our miracle.

Chapter Fifteen

Double Blessing

We made love that day, lovingly, passionately and fearlessly. God had a plan and this was the day it was to take place. I didn't need any test to tell me I was pregnant. I knew the very minute of conception. But to be sure I took a home pregnancy test when I was five days pregnant. Now I know this is kind of crazy to take a test five days after conception, when I hadn't even missed my period yet. It was positive!

The day that I found out that I was pregnant was also the same day that I got baptized. That was so awesome to be crucified with Christ into the water and raised to be a new creation. I believe that baptism is an outward expression of an inward change. And I chose to announce to the world that I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. It was a very blessed day.

At about seven weeks pregnant, because of having such a high risk pregnancy, the doctor ordered an ultrasound. I asked the technician how many babies there were (I just had a feeling and hoped in my heart that there were twins). At first she said only one, and I was a bit disappointed, but then she saw another sack, and confirmed that I was miraculously carrying twins! I was in shock but had so much joy.

I came home and left the ultrasound pictures on the front door so the first thing James would see was twins. He was so excited. We were truly blessed; this was the grace of God—a miracle.

The pregnancy was difficult. The first trimester was extremely painful, because my uterus was attached to my bowel due to scar tissue. It put me in agonizing pain twenty-four hours a day for three months. My husband, once again, had to take care of Justin and myself. So now this is the third time since we had been married that I was on bed rest. It was painful, depressing and lonely. I felt once again like a burden. And my doctor informed me that as of twenty-seven weeks of pregnancy, he was going to put me on complete bed rest to prevent premature labor that I suffered with Justin.

Somewhere in the second trimester, my organs detached, and I began to live life again. Actually, I felt great, there's nothing like that second trimester of pregnancy, for me anyway. I've never felt physically better than during that segment of time.

Out of the blue, my therapist called me one day. He thought I was healed of my abuses, since I had convinced him, James, and even myself that I was. In fact, my therapist chose me, out of the hundreds of patients he had over the fifteen or so years of his practice, to share my entire testimony to a room full of therapists in training. I was amazed at his request, but I accepted and asked the Lord to help me. I wrote down key points, but the Lord blessed the entire testimony. James was so overwhelmed by emotions that he couldn't even speak. At this time of the testimony, I only knew of the abuse when I was ten by my neighbor up until the adult years. But whatever I said really touched these people, because several of them came to me afterwards and shared their gratitude of my honesty. It wasn't that I was trying to fool anybody; I really thought I was healed. The problem was I put my faith in man—my therapist, and not in the God of the Bible, Jesus Christ.

A few weeks after that event, James and I realized that we needed to find a new home. We

couldn't live comfortably in a two-bedroom condo any longer. So we went house hunting. I was twenty-five weeks pregnant. We decided to look for land and purchase a modular house. One day we traveled about two and a half hours away to look at modular houses. After leaving one place, on our way to another, we passed the exit and as we were going to turn around and go to another site of modular houses, we both knew that we were not to go there, and that we were to head home. The Lord spoke to us both that day. We didn't know it was the Lord's voice, but we knew, adamantly, not to go to any more sites.

We went home and the very next day I went into pre-term labor—at twenty-five weeks pregnant. My contractions were ten minutes apart, and I was rushed to the hospital. They stopped my contractions after hours of medical treatment, but I dilated two centimeters and was in great danger of losing my babies. From that day on, I was on complete bed rest, with monitoring of my contractions and medication. I was so scared I was going to lose these precious miracles. We already knew what we were having—a boy and a girl.

I was on bed rest, depending on everyone else to take care of me once again. I wasn't able to take care of Justin or run our business to make that \$300 a month payment. Yet again James wouldn't help with the business, which left me with the burden. How selfish could he be? When I asked or begged him for help, he refused. When I told him I was worried about the loan payment, he would say that I needed to trust God. The problem was, he wasn't doing anything to contribute or help the situation. It was very stressful and I felt that he didn't care what it was doing to me. Finally, as I said, the stress of it got to be so much that I had to make a choice whether I was going to let the business go or lose my babies. I was not going to lose my babies; I loved them, and they were so important to me. I was still scared about ruining our credit, and I begged James to help me with the business, but he wouldn't make deliveries or run errands, or anything. So I just gave up. I couldn't work when I went on complete bed rest. I remember being so angry with James for laying such a burden on me and not providing a way to pay the loan.

I was on complete bed rest and wasn't even aloud to come down the steps. I could only get up, take a shower and then lay in bed all day long. It was going to be like that from twenty-five weeks until our goal of at least thirty-eight weeks. That's what we were praying for, although my doctor would have been thrilled if we could even just get to thirty-six weeks.

So I stayed in bed, scared of losing the babies, feeling like a burden, feeling all alone, and extremely depressed. But this time I wasn't alone, Jesus was with me. He was with me the last time too, but I just didn't realize it. Jesus comforted me and people from church called and came by. They made dinners for us, and Pastor Gary came and gave me communion. He prayed with me, and the church taped the sermons and gave them to James for me to listen to and be fed by.

It was really a blessed time, this time, but I missed raising Justin, and I was made to feel like a burden from James. Since I had Jesus, I didn't go into a full-on depression. That in itself was a miracle. The days went by slowly, one after another. The excitement of the week was when I got to go to the doctor. Isn't that sad to look forward to going to the doctor? At least I was out of the house.

I stayed on bed rest until one night, when I was thirty-three weeks pregnant, my contractions wouldn't stop. I don't care how much water I drank or what medication I was on at home, they

wouldn't stop. I was rushed to the hospital and put on Magnesium Sulfate, which slows every organ in your body down, not only your uterus but your lungs as well. I call it a fate worse than death.

Finally after many hours under the torture of this horrible drug, the doctors finally stopped my contractions, but there was no way that they were going to let me leave that hospital until I had those babies. So I spent another week, including Thanksgiving, in the hospital.

The day after Thanksgiving at 3:00 in the morning, I went into labor again, this time it couldn't be stopped. James was on his way to the hospital as I was being prepped for an emergency C-section. As the doctor was inserting the epidural, James rushed in and was prepped to be in the operating room. And at 4:41 a.m. on November 26, 1993, our son, Kevin, was born, weighing 5 lbs, 3 oz and at 4:43 a.m. our daughter, Kaylie, was born, weighing 6 lbs, 5 oz. They were beautiful and so fragile. Our daughter was born not breathing but the doctors revived her back to health. And our son, this poor little fragile thing, was put on a respirator because his lungs hadn't matured. This was the scariest, most desperate thing that I had ever seen.

Both my babies were hooked to monitors, and they both had guavage tubes in their noses for them to be fed. Neither of them knew how to swallow. I only saw them for a moment as the nurses wheeled my bed through the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, but I'll never forget the feeling of helplessness that came over me. After this time, until exactly forty-eight hours later, I was not able to hold my bundles of joy. I had a cold, and I posed a danger to their well-being.

As I lay in the hospital bed awaiting some kind of confirmation of their status, all my friends and relatives got to hold them, everyone except me. This broke my heart, but I waited patiently for those long forty-eight hours to end. And when it did at 4:41 a.m., exactly forty-eight hours following their birth, I wheeled myself down to their place of residency, NICU, and I held those incredible miracles that God had blessed me with. Words could not describe my joy.

That joy shortly darkened when I was told that I would be going home without my babies. It was probably the hardest thing, emotionally, that I ever had to do. That was a very traumatic experience for me. The one thing that I needed was for my husband to empathize with me. After all, they were his babies too. But instead of us comforting each other, we just lived our own pain all by ourselves. It was a very lonely time. I remember him remarking that they were his babies too you know. That just made me feel, once again, so separate.

It was well worth the wait, even though I had to electronically pump breast milk all day long and James would take it to the hospital in the morning. In the afternoon I would go to the hospital myself and feed them. It was exhausting, but after ten days of worrying, pumping, feeling joy from their birth, and sorrow from the loss of them not being with me, they finally arrived home to complete our family; the family that the Lord had created.

They came home, and there I was a mother of three babies in diapers, three to feed and change each and every day. I was not allowed to go out of the house with my kids, because of the threat of the twins getting sick, since it was winter. The kids and I were literally stuck in the house for three months, including the time we couldn't go anywhere due to the ice storms that we had that winter. So, in reality, I was inside for five months if you count bed rest and the hospital. I got major cabin fever.

The days went by, filled with a lot of work, a lot of emotions, and much exhaustion. Every weekend was hell in our house because of the way James treated me. He would start out Friday evening after he got home from work. He would ridicule me, or totally neglect me. He would try to start arguments the whole weekend from Friday through Sunday due to his depressions that were so bad that sometimes he would sit in the dark for hours.

I nursed both babies for approximately four months. Shortly after I stopped nursing them, I was riddled with pains of endometriosis again. I went to my doctor, and we scheduled a hysterectomy at twenty-nine years of age. He was very against doing this procedure to such a young woman, but it was inevitable, and we both knew it.

The surgery was to be a two-day stay at the hospital, which, unfortunately turned into eight days. I had internal bleeding and received a blood transfusion. I was in a lot of pain and very scared. I didn't know what was wrong. My temperature wouldn't go down, and I had already been through almost every test there was in that hospital. I would say my faith wasn't really strong at that point. But even when I didn't have the faith, God did, and he faithfully gave the doctors the correct diagnosis and then I was released. Of course I was to be put on bed rest again. James took care of me, begrudgingly, along with Justin, who was a little over two and Kevin and Kaylie, who were about eight months old. It was a very tense and lonely time for me. While recovering from my hysterectomy, our relationship was strained even more because of the fears I had, which had manifested themselves into pure resentment from all my unmet needs. Sex was not even an option. It wasn't a thought, and it definitely wasn't a desire.

Shortly after recovering from my hysterectomy, I experienced a very familiar pain in my abdomen, could it be, yes it was, endometriosis. It was an extremely rare case that reoccurred after a full hysterectomy. The only solution to this dilemma was not to take any estrogen, because it was the estrogen in my body that was causing the endometriosis in the first place. But by not ingesting estrogen on a daily basis, my body would go into a state of induced menopause. And that is exactly what happened - menopause at age twenty-nine: hot flashes, mood swings, the whole package. That was all our relationship needed was a very moody wife. And sure enough through the mood swings I suffered a deep depression.

Chapter Sixteen

Could This Be The Answer

James started playing softball with the church. He demanded to keep playing no matter how much needed to be done and how much I needed help with the kids, and how much I needed a break from them. He would use the excuse that he has never played organized sports, because growing up, his parents never encouraged him to do or stick with anything. He said he really needed to do this and that I needed to support him and that it was so important to him; how he worked hard all week and that the least that I could do is go and support him in something that really made him happy. I felt so guilty for even thinking that I should have any time to myself, that I would get the kids ready. But after doing that all week, I was exhausted and so on Saturdays it would take longer to get going, to get motivated. Instead of being supportive and just once telling me to do something for myself, James would get angry with me for taking so long and making him late. Softball became his life. Two to three practices a week and games on Saturdays, and of course I was supposed to support him through it all because the Bible says, I'm his "helpmate." So out of guilt, I became his "helpmate." No matter what I wanted or needed, his needs and wants were going to come first. I don't mind doing things for someone, but all I got from him was grief, attitude and anger and yet I was supposed to be this supportive wife who stood by her man. No thank you!! That's not what I wanted. I wanted something I could do just for me.

I was twenty-nine years old and a stay at home mom with three children under the age of three, and now I wanted a career. James wouldn't get a better job, or a second job, and he wouldn't let me work. Every time I even brought it up, he would say his kids were not going to be raised by a stranger, because he was raised by a nanny and his parents never paid attention to him. He was so neglected as a child, and there was no way that he was going to let his kids go through what he went through. I needed to think about how he felt! I was being really selfish and needed to quit thinking of myself and think only of my kids and their well being. It was a guilt-ridden statement that always would keep me from my dreams. He said, with tears in his eyes, "You need to think of how I feel." I bought it every time. I owned his fears. I was a stay at home mom struggling financially, miserable emotionally, and all because of his fears and pain of his childhood. I didn't want to add to his pain so I didn't work. I hated it, but I didn't do it. I decided I would just buy my time until the kids got into school; that was my hope. One day they would be in school—and I would finally have a life of my own!

I always had a dream of owning my own business. I had this ambition that just burned inside of me. I would cry and pray, "Lord why did you create me like this? Why did you create me with so much ambition and then make me a stay-at-home mom?" I hated it. I loved my kids so much, but I would have been so much happier if I could just have something, anything that was just for me, but that also helped with our finances.

Then it happened; I was introduced, by a friend at church, to a wonderful nutritional and weight-loss product. When I took it, I got tons of energy, lost weight and felt great. Because of all the surgeries I had, my abdomen became very weak, and I developed a hiatal hernia, and because of all the emotional pain I had been through all my life, especially my marriage, I developed an inflamed stomach and irritable bowel syndrome. My stomach had been through a war. After all those painful, disgusting tests, I was put on several medications just so that I could eat three meals a day. It was very depressing knowing that I would be on all that

medication indefinitely, and I believe God knows my heart and my frustration. That's why I believe He dropped this opportunity into my lap, but not only that, He used these products that I marketed and ingested to heal my stomach. I took a lot of pills, all natural, and I replaced two meals a day with protein shakes. My stomach couldn't handle more than one meal a day. I loved the business; I met a lot of people and helped them. I felt good about myself because I was doing something I really wanted to do. And to top it off, my health had never been better, my energy soared, and I lost twenty-seven pounds and several inches.

Before I knew it, I was selling it. I felt alive. I could meet people and have adult conversations. I went from being a consultant to a supervisor in about two months. I worked hard and did a great job. My up-line encouraged me, my friends encouraged me, but James was completely the opposite. He was angry if I was on the phone talking to customers. He wanted me to make money, but he didn't want to support the time that it would take to make this extra money. He said that he "felt left out," but when I asked him to be involved, to go to meetings with me, he said no he didn't want to help or have any part of it. We would argue over and over. He said that "I was putting business first and him last." I said "I'm trying to take care of business when you're not home, but I have to call people at night when they will be home." I always felt so guilty if I took any time when he was home to take care of business

I should have felt great emotionally. I mean I was a perfect size 6, my hair was the perfect style, and I bought all the cute clothes to fit my little shape. My career was off and running, but you know what, I was miserable. Yes, I had all the outside stuff going for me. And, if you had seen me, you probably would have really thought I was put together pretty well, with no problems, but that's not true. There is always a price to pay for success and I was surely paying.

James and I had nothing in common. All I thought about was my business (it helped me not think of the reality of my life and marriage). He was against it from the beginning, and the kids were feeling the neglect. I was always with them, taking them fun places, doing fun things, but sadly to admit, I had only one goal in mind and that was who would be a good prospect. I couldn't even look at someone without viewing them as a potential customer. I was really obsessed with this business. It has really been humbling to admit this, but it's true. I was obsessed once again. Of course, I was a huge mess inside. My emotions were filled with guilt, anger and fear.

After softball season was over, James decided he wanted to go back to school. With three kids under three years old, he decided that he needed something for himself. Two nights a week, he took English 101. Now I knew him and how he obsessed over things, and I was really afraid that this would take over his life like softball did. When I shared my concerns with him, he told me his parents, who were educators, never encouraged him to go to college, so I at least could do that for him. I could at least give him that. After all he worked hard all week and all he wanted to do was do something for himself so that he could feel like he could finish something in life. Now, I of all people understood how much someone needed something for themselves, so of course I agreed, not out of love and support, but guilt and shame.

We tried to work on our relationship by having our pastor and his wife counsel us. But neither of us could give up our pride and sacrificially love each other. That would mean I would have to give up on my business, which I thought was my life.

Our finances were really bad, as usual, which meant my dad was buying us diapers and formula and James, instead of getting a second job to provide for his family (who totally depended on him) spent his money on school, on classes and on his books. One class two nights a week, six hours a week, no big deal, right? I mean that shouldn't really disrupt our lives very much. Well with his obsessive behavior, he would study three times the amount of school hours. He studied at the library for eighteen hours a week. So there I was with the kids all day, and because he had to study all night, I would be taking care of the kids all night as well. It was way too much for me.

Every time I brought up that he was spending too much time studying, he just made me feel even guiltier. Instead of hating him for his behavior, I hated school. And then not only was he obsessed with the studying, guess who he asked (I mean guilted) into typing his papers during the day? I was supposed to juggle three kids, a house, and make sure his papers were typed for school. I hated that. I didn't want to type his papers. I mean, I was so angry with his school for causing me so much pain. I blamed it all on his teacher. I didn't even blame James. Well, I did on the outside, but on the inside, I was angry at his schoolwork. Isn't that nuts, being angry at his schoolwork?

Usually when he asked me to type his papers, he did about fifteen drafts before I got it, and then I would have to type at night when I was tired, actually exhausted from the day. He would criticize everything I did. I hated sitting next to him at the computer knowing that after all the criticism, he was going to want to make love. I hated the thought of such an insensitive selfish touch coming from him.

When the class ended I thought I could finally get some time for me, but he demanded to take another class. He said he worked so hard in English 101 that he just couldn't stop now. After all he never finished anything in his life and he needed to do that for himself. After all, he worked hard all week and the least I could do was to support him on something he wanted for himself. So out of guilt and being tired of arguing, I just gave in. But I told him it had to be different this time, no more eighteen hours of studying. He agreed and said he knew he was being obsessive and perfectionist about it and that it would be different this time. I halfway trusted him and agreed, but things didn't change. However, this time I didn't just hate his schoolwork, I hated him. I didn't want anything more to do with him. He was so selfish, spending the money on school that we needed to buy groceries, diapers and pay bills; and also taking every spare moment studying.

I still, somehow, wanted him to do well because I didn't want to be the one in his life that didn't support him, but it was getting out of hand. I kept telling him that we needed to schedule his study times on a calendar, and that I was sure we could work it out and that he could do well. He wouldn't, he would just make me feel guilty. I gave in, but I hated every moment of it. Then because I was so angry and worried about our finances, I got sick. Eventually he begrudgingly quit school. I thought our life would get a little normal, but then softball would start again and all that guilt, frustration and anger started all over again.

During these times of frustration and anger, I went over my dad's house. He didn't live there. I went over there in the summer time and just prayed and cried and layed on a raft in his pool. That was my time. And usually about every four to six months, I would get so tired of his guilt and shame that I would go away for three to four days by myself. I knew when I couldn't take it anymore, and I would split. I'd go to my dad's beach house or time-share somewhere. It was

either get away, or go crazy. I felt so many times that I was going to have a nervous break down. I was so overwhelmed by our financial situation, not knowing how we were going to pay our bills, not knowing if I would even have gas to go anywhere, and knowing that if I couldn't go out with the kids that I could really go crazy. I would just be so overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted from the weekend hell at our house.

This is how it went weekend after weekend. He would come home on Friday evening angry and hurting and would thrust all his pain onto myself and the kids. He picked on all of us by ridiculing everything we did. He put me down for not cooking which I didn't do because he ridiculed what I cooked or he would take over if I asked him how to do something. He complained about how he had to handle all the responsibility like laundry, (which totally overwhelmed me) and shopping, (because he questioned everything I bought at the store). He didn't talk to me and got on the kids about their eating or how they were sitting. He argued a lot with Kaylie and myself. He felt like we were always taking advantage of him. He yelled a lot at the kids for petty things and he got on my case about disrupting his plans or claimed that I slept too late. Whatever he could complain about, he did. Then he would go to work on Monday morning and, after putting me through hell all weekend he would then come home Monday night like nothing ever happened. I felt like I was going through post war depression. The kids repeated the behavior that they learned over the weekend. They picked on each other and disrespected me. This went on until Thursday when we would all finally pull it together. After I worked all week so hard with the kid's behavior, they would start to behave, and then, bam, Friday would come and it would start all over again.

Birthdays, celebrations and especially holidays were absolutely miserable. James struggled with depression Thanksgiving Day through the day after New Years Day. I'll never forget one holiday season, as he was sitting in the dark, he got up, took a sledgehammer and mutilated our wing back chair. He thrashed it into thousands of tiny pieces. I know, because I cleaned it up. Now that scared me, that really scared me to truly see the kind of anger and rage that was inside of my husband. I think at that point, I never wanted to make him that angry again. I just never wanted to push him to or over his limits. After that, I always kept my boundaries. When he would get angry and slam kitchen cabinets, I would feel fear and stop arguing. I was afraid to push him any further. I really wasn't sure what he was capable of doing.

Dinnertime was miserable every single night. He would get so angry if dinner wasn't perfect, especially his cooking. If he burnt something or it didn't turn out exactly the way he wanted it to, he would have a fit and slam cabinets or throw something. If his food wasn't hot enough sometimes he threw his food in the trash. He was always in a bad mood and would not talk to any of us, but he would constantly correct the kids at the table. He didn't ask them how their day was; he just got on their cases. As I would ask them how their day was, all he would do was get on the kids about how they were sitting, or what they were and were not eating. Dinnertime was the worst time of the day.

You may be wondering why I didn't cook. It was because I didn't know how to cook very well, and I was afraid to try because of my husband's comments. I couldn't do anything right, at least that's how I felt. Since everything had to be perfect for him, I never felt like I could ever please him, so why try. I mean I couldn't even make him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich right. It had to be perfect, the bread had to be laid a certain way, the peanut butter had to be thick enough and the jelly had to be just enough. If not, he would want me to fix it better. I told

him I wasn't comfortable with trying to do it his way, but then his guilt trip would start. He would say that I should make it exactly the way he wants it. I should want to do that for him if that's the way he wants it. The problem was that I really did want to do it the way he wanted it, but I never could get it right.

Everything was like that. I'd try to go shopping, and he would put me down and question how much I spent or what I bought. I always felt so insecure. I felt like I couldn't do anything right. When I cooked, I would be so overwhelmed and so worried about being put down, that I would end up crying by the time I was finished. I couldn't eat my food and definitely couldn't enjoy my meal. So even though he would make me feel guilty for not cooking, that was way better than the grief and anxiety that I experienced when I did cook.

I wasn't afraid of doing laundry wrong, I just was so overwhelmed by every chore, especially laundry. I couldn't keep up with it. I could put it all away, but keeping up with it daily was not possible. I would put it in and totally forget about it for days. So he washed and dried all clothes and I put them all away.

The sad thing was that he told everybody that he did all the cooking, grocery shopping and laundry. Everyone thought my husband was too good to be true. He cooked, he shopped, and of course, he always ran into one of the women from church, who saw him week after week grocery shopping. Of course, he would boast about all that he did, not ever telling anyone that he wiped my self-esteem out when it came to those kinds of chores. No, they just thought that I was married to this wonderful guy, and wondered what I did if he did all the cooking, shopping and laundry. He ate it up. And then they came to me to tell me how lucky I was and how wonderful he was. It made me sick to my stomach. This went on for years. Practical strangers would come up to me and tell me how wonderful he was. And they would also tell me all the wonderful things he said about me to them. How much he admired me, and the way I handle myself. I would get the honor that I so desperately needed from my husband through others repeating what he said to them about me. The thing was, he never said those things to me. As I would tell him that I was proud of him for something, he would tell others how proud he was of me.

I'm sure you're wondering, why didn't I leave. It was because I was terrified to take care of my three kids myself. With the low self-esteem caused by my husband controlling everything I did, and feeling totally overwhelmed about every chore, and the lack of training to even know how to accomplish the things that needed to be done on a daily basis, I was just really scared. I didn't think I could make it on my own and I had so many people telling me it wasn't an option. They said that I took those vows before God, and what God puts together, let no man put asunder. They said marriage is for better or for worse. That's what kept me in this prison called marriage. The way that I dealt with the hell year after year was that I went away by myself; me and God and my journal. I cried and prayed and wrote all my pain on paper. I would come back refreshed and ready to deal with it for another four to six months.

My business really helped me to deal with the way my life was. I wanted so badly to do well. I knew I had the potential. I had the gift of selling, and I did great. I felt like, finally, I could contribute to the finances, and our marriage would get better – but it didn't. Just the mention of my business would start an argument with James. He would tell me how unimportant he felt and how I wasn't making enough money anyway, and how I decided to become a distributor without discussing it with him, and how it was taking up too much of my time. The arguing got

so bad that I just couldn't take it anymore. If he wasn't going to support me emotionally, then I was going to have to quit. I was devastated, but I packed everything up one day and went out of business. It was a very sad day for me, but a very happy day for him. I would be there for him whenever he needed me, no more interruptions. But the problem was when he didn't need me for anything; he emotionally shut me out and didn't talk to me. So there I was, without the job that had brought so much meaning to my life. I had all this ambition and nowhere to use it. Life was even more dismal and dreadful than ever.

Chapter Seventeen

The Truth Be Told

We continued our counseling sessions, and during these sessions, the intimacy issues kept coming up. I always had an excuse, until one day Janet, my pastor's wife told me that she really didn't think that I was healed. I finally realized that the only true healer is Jesus Christ. I agreed with her one hundred percent, which meant we were back at ground zero. James did not like that and resented me even more, but he had to accept it. We both had to trust Jesus that he was going to heal me. I knew he would, but I knew it was a process. We all prayed for God to send someone to help me, and as He is faithful, He started the process.

One day I was at church, and a woman was there praying with me. After the service was over, she came to me and proceeded to tell me that when she prayed with me she felt so much pain in me that she wanted to vomit it up. She seemed to have the gift of feeling other people's emotions. I was shocked at her words. I thought I had worked through all that. But I trusted that she was giving me a message from God, because I had prayed so earnestly for help. Even though she confided this to me, I didn't do anything about it. I guess I was terrified of the emotions that might surface. But God was in control, and even though I tried to ignore this discovery, He didn't. He sent this same friend to our house, and she proceeded to tell me again of the pain I was suffering. She explained to me that the problems in our marriage were not just because of James' anger, but they were due to my pain also. She said there was a darkness in me so strong that even God couldn't get through. And that the Lord really wanted to heal me, but I had to want it.

I was amazed at her words. They echoed in my ears - God wanted to heal me. I knew what that meant. It meant pain, the kind of pain that I tried to stuff back down all my life. God wanted me free from this bondage. He wanted His light to shine through me. He wanted a relationship with me. What was I to do? I got on my knees, and I said "Lord please help me, no matter what it takes, please heal me. I trust you with all my heart. Let me feel the pain for once in my life." I prayed this prayer many times.

One day a friend called me and told me about a twelve step Christian Recovery group she went to. Because of my experience with twelve step groups, I really wasn't ready to get into that kind of commitment. But the Lord had a different plan. He wanted me there and He was going to make sure I would be there. I decided to attend a women's sexual abuse group. It was a very uncomfortable situation. There were only three of us there, not really enough to constitute a meeting, but not small enough for one on one conversation. It was here that I learned about a one-on-one therapy practice, and I set up an appointment. At my first appointment I told the therapist my life story as far as I could remember it. I told her that I really thought something happened before I was ten, because why would I be so afraid of intimacy after working through everything that I worked through in the last eight years on and off with secular therapists. She proceeded to say that she didn't know if anything happened or not but if it did Jesus would heal it, because He is the great healer. I trusted this.

She also said something that was quite bazaar. She told me to go home and get in touch with the little girl inside me. I had heard that before, but what I had never heard was to do this by writing with my non-dominant hand. It has been proven that if you write with your non-dominant hand, you tap into the creative side of the brain, which is also the side that stores the

memories. The way that this was discovered was during a surgical procedure on someone with epilepsy, the surgeon probed a particular part of the person's brain, and discovered that the patient began to express memories. Apparently this became a study and hence the practice of non-dominant writing.

I previously had worked with three therapists over a period of eight years. Each had tried to get me to journal, though I never did. I guess this new way of journaling really got my curiosities up, so I decided to follow through.

My therapist also thought it would be best if I joined a group therapy session for six months in a program called Survivors of Incest. That name alone turned me off, because as far as I knew there never was any incestual abuse. But I agreed anyway. I knew I needed help, and I knew God was in control. My therapist and I would have about two more individual sessions before group was to commence, so I needed to begin my journaling. Now I wasn't really sure about this journaling thing, but when she explained it as "You have two choices in life, recovery or sickness." I chose recovery, and that is the journey I embarked upon.

There would be no turning back once I started, and I knew this, but as I said I trusted God and knew that my Lord would be with me every step of the way. The journey began as I began my journaling. I went home, took out paper and pen and started writing with my left hand though it seemed silly. I couldn't understand a thing that I wrote, but I trusted that this would work, and I had tried everything else to get in touch with my memories. So I did it; I started asking this little girl that lived inside of me some questions. Now I know it sounds nuts, but we all supposedly have the children that we once were living in our subconscious.

I started asking her—my inner child or whatever you want to call her—questions about her family. How many brothers and sisters she had and about her mommy and daddy. I approached her like I didn't know her at all. And in reality I really didn't. So she told me she had one sister and one brother, and that they were both older than her. She described them to me and talked a lot about her brother bullying her. She also said that her sister really protected her. This was quite bazaar, having this written conversation with myself. The most interesting part was, as I was writing, I was actually remembering things very vividly. I asked her about her mommy and her daddy. She shared that her daddy had his own business, and she would go with him to people's houses fixing their tv's and that all these old women would give her cake and ice cream and cookies. Amazingly, I could see this in my mind. Then I asked her about her mommy. She said her mommy was a make-up lady, and she and her sister liked to play in the make-up her mommy would give her.

All in all, it seemed like a normal childhood, but then I asked about her grandma and grandpa, and boom, there it was, she confided in me the most horrendous thing I had ever heard. When she told me that her grandma's boyfriend hurt her, I didn't have the vivid memory. I just wrote it like I was being told a story. And it was probably the scariest and hardest thing I had to do. Seeing that on paper blew me away. But I knew it was crucial that I accept what she was saying. I didn't remember any of it, I didn't feel anything personally about it, but my heart broke for this poor little girl. It's almost like this part of her agony was completely separated from me. I was just writing a story. So I tried to comfort her, and yet at the same time, I completely disassociated myself from her and her pain. It was really weird.

Hours after I had written this traumatic, horrible experience on paper, I read it over and over. I

was in shock, especially when my little girl, Rhonda, told me that this began at age three. My own little girl, Kaylie was just turning three at the time. I don't believe it was just a coincidence that this memory came when my own daughter turned the age that all my pain began. I believe this was God's timing. I read over this information again and again because, at the time, that's all it was: information.

I knew it was time to take it out of the darkness —the pit of secrecy, and bring it into the light. So I told my husband the whole story, and to my amazement, he didn't try to talk me out of the fact that it really happened. I was terrified to tell him this horror story, but the Lord gave me both courage and strength. I still didn't have any feelings attached to it. I continued daily to journal to my inner-child, and she continued to tell me the gruesome details of these horrible times of abuse. I kept this only between James and myself. I prayed and asked God to help me to remember this, and to let me finally feel the feelings of this memory.

I'll tell you, I'm not sure how I got through this time of recovery. I was taking care of my three kids under the age of five. I continued to live my life knowing that I was a time bomb of feelings ready to explode. I had a vision of Jesus Christ holding me in his arms and carrying me through life. And that's exactly how I felt. I had moments where all I could do was stop and pray and cry out to Jesus to help me and give me peace. I started having flashbacks of small parts of the memory. I started seeing flashes of olive green walls, and flashes of bathrooms in my head.

I was finally beginning to put this puzzle together. One night at group, we were all to share our first childhood sexual abuse memory and who the perpetrator was. I had it all planned; I was going to share about my experience with my neighbor when I was ten. That was my plan not God's. I started writing down details. I had already worked through this one so I knew I could share this experience and still keep my composure. But in the middle of the rehashing of this event onto paper, I felt a tug from the Holy Spirit to say something totally different than what I wrote. The Lord wanted me to share the details of what happened when I was three, not ten. So I excused myself and went into the bathroom and prayed "Lord, whatever you want me to say, let it come out of my mouth. I yield my words to your perfect words, I yield my spirit to your spirit, and I yield my will to your perfect will. Lord, help me to finally speak the truth." And I did, when it was my turn, I proceeded to tell, in a very matter-of-fact manner, details of the horrible sexual abuse that I suffered at age three. I was humiliated, ashamed and desperately wanting to stop the words from exiting my lips. But the Lord had a different plan, and I trusted Him. I knew that if He felt it was time, then it was time indeed. I cried and shared some more, but I still didn't experience the degree of pain that came with such violation.

The next day, James was helping someone move and, luckily, he wasn't too far away because from the beginning of the morning, I had uncontrollable rages that could have caused me to hurt my kids. But God saw to it that this didn't happen. I ended up putting all three kids in their rooms as a safety precaution.

During this time of recovery, I never physically disciplined my kids - I think if I would have, I would have damaged them forever. I had so much anger and rage because of what was thrust upon me as a child. So after I put the kids in their rooms, I called James and told him to come home right then. I went into my room and crawled up into a fetal position and cried uncontrollably. Then he came home and held me, and I felt like I was literally throwing up this suppressed pain of twenty-eight years. I felt like I was going to die from this emotional pain. I

also simultaneously relived the entire memories of my abuse. I shook and trembled and actually convulsed with fear. I screamed a deep scream from the pit of my stomach. It sounded like a wounded wolf. I had never heard anything like it before and yet it was coming from the deepest part of me. It was the most intense, gut-wrenching howl I have ever heard. It was nothing I could even imagine coming from a human being. And yet it was coming out of me. It was suppressed pain that was stuffed under so much other pain. It was truly the beginning of my recovery process. And the Lord was with me the entire time. He never left me.

After this life changing, gut wrenching, exhausting experience, I began to feel something I had never felt. I felt a sort of freedom and peace that I had only heard about or read about. The pain that controlled my entire life, my every move was gone, I was freed from the bondage that Satan had me under for so many years. My whole life started to change—my thoughts, my perceptions of things and my self-esteem. I started becoming the person that God had created. My relationship with the Lord began a whole new level. I started having the peace that I never ever thought was possible. I was free, truly free. Although I didn't know it yet, or maybe I just didn't believe that I could really be freed from this prison I was in, but I was.

One day during a woman's seminar, as I sat in a front row seat in a Healing of Sexual Abuse session, I heard the voice of the Lord, so clearly. He said, "Rhonda, you are free." I'll never forget those words. I actually yelled, "Yes!" right in the middle of this woman's testimony. Now she probably thought I was crazy, but I knew what God told me and I believed it. He told me that I was free. Not the kind of freedom that I always searched for with drugs and alcohol or the kind that I thought I achieved every time I moved—no, this was permanent. This was total freedom from the hell that bound me all of my life. So many things started happening. I started loving myself. I started taking care of myself. I began sticking up for my self. I became a stronger person. I was no longer a doormat. I went to the opposite extreme. I also stopped the sabotage, with the Lord's help. It was all a miracle.

I had such a peace, the peace that surpasses all understanding. And through this freedom, my relationship with Jesus grew. I continued my devotions every day. I learned God's Word and I depended on His Word to help me through each and every day. One day I was at a ladies Bible study, and as I was listening to the speaker at the podium, the most amazing, incredible thing happened to me. As I sat there, I felt the Holy Spirit so strong—stronger than ever before. And because I was already taking notes at this Bible study, I was well prepared to write, and that is what the Lord told me to do. His spirit came upon me and all I could do was write. My lips were sealed shut, because I tried to open them and they would not move. My ears were deafened of all the noise around me, and I could only hear the Lord's still quiet voice. He spoke to me of many things that were in my heart, and as He spoke, I wrote. He spoke to me of things I had never spoken aloud; things of my heart that only He could hear. It was the most incredible, scary thing that had ever happened to me. He told me He loved me and that I was His precious child. He called me His sweet, sweet, precious child. He filled my heart and the pages with beautiful words that only my Heavenly Father would say. He also spoke to me of my husband, telling me that He was His child and that He loved him and that He would heal him from all the hurt and pain he has been through. Well, you can imagine the shock I was in. As much as I tried to cease this writing, God would not allow me. He took over my pen, and shared with me the answers that I had been praying for—for so many years. This communication with the Lord went on the entire meeting until, in a flash, the heaviness of the spirit left me and again I was able to speak and move my lips, and I was able to hear all the

noise around me. I sat there in my seat, stunned, not believing, but knowing that this really did happen to me. It was incredible.

I took this journal home and I shared it with James. I know at first he thought I was crazy, who wouldn't? I know I did, but then as I read and began to speak to him about what God said about him, well it was incredible. All of a sudden he heard the words that the Lord loved him and that he was His child. My husband, on the inside, broke open. His prison gates were pushed wide open. He said that he completely and totally heard, through the words on the page, that God loved him. Now he had heard that many times by many different people, but this was straight from the Lord. These words were so anointed that he asked me to read them over and over again. It was a miracle in the works. But I had to also remember what God wrote about him and that he was His child and He was working a miraculous work in him. That was so hard to accept, I mean, I really wanted to fix him. After all, God was really in my life now. But that is not what God wanted. He wanted me to put him in His hands, not mine. And I tell you, from the background that I came from, I wanted so much to rescue him, fix him, and snap him out of his depression. But I really had to trust the Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit I did. I let him suffer so much pain. I let him try to eat it away with food and sleep it away with sleep. And all along, I could say nothing. It broke my heart to see my husband suffer so deeply. But like I said, I had too.

The only way I could do that was to stay away from him and out of his firing range, because when he was hurting, he would try so hard to make me hurt too. But one day I finally understood that I had to detach with love. Now that doesn't mean I left him, because I was told that wasn't an option by the people around me.

As you've read, we had already had some very horrible times in our marriage, but the worst was yet to come, at least for him. Since God had freed me from my pain, I became a new creature, the old had gone and the new had come. Although I looked the same on the outside, I was not nearly the same on the inside. I learned, from my therapist wonderful tools of communication and acceptance of other's feelings. I also learned to give the feelings back to them and not accept them as my own. Our marriage got a lot worse. This new me went from a lamb to a lion and I did not take any disrespect from him. He got in my face, and I got right back in his. When he would get in my face and yell at me, well in the past, I would cowardly take it and fear that he was going to hit me, but not anymore. It was like World War III at our house. I used to take it all from everyone, and now I wasn't about to take even a smidgen of a comment or put down or ridicule. It was a really freeing feeling at first to stick up for my rights and who I was, but then it became a war zone.

Back into therapy we went, to learn how to communicate. We really worked hard at this communication thing, but one real essential ingredient was still missing from our relationship. I bet you can guess what that was, yes, you guessed it, intimacy - pure uninhibited sexual intimacy. I was still so terrified of sex even though I worked through all those issues, every single abuse that has been written in this book was dealt with, but there was still fear. I didn't understand it. Why was I still so afraid? We prayed and prayed and prayed. I even wrote to a well known ministry that was having a prayer vigil, of my issue and asked for prayer. My church was also having a prayer vigil, so I fasted sweets for forty days, well actually thirty-five days, because I started late or should I say, obeyed late. Anyway I, elusively, shared my prayer with the group. I didn't tell them what it was, but I told them that there was a bondage

that I was still under, and I needed to be freed from my past. So even though they didn't have details, God did. He knew how much I wanted intimacy, but yet the fear held me back.

Shortly after the vigil, I was at home one Saturday, and as I usually prayed and asked God if there was any more pain that I needed to work through. He was always faithful in revealing the truth to me. Well, I felt led to do it again. Now I thought for sure there couldn't be any more. I thought I had worked through every single solitaire issue from birth to current age, (thirty-two at the time). I prayed this prayer and asked God to reveal more truth if I had missed something. He did, and within the hour, memories poured out. I will not go into the details, for I don't believe the Lord wants me to reveal this, but I will say that it was overwhelming. It was so painful and so scary, and I was very young.

As I poured out these tears and screamed and yelled and punched pillows, I thought it was all out. Not so, because the next morning I got up and got ready for church like any other Sunday. I felt fine, no depression, no anger, just normal. Then it happened again. James, the kids and myself were driving to church, which was all of five minutes away, and I started crying. I said to God, "Why now? I don't want to go to church crying." As I said this to God out loud, James heard me and said, "This is the time you need to be in church." So I agreed to go, and luckily, the crying stopped, and I pulled myself back together and walked calmly into church, thinking and praying, "Please don't let me fall apart; Lord, it's okay at home, but I don't want all these people to see me loose it like this." I didn't want them to see the real pain I was in. It was okay to show the surface stuff, even the self-esteem issues, but not this. How would they accept me if I was a bundle of pain? Well, you know God and His infinite wisdom. That's exactly what I did, I fell apart as soon as worship started and the tears poured out like a never-ending faucet. I continued, or should I say, that God continued to cleanse me the entire service. I couldn't stop crying; I tried, but I had no control over this. The Lord knew it was time for people to see my pain, and, boy, did they ever. Through this most humbling time, I knew that it was time for people to see the real me, instead of just a well-dressed mask of me.

Even under the kind of pain that I was experiencing, I could hear the Lord's still soft voice speaking to me. And right in the middle of my tears, the Lord had me go up to the front of the church and pray for my pastor's wife, Janet. It was powerfully commanded to me; all I could do was obey. So I went up front and prayed for her. She was not feeling well; she was in pain (physical pain). I had no clue why she was up there, but it was not very often that I had ever seen her up there, and never had I seen her there for herself. I put aside my pain, or agony I should say, and I reached out to someone else. Not for my own needs, but the needs of another suffering Christian. And that's what it's all about. No matter what we're going through, whether it is physical, emotional or even financial, when the Lord says go and pray for someone else, we need to obey; and I did. I don't even know what I prayed that day, because as far as I thought, I was useless spiritually. But that was so far from the truth. Actually my heart-felt prayers were heard, because a few days later, Janet was rushed to the hospital with abdominal pain. She had an ovarian cyst that burst. Miraculously, it did not go into her blood stream. God protected her, and maybe He may have had me pray for that particular reason. I guess I'll really never know until I ask Him face to face, but that really doesn't matter. What matters is that I obeyed. And through my obedience, the Lord blessed me, because after all these years under the bondage of the enemy, regarding intimacy, I was totally, completely, miraculously and permanently healed. The blood of Jesus Christ washed all the pain of my past away, and all the inhibitions of intimacy were free. The fears were gone forever. **Truly the**

prison gates of my past were broken.

Chapter Eighteen

Why Isn't This Working

After this incredible miracle, I thought everything was going to change. I mean, I could now have true intimacy with my husband. That's what he always wanted, and actually we both desired it. But something really strange happened that just didn't make any sense. James pushed me away even more. It turned out that he had a fear of intimacy and it wasn't just all my baggage that was keeping us apart. When I was finally ready to have what he called a normal marriage, we couldn't because he was so hurtful that I couldn't stand to be that close to him. Believe it or not it got worse, not better. He got more abusive and argumentative.

I got to the point where I just couldn't handle it any longer. I wasn't ready for a complete end, but I needed a break from him. I could see that no one should ever have to live a life and marriage that I was living. No more was I going to go through his ridiculing, depressions, guilt trips, sarcasm and worst of all his silent treatments. I had my fill and I kicked him out.

This was sometime in the spring of 1998. The kids were four and five, and I was scared. I still wanted to be married, but I couldn't take the abuse from him anymore. He left and went to my dad's house. Just at the right time in my life, God brought me this wonderful neighbor who became my friend and mentor. She taught me how to do so many things. She taught me how to do laundry, how to go shopping. She taught me how to make a grocery list, what to look for, how to do it. She was such a blessing to me. During this training session, James demanded to come home after one week. I knew we weren't ready, but he demanded it and he supposedly was the head of the house. Plus, I couldn't do it all myself, and I knew it. It was so overwhelming to me. It was a week of total confusion, total fear and total frustration; thank God for my friend helping me. I just didn't feel that I could make it on my own, and I knew I wasn't ready yet. I also had just been diagnosed with very severe ADHD. No wonder everything overwhelmed me. I had another therapist who wanted me so badly to get on Ritalin. I wouldn't do it, because of being a recovering cocaine addict; I didn't want to take a stimulant. Instead I just learned to cope with my inadequacies and struggled with every day life demands. So when he had demanded to come home after our short separation, I agreed, not out of fear of him and definitely not because I missed him, but out of fear of all the duties that would be all mine. I just wasn't ready yet.

When he came back, I tried even harder. I learned more about how I could be a good wife, and how I could love my husband. And at first he really changed, I guess we both did. He began to communicate with me and started treating me the way I was supposed to be treated, even our intimacy got better. But then no matter how much independence I tried to have, no matter what effort I put into learning how to be a wife, it was never good enough. He wouldn't give up the control. So I just let him take care of everything all over again. It was better than arguing about everything and feeling like I had to explain my every move to him. I just accepted that he needed to control things, so I let him. I felt a little insecure about my role as a wife, but since our communication was getting better, this was just one of those things that I would just have to live with.

During that same spring I had been applying to different schools for their external learning programs. One day I got a letter from a Bible Institute, which offered free tuition. Since I'm not really a detailed person, I didn't read the whole thing. I just read "free," so I told James that I

really wanted to enroll in this program. He read the brochure and realized that we would have to move to Lynchburg, Virginia. I was ready for any change in my life, so we did. We moved, but not for me to go to school, for him to go. I told him that I would put my dreams aside for him to have his, although I couldn't believe that I was saying that. We began packing our things. First we had to figure out which school the kids would go to. So one day we drove to Lynchburg and signed the kids up for school. The twins got into kindergarten early.

Then on the 4th of July weekend, we went to Lynchburg to find a place to live. I didn't know if we were going to live in an apartment, a trailer or a house. It didn't matter, whatever God wanted. We ended up going to this beautiful four bedroom house with a walk in closet and a garden tub on $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre. It was my dream home. The rent was \$600 a month and we got a housemate who paid \$200 a month.

I was a stay-at-home mom again with no career and my husband was a full time student. I put my dreams on hold for him to go to school. The problems started when that was all he was going to do. He wouldn't get a job. How did he think we were going to eat? How were we going to pay the rent, which was going to turn into a mortgage in four months because we had an agreement to lease purchase the house by December. Our townhouse in Maryland still hadn't sold. I was undeniably freaking out. How were the kids going to go to school? We had to pay \$1,500 per year for tuition since we lived in the city and they went to a county school. How were we going to get health insurance for them? How? How were we going to pay our bills, car insurance, life insurance, and utilities? What was going to happen to us? He had never not worked before. We didn't quite make it in Maryland, but we had always had people around to help us. Now, we were truly poor. He wouldn't work and he didn't want me to work because who would take care of the kids when they were home from school or holidays, or if they were sick? What was going to happen to us? I couldn't stop thinking about this. I couldn't stop worrying about how we were even going to have gas for our vehicles. And every time I would ask him, all he said was, "God will provide, you need to trust Him. You need to have more faith."

It was terrible. I had to go to the health department when the kids got sick or when I got sick. I'll never forget the day I had to humbly fill out the paper work. They asked me how we are living with no income and I said, "God is providing." I felt like a big fat loser. And James never thought about, or at least he never discussed with me any of the things that I was concerned about.

People did help; they gave us food, clothes, and even money after we had spent all our savings. I knew I couldn't live like this. Once again people were helping us. Why? Because the head of our household wouldn't do anything to provide for his family. If we needed anything, I would ask him, and he would get angry with me. He was stressed out constantly, angry all the time. He was worse than ever because he was so worried about his grades. He didn't care whether we had food on the table as long as he made straight A's.

I thought I would have a nervous breakdown, so I begged him. I got on my knees and begged him to get a job. In the meantime our housemate, Tyler, who was so much like me, started sharing ideas with me about a business. The entrepreneur in me was yearning for something; a way to be home for the kids and make a lot of money at the same time. I couldn't go on like this and not get some kind of stress-related problem. I already had irritable bowel and it was getting worse with all the stress. So Tyler, James, and myself formed a business called JSR

Advertising. We started out selling pizza box top advertising. I say we, but it was Tyler and myself who did all the work. James was too busy stressing and studying for that A. So I made the phone calls, booked appointments and Tyler met with the clients. It went well and sales were great. Then we started selling fundraisers. Again, I made the entire initial and follow up calls, and Tyler would kickoff the fundraisers. The money really started coming in. Plus, James finally got a part time job delivering pizzas. He hated it and complained about it constantly.

I was doing what I love to do, sales and actually making money, but we still had this huge mortgage in Maryland, and we were definitely not making enough to qualify for our house. I would have moved but the move itself would be so overwhelming for me, trying to unpack with untreated ADHD would have put me into hysterics at that point. I was miserable. So I kept praying and asking God to show me a sign if we weren't supposed to buy this house. There was no sign, so we stayed. Our townhouse in Maryland finally sold after we brought the price down so low that we had to come to the table with \$1,600 just to get it off our hands. It was better than dishing out \$1,200 a month.

Once we sold the townhouse, it was a great relief, but then how would we buy our house? James was delivering pizzas, and I had just started a business. It was looking really bad. What were we going to do? Where were we going to live? Why couldn't he see reality? He wouldn't get a full time job. He wouldn't quit school. He would say that the reason we moved to Lynchburg was for him to go to school. But I never imagined that he wouldn't provide, at least the necessities, for our family. I didn't know he was capable of being that selfish. But I was wrong. He was that selfish. All he cared about was his grades. All he wanted from me, as he would say, was to support him and be on his side and not against him. I needed to be his helpmate as the Bible says. It was all about his needs; who cared that we were going to lose our house? Who cared that we would have no place to go, as long as I supported him and his needs—then I would be behaving like the good little submissive wife. It was crazy! He made me feel so guilty, and he said, "You need to trust God, He knows our situation."

Our realtor called me up and said that the owner of the house was putting this house on the market. He was kicking us out and she was going to be putting a for-sale sign up and that the next weekend, and she was going to have an open house. The owner said that we didn't even have first right of refusal. That was too much for anyone to handle. I got off the phone and just started crying. I was so scared for my kids. What was going to happen to us? I have never felt so hopeless, and all James could say was that we needed to trust God. Give me a break. What we needed was for him to get off his lazy butt and get a full time job.

Again I cried and begged and told him that I couldn't take this and our marriage couldn't take it either. Finally, finally he decided to not go back to school the next semester and he got a job. He finally, after I almost had a nervous breakdown, got a job that week. He got hired on a Friday and he was to start the next Monday. He was really angry about quitting school and begrudgingly took the job. He got hired as a sales representative for a telecommunications company. It was a great job making pretty good money. We were able to qualify and buy our house. Even though our monthly payment went from \$600 to \$900 we were doing ok. I could finally relax emotionally and let him take care of us. I continued to work selling fundraisers, and we continued to grow JSR Advertising.

Things were good, and there seemed to be some normalcy. Well, for me there was, but not for my husband, he was miserable; he hated his job because he's not the sales type. I taught him

everything I knew. He would come home for lunch, and I would give him pointers on how to do things like how to talk to people. I guess you would call it coaching. When he followed my advice from my experience, he usually got the sale. I know a lot of sales techniques, and it was great to be a part of his life like that. It was finally something we had in common. He did really well, selling approximately \$30,000 in a three to four month period, but he never had confidence. He was always in a bad mood and angry because he never felt comfortable at what he was doing. His fears made him very unpleasant to be around. He became extremely moody as usual, and dinnertime continued to be miserable as well.

My life, on the other hand, was getting better because I found an herb that really helped my ADHD, a real godsend. That's how I was able to run my business. But our marriage was the same: miserable. He was ridiculing and harsh with the kids. He picked on all of us. During the day, I would have a great day. I worked all day with my business, and then James would come home in a bad mood and pick on us some more. Day in and day out this is the way things went because he was insecure with his job. Then he got interested in a multi-level marketing company. "This is my ticket out of my job," he said. He talked about how he wanted to do this thing full time and quit his job, because he hated it anyway. I told him he needed to keep working. He would again tell me how I needed to support him. I knew once he said that, we were doomed. His selfish, "I don't care what my family needs, I only care what I want and need," attitude, was coming back, and I got scared. We fought and fought as usual. He told me how insecure he was, and he told me how I didn't care as long as he was paying the bills. So of course, I would feel guilty and just let him sabotage his job and our marriage as usual (you see the pattern here). He did, sure enough; he sabotaged it to the point of getting fired. This was in the end of May of 1999 and the kids were getting ready to get out of school for the summer, so I knew I couldn't go get a job.

Then the kids and I all got this really bizarre bug called Shigella, an intestinal virus that is kind of like salmonella. It is extremely contagious. The health department quarantined us. So now there was definitely no way that I could get a job. I tried to work my business, but with three kids home every minute, I couldn't get anything done. James was home and kept saying how he would help. I decided, at that time, since Tyler had moved out, that I would begin an advertising specialty company, which consisted of screen printing and embroidery as well and any other promotional item needed. I had to do something. James wouldn't get a job. We decided to really make a go of this new business. So I tried to work everyday, but with the kids so sick, I really couldn't and every time I asked him to help, he had some excuse as to why he couldn't help. So there we were, five people stuck in the house all day long for five long weeks. We couldn't go anywhere. I couldn't work, he wouldn't work, his 401K was gone and again the bills weren't getting paid. It was the same craziness all over again. We would argue all over again about him getting a job. He would tell me, again, that he wanted to build JSR and isn't that what I wanted? And yes, I did, but he did nothing to build the business. As a matter of fact, because I had to take care of the kids and he wouldn't take care of business, I lost one of the biggest accounts that I could have ever had. I had the job, but he wouldn't follow through with the research. He wouldn't work outside the home, he wouldn't work inside the home, and he really wouldn't take care of the rest so that I could do either. It was nuts.

He said that he didn't want to work, and I needed to support him and quit always being against him. So of course, I felt guilty and felt that somehow I must not be being supportive enough, so dumb me told him he should go back to school. I guess I felt the impact of his emotional

abuse. He started school again, but for some reason I thought it would be different this time. I thought that he really had learned from the last experience. Not so, and yet again we were getting ready to lose our house. Yet again, he said, "I need to trust God." So there he was, back in school, not working and expecting me to make enough money to provide for our family with my business. It didn't work.

I decided to get a real job, but when we talked about the arrangements for when the kids were off school for holidays or if they get sick, he said that I couldn't expect him to take off school, since he was only allowed three absences. After arguing over and over about it, I realized that I would just lose whatever job I got because he wasn't going to help at all. It was useless to even try with his mind made up so I worked really hard on my business. I did all that I could, but I couldn't make it. I begged him, on my knees again with tears in my eyes, to please get a job and don't make me go through this again.

This time he got a job stuffing envelopes and then he got a job working the night shift assembling cell phones. That's all we needed, to be around someone who had total sleep deprivation. He worked from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 a.m., and then went to school until 12:00 p.m. He came home and slept until 4:30 p.m. How was I supposed to keep the kids quiet when they got home from school? He slept down stairs, but noise traveled and he would get on my case about how he needed his sleep, and he needed this and he needed that. And then on his days off, while he was depressed he started his old guilt trip, manipulation, and emotional abuse. He told me all the things that I was doing wrong, and how I wasn't being intimate with him. He had put me through so much hell the first year that we moved to Lynchburg, that all I was trying to do was survive, and that didn't mean sleeping with the man that put me through all that hell. I hated him. I just wanted him to quit school, get a real job and take care of his family (sound familiar?) But he wouldn't. He was a miserable, depressed, abusive, selfish jerk. And I wanted out. No more, no more abuse.

One day I left church, dropped off the kids, and headed for Maryland. It was time to separate and I knew it. The day I was going to leave, I asked God to stop me if He didn't want me to leave. He did, he sent me straight to my pastor, who convinced me of an in house separation, and he said he would counsel us. Now this would have been our sixth marriage counselor over the years, but I was willing, so I said I would stay and work it out. But nobody could convince my husband to quit school. I kept telling him that he would graduate, become a pastor, but have no wife and family, but it didn't matter. He was going to do what he was going to do no matter what I wanted. His selfishness just took over. Because once again, he said that's why we came to Lynchburg, for him to go to school and to school he went.

Then my best friend, Angela and her husband knew I couldn't take anymore, so her husband, kindly, told her to take me to the beach. We went, and it was just awesome. They spared no expense. We ate the best food and talked and talked and prayed and prayed. And through our praying, we both decided that I would just accept that my husband was going back to school the next semester. I was just going to submit to whatever he was going to do, and I was going to stop arguing with him. If he started an argument, then I would just put my finger over my mouth and not respond. I was sick of arguing and I was sick of my kids hearing it all the time, which caused them to argue and have nightmares. So I did, I stopped arguing back.

When I got back from the beach, James had written me this absolutely beautiful note telling me how much he loved me and how I was so important to him and our marriage and how he

was not going to go back to school the next semester and how he was going to quit his night job and get a full-time day job. It was amazing, music to my ears. He did get a full time day job, in the telecommunications industry, only this time not in sales, but as a senior technician, the same job he had done in Maryland. It wasn't the same kind of salary as the sales job, but hopefully we would be alright. It was tight.

Chapter Nineteen

What Is It Now

He argued with me about things, due to his financial stress, but I just kept silent, which was slowly killing me. I didn't know it, but it was tearing up my guts. Before I knew it, I was having chronic diarrhea and constipation. It alternated within three to four days of each other. Then I went to the health department because the diarrhea got so bad. It was my irritable bowel acting up and I knew it. The doctor told me that I had the flu; I told them that it was not the flu, but he wouldn't listen and gave me a new flu prescription medication. Usually, I read up on anything that goes into my body, but I was too sick, so I took the medicine and four days later, my colon started bleeding. I lost a whole lot of blood. I ended up in the hospital. I was so weak. I went to doctor after doctor, took test after test. Finally I was diagnosed with colitis. I had constipation and bloody diarrhea that would alternate three to four days apart. I was in bed with horrible, excruciating pain. I lost so much blood that I lost weight. I had to take narcotics to knock me out because of the pain.

My business kept afloat, because a friend, Brenda, who was like my partner (but without any financial responsibilities) worked with me. I made phone calls between my bathroom visits, which consisted of about twenty to thirty in a day, and set appointments. If I was out of bed, I would keep the appointments. If I was in bed, Brenda went for me. I worked mostly from bed for an entire year.

During this time, James spent very little time with me. Usually on weekends he would get a movie and we would watch it in our room, while we paused it for my bathroom breaks. But, unfortunately, he gave me very little attention. He did, however take care of my daily needs. He would leave work from his full time job, with his boss's permission, and come and feed me lunch and let the dog out. Although I was fed three meals a day, I never felt loved or cared for, I felt like a burden, the same feelings I felt when I was on bed rest from my surgeries and pregnancies. I felt so very alone. I talked to my pastor who referred my husband to the youth pastor who was helping him to do the right things. Things seem to get better between him and I. We started watching counseling videos that helped us to communicate better. We really started getting closer, even though I was sick. We began having intimacy and I thought we were on our way to recovering from all that had happened since we had moved to Lynchburg.

There was no more school, no more anger or frustration. Now we could start all over again, maybe this time we could really find the love that was buried somewhere in us. I had hoped it would be different since we didn't have those kinds of stresses; he really started changing. One day, he asked what the one thing I wanted him to do was. I responded with, "paint our house." He did, each and every room, without any arguing. It was great, we talked and laughed and started becoming friends. Not just two people living together, but true friendship. He was attentive to my needs and I was attentive to his. But the closer we got intimately, the more he started pulling away from me by arguing with me again about everything.

When I did get out of bed, an absolute gift from God, my house was a mess, which made me feel worse. I could no longer take care of the bills, making sure they were paid on time. We weren't making it on his salary once again. I had tons of medical bills that were accepting \$10 per month, thankfully. When I was first sick, I had no insurance, but then I got it through his work. So through much arguing, even in my condition, he finally got a part-time job to help us

out. But because I was so sick, he had to soon quit that so he could be home to feed the kids dinner.

Since our house had been newly painted, we decided to sell it ourselves to get us out of the financial jam that we were in. We had even found a house that we both liked that would make our payments lower and we wouldn't have to pay for the kid's tuition for the coming year, which was July of 2000. Even though we all loved the house, James wanted a house with a lower mortgage. That would have been fine if I didn't have my heart set on this particular house. It caused major arguments. But our house wouldn't sell, so we got a realtor, and even that didn't help, and every time we had an open house, I would end up having a colitis attack. I had to go to Angela's house and lie on her couch so that I would be by a bathroom. The stress of selling our house brought it on. We continued to look for houses and continued to try to sell ours. It was extremely stressful, trying to keep an immaculate house with three kids and a dog and a cat.

One time I had worked so hard to clean the house, and I truly felt it was show ready, but apparently, I was wrong because my realtor wrote me an e-mail telling me that one of the prospective buyers said that my house looked "lived in." I didn't really know what that meant, I was kind of hurt by the statement but more than that, I was confused. I mean, what did they expect with a family of five and two pets? James came home that night in a bad mood, but I hadn't picked up on his mood yet. I proceeded to tell him of the e-mail and before I knew it, he was yelling at me and telling me how the house was a mess as always, and what a terrible housekeeper I was. I was totally blown away by his words, and it really hurt deep. I began to realize that I wasn't going to be the one to take care of the house anymore if I was such a bad housekeeper. Plus, half the time I was in bed, so I got really tired of being the one in charge of the whole thing. It was just too much for my body to handle while also on my journey of healing from this dreadful disease.

Then we found another house that was even a lower mortgage that was in the county that the kids went to school in. Because we had our house on the market and we were looking for a house in the county, we didn't have to pay tuition. I got my heart set on yet another house, after looking at countless homes. It was a great house, with exactly what we needed, but then James wanted an even lower mortgage. We argued and argued about the fact that he wasn't going to find a house that had all that he wanted, in the location that he wanted, for the price that he wanted. I was trying to get him to see the reality. I kept telling him that if we put a contract on a house, then our house would sell. But he wouldn't believe me. He kept saying that we sell our house first then we find a house. It was a continual battle. He said that it just wasn't God's timing and that when it's time, He would provide a house for us. What he wouldn't listen to was that houses in the county go very fast, and if he really wanted to live in the county, then he needed to put a contract on a house, and leave the rest for God. It was going to have to be a contingency contract anyways. We weren't going to own two houses. We finally put a contract on the house, and they counter offered. He wouldn't agree to their terms and he wouldn't even counter offer again. That's when I got really fed up. I was not going to be the one in charge of keeping the house clean and I surly wasn't going to get my heart set on another house, just to have it ripped away from me whenever he changed his mind again about the amount of mortgage he wanted to pay.

You see, a house is a very emotional thing for a woman, and the whole thing was just making

me sicker. I was done, but I didn't want to lose our house, so I called the mortgage company and told them what was going on, and they graciously put us on a forbearance plan, meaning that we didn't have to pay our mortgage for three months. That's \$2,700 we would have and our credit wouldn't be affected at all. Budgeted correctly, that could last a while.

I was done. I had rescued James for the last time. It was time for me to create a vacuum for him. I just needed to get better; that's what I needed to concentrate on, not finances or bills or any other responsibilities including looking for a house. I told him that I was done looking and selling and if he really wanted a new house, then he could just leave and get an apartment. I wasn't going to argue with him anymore. I just couldn't, it wasn't worth it. I needed to get better no matter what it took.

So that's what I did, I went on a journey of healing. I was going to stop at nothing. No medicine was working, and the stress was making me sicker and everything that he would complain about: the house, the kids, and the finances would make me worse. I got weaker physically, but stronger emotionally. Yes, sometimes I wanted to die, but I knew it wasn't time to give up. And yes, I definitely wanted to leave him, but I knew for sure I couldn't handle taking care of the kids myself. I was stuck and I knew it. I think that is really why I wanted to die. I wanted God to take me out of my misery. I would say to him, please just take me home. Then I would think about my kids and get the strength to keep fighting for a treatment that would work. I had tried everything including herbs, acupuncture and medication after medication. Thousands of dollars in medical bills later, nothing worked. I knew that I would get better, but it had to start with me. It had to start with how I handled my emotions.

That is when I made the change. I knew I couldn't rescue my husband anymore. I just didn't have the energy for it. I had to let him fall. No matter what was going to happen, I wasn't going to pick up the role of leader of the house again. I couldn't, my health depended on me letting go. So I did. I just realized that if he didn't pay the electric bill, then the electricity would just have to get turned off. And I just had to be ok with it. Angela really helped me be strong. I don't know what I would have done without her. She was and still is such a blessing to me. James was now in charge of paying the bills. The house, the kids, the bills and all the needs that go into it were all his. I wouldn't imagine him not paying \$10 a month for my medical bills, after all, he wasn't paying the mortgage, so he had plenty of money, so the other stuff should have been no problem. The responsibilities were not mine anymore, what a relief. But boy did I hear about it. I was in bed bleeding and in so much pain, and he would start complaining about all the medical bills. I felt like he was kicking me when I was down. I felt like I was causing him all these bills and I felt so guilty, it made me sicker. By this time I was having attacks on a regular basis, sometimes every two days, and during these attacks I was completely bedridden. And as time went on my tolerance got lower and my emotions got stronger. James would totally ignore me, totally reject me, then when he did talk to me, it was nothing but complaining. Finally I just told him to talk to someone else, cry the blues to someone else, because I'm sick, I'm bleeding, I'm tired, and I don't want to hear it. Boy, that felt good, I finally told him what I was thinking, and I didn't care how it made him feel. It made me feel good. That was the continuation of my healing. I started speaking my mind. I quit worrying about hurting his feelings, and I started worrying about my own. We started communicating. I didn't hold back, and I spoke my mind. Yes, I was still sick physically, but I was getting healthier emotionally.

Christmas of 2000 we went to Maryland, where I was going to have exploratory surgery to see

if any of the endometriosis or surgeries from it, was causing the problems. At this time I had only been diagnosed with ulcerative colitis. As I was scheduled for surgery, when I went to my pre-op visit, my doctor sent me to a Gastroenterologist in Maryland. He told me that if the GI doctor says to operate, he would, but if he didn't, there was no way he would cut me open again. He had already done five surgeries in my lifetime including a hysterectomy. There was no way he would do it again unless it was absolutely necessary. He sent me to a specialist, who did a colonoscopy the next day (my second since the illness started.) He told me that I had untreated Crohn's Disease and that he was prescribing IV therapy. I hated IV's, but I was ready to try anything besides surgery. Removal of my colon was the last option, and I wasn't ready to go there yet.

I came back from Maryland and started my first treatment in January of 2001. Within two months, I was in complete remission, truly a miracle from God through this wonderful medicine. I was getting my health back, slowly; it took a long time to get my energy back, but slowly and surely I was getting stronger every day.

Chapter Twenty

One More Time

I decided to try one more time really hard with my relationship with my husband. I decided to make love to him every night for two weeks; you see I started seeing the pattern of when things went wrong with our relationship. It was when we had intimacy. It was then that he would begin to push me away emotionally. I figured if I still made love to him even when he pushed me away, then he wouldn't have a choice but to be vulnerable because we would have intimacy that next night again. This was very difficult for me, knowing the kind of rejection that he was capable of giving, and how sensitive I was about being vulnerable myself. I committed to do it anyway, no matter how much he hurt me. The first week went well, then he started pushing me away, but I had determined to do this. It was like my last real attempt at my marriage, so the more he pushed me away emotionally, the more I tried to convince myself that we should make love anyway. But the distance got really bad and I began to use old behavior, like act like I was tired. I very quickly realized what I was doing, so I started talking to him about the way he was treating me and how he was beginning to push me away. He proceeded to tell me how I didn't satisfy him, and how others got to have me the way he never gets me (he was talking about my old abusive boyfriends that forced me to do certain things). Now he didn't say it with any gentleness, it was abusive and extremely painful. I felt like he put a knife right through my heart. Because we had been intimate, I was extremely vulnerable and my guard was completely down. I was completely open. His words pierced me like a sword. He had no idea how much that hurt. That was the beginning of the true end. I vowed that I would never let him get that close to me again, never.

I stuffed that way down and lived my life. Boy nothing was going to stop me. I worked so hard on JSR Promotions. Brenda and I began to really build my business. It was amazing, sales were coming in like crazy and business was booming. We did a lot of on-site heat pressing. We made a lot of contacts and really built a solid business.

As soon as I started getting better, the letters started coming in, apparently the whole year that I was sick in bed, my \$10 a month medical bills were not getting paid. I remember during the year that I was sick, bills came and if James didn't have the money for them, he would put them in a drawer and not even open them. I really didn't think he was doing that for a \$10 per month bill, but sure enough, he was. I found unopened medical bills dating back months. I found collection notices that were never even responded too. All of a sudden, I had all these collection agents coming out of the woodwork. I groveled to each one of them and asked them to give me another chance. Our credit was already ruined from him not paying the credit cards; I didn't want a judgment against us. I couldn't understand it. He didn't have to pay the mortgage for three months, but he couldn't pay ten stinking dollars on my medical bills! What was wrong with him? I was irate. I was so angry that I had to clean up his mess once again.

Then our income tax refund came and he paid back the mortgage we owed. After a month had passed, our mortgage was due again. Since I had already committed to myself that I wouldn't get involved, I waited to see if he would pay it. By the beginning of the month, I finally asked him if he paid the mortgage. He said, "nope." I said, "Are you going to pay it?" He said, "I don't know," I said, "How much money do you have for the mortgage?" He motioned his hands into a zero. He had not saved any money for the mortgage. I was beyond irate. I wanted to hurt him. I didn't want to be his mother anymore and I realized I didn't want to be his wife either. I

couldn't stand him. I couldn't stand to be around him, but I wasn't ready to be on my own yet. Because of the stress that was going on from getting all these unpaid medical bill notices and finding out that he had no money for the mortgage, I got very sick. I was under so much stress that I had horrible pains in my stomach and I threw up for six days straight. Everything I ate would come back up. I was in so much pain that an ambulance had to take me to the hospital. My stomach was spasming. At the hospital, the nurse gave me several shots of morphine, but as soon as it wore off, I was in horrible pain once again. They kept me in the hospital for four to five days, hooked up to an IV pushing fluids through my body. I was dehydrated from all the vomiting. They took test after test and found nothing. After each shot of morphine wore off, the pain would return with a vengeance. Then the doctor decided to give me an anxiety medicine. It worked, and it settled everything down. It was confirmed that all my symptoms, like the vomiting and pain, were caused by stress. I realized then that this stress that James was causing me was going to kill me, and I didn't want to be sick any more.

All I wanted to do was go to Maryland for the entire summer. I could then get away from him for two months, oh how I looked forward to that! We had started going to another church, and before the summer started, we went to home group. At this home Bible study, we were doing a study called "How to Build Your Mate's Self-esteem." James was so loving and nice, as usual, out in public, but at home he wouldn't talk to me at all or he ridiculed me about something. He started arguments about everything under the sun. I told him that I wasn't going to play that game anymore. I would not allow him to act like this wonderful husband around others, and treat me like a dog at home, no way.

One night when we were at Bible study, he bared his soul. He told the truth, for the first time in his whole life, in front of a room of people. He told them that who they saw was not who he really is. He doesn't act the same at home at all. He was totally honest about how he really was. It was amazing, the naked truth. I was floored. Of course I told him he had to, but he actually did it himself. I thought for sure this would change him. Maybe by speaking the truth, he could be free to be that nice, warm, funny, loveable guy that everyone except for me got to enjoy; but no, it backfired, he got a lot worse. He asked for one of the guys to be his accountability partner (someone that will keep him accountable for his nasty behavior). The only problem was that he hid it all, again, from him. He would be yelling at the kids and arguing with me about whatever (usually something I wanted or needed or about our financial situation, or how he felt left out of my business, but yet he didn't want any part of it). Then in the middle of our argument, his accountability partner would call and ask him how his day was, and he would say, "great" and he would joke around. It made me want to puke.

Chapter Twenty-One

Reality Hit Hard

Then summer came, the Bible study ended, and I was for sure going to Maryland. But then my business got so busy that there was no way I could leave for the whole summer. I did go for a weekend to go to my friend Heather's senior prom. While there, I got into a conversation with my sister, her husband, and Heather. I told them what they already knew and how miserable I was. Somehow we got on the subject of James and mine's last intimate moment. It was so painful to even talk about; it put me into a deep depression. I left Maryland with the kids. It was late at night and I was very depressed. I guess the reality of how bad my marriage was really got to me. As I was driving, I realized I didn't want to go home to that man ever again. I prayed and cried, thinking about just going to sleep and letting God just take me home. One minute I would fall asleep, the next, I would slap myself to wake up. I wanted to die, but I didn't want the kids to die. Somehow by the grace of God, we made it home that night.

I made up my mind that night that I was separating from James. So I got home and the next night he told me that God really convicted him about what he was doing and he really wanted to change. But it was too late, I wanted a separation, and if I didn't get one, I would eventually never want to work it out. But I would be willing to separate to reconcile. He was shocked. I was serious.

Summer came, and most of the time the kids were in Maryland, thank God. They didn't have to hear the arguing. I couldn't stand James, so I began strategizing and planning how to get out of my marriage. We got another counselor from church, number seven or eight; I've lost count by now. We also got a financial counselor, who said we needed to sell our house. Well what kind of a house would we get with the bad credit that my husband got us into? But I knew I couldn't live in our house and walk away from my marriage, it was too expensive.

I, for some reason, felt like I had to walk away from God to walk away from my marriage. That's what people told me, not anyone close, just acquaintances. I loved and still love the Lord with all my heart, but I couldn't stand anything to do with what I thought were the laws of the Bible. I knew I wanted to separate, but I didn't want to go against God, so I convinced James, our counselor and myself that I wanted to do it Biblically. Its like the keys to my prison gates were dangling in front of me for the first time in my married life, and I was going to find a way to grab them no matter what it took. I halfway convinced myself that we were separating to reconcile. Now I hadn't told James or the counselor the truth—that I had no desire to ever get back with him. I just played the game. I had to first convince James that if we could find a house that we both liked, that fit our budget, then our house would sell quickly, (sound familiar)? For some reason, he agreed this time. We found a house in a great neighborhood. God answered all my prayers, a house with three bedrooms and two bathrooms with a fenced-in back yard and lots of kids in the neighborhood. The owners of this house bought our house, and we switched houses. It was definitely a God thing.

I never really saw all five of us living in this house. I guess I knew my marriage was over. It was just a matter of the right timing. We had to pack, but I was really busy with on-site heat pressing. This was right in the middle of baseball tournaments. Not a good time to move. I couldn't find time to pack. I did what I could every minute that I could, but I just didn't have the time. I worked all day and then worked at night. James was a real unsupportive jerk about it. It

got so bad that I had to call our counselor to intervene. At the time, Heather was staying with us, and she helped us move. During that time she witnessed first hand how my life was. James was so nasty that he couldn't even hide it from her. It hurt her so much to see how he treated me, that it made her cry. She asked me why I put up with him. And I said, as I always said, that I did it for the kids. I did what I had to do for them, always for them. I called the counselor and told him that I really didn't think I wanted to move into this new house with my husband, and I meant it. He came over and told him to be extra nice to me that week, and to love me and honor me and serve me. I explained to him that the unpacking was the worst part for me. Even though I was on medicine for my ADHD, I still was really scared of feeling overwhelmed when I unpacked, so he told him that he needed to do anything, no matter what it was, to help me. He said, "do it lovingly and kindly." James was to serve his wife.

Well I really thought that he would take the counselor's advice. You would think that hearing that I didn't even want to move in with him would really hurt. He knew I wanted to leave him, and he knew I was only staying for the kid's sake. He knew because I told him. And when I said it, he would say "yeah yeah, I know you're fed up. You're always fed up, what else is new?" Well this time, this was it. I would never say I'm fed up again unless I was ready to end it. And I was. I was scared, no terrified, but I didn't want to wish I was dead anymore. I wanted my life back, and I would do whatever it took, even if that meant I had to lie to or deceive everyone, even myself. But I decided to see if maybe he would actually help me unpack. He didn't, and as a matter of fact, every time I asked him to even move a box, he told me how many other things he needed to do, or his carpel tunnel syndrome was hurting him so he couldn't help me. He didn't lift a finger unless I was throwing away his stuff, then he got right up, used his carpel tunnel hands and went rummaging through the trash. The kids and I did everything.

I didn't even think of unpacking our bedroom. I was just fine sleeping on the couch. I was so frustrated with him. He wouldn't even help me figure out the bills. He did the absolute opposite of what our counselor asked him to do. During the days of unpacking, our counselor came over and asked us how our week had gone. We never could get to real issues, because we were always just discussing how the week went, and it was always going bad.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The Final Farewell

I called the counselor and told him that he needed to get James out of the house. I wasn't leaving this time; I had already tried that one. Nope, it wasn't going to be me leaving, it was going to be him. The counselor agreed and he came over. I convinced James and him that I wanted a separation to reconcile but I wanted no time limit on it. I wanted a semi-permanent separation. James finally agreed, but it took a couple of weeks. We had delays because our counselor went on vacation, and the kids started school, a new school but in same county, so we no longer had to pay tuition, what a relief.

Then the horrible event of September 11, 2001 happened. It devastated me. It made me realize how much compassion that I truly have. I wasn't just a heartless woman, I was just fed up and not going to take it anymore from my husband. The good thing about the time that we agreed for James to move out and the actual time that he did, was that he was working out of town, so I never had to see him. It got me used to the idea, and I was handling it just fine. I took care of the kids just fine. The only bad thing was that I knew he could come home, and I wanted that to change forever. I was just counting the days until he really left.

On Monday morning, September 17, 2001, James moved out. It was and will always be the happiest day of my life. All I could do when he left, knowing he wasn't coming home anymore, was smile and rejoice. I praised God and thanked him for answering my prayers. I was truly happy, completely and awesomely happy. It was great! I have to admit, however, there was this teeny tiny string that held us together, that maybe one day he would change.

As time went on, I started reflecting back on my relationship, and I realized how miserable I really was for over ten years. So I went forward and got a legal separation, mainly so that James couldn't ruin my credit anymore. I gave him the papers, but he wouldn't even talk about it. He was devastated.

Our counselor called me up and told me that the pastor of the church that I had started attending, (since I wasn't going to go to the same church as James) called him up, and they discussed how I needed to set a date when James was going to move back in. I immediately felt a noose go around my neck. I felt like I couldn't breathe, and then some how I got the courage to say no, I'm not letting him back in. The counselor told me that I wasn't following God's way of separation, and he wanted me to see my husband's other counselor. I was so shocked, I just said "fine."

Then two weeks later, when James was supposed to hand me signed separation papers, he instead said, "I'm not signing the papers and not only am I not signing the papers, I'm moving home tonight. You're my wife and these are my kids and this is my house and I'm moving home. The kids need their father home with them." Well I freaked out and felt that noose go around my neck again. After saying things I regret and making a scene, he chose not to move back. I then proceeded to tell him that he will never do that to me again, and that I was divorcing him. Wow, divorce! Even though so many Christians told me that I was turning my back on God if I divorced, I knew God didn't want me to wish I were dead anymore. And the most amazing thing was, that I didn't. For the first time in ten years, I wanted to live. And you know that teeny tiny string that held us together? Well it was chopped right then and there.

There was no more “us;” there was now I and the kids, he and the kids, but not we and the kids. It was great. I felt liberated and free. I felt nervous about life itself, but I felt so much peace about my decision, and I finally said the d-word. I said “divorce” and I meant it.

For years, even before meeting James, I was very unhealthy emotionally and physically. I was always in a very unhealthy relationship. But now, ever since my recovery process earlier in my marriage, I was out of the dungeon of pain from my past. My dungeon gates had been broken, but I was still in such an unhealthy relationship. Now, however, for the first time in my life, I was no longer in an unhealthy relationship, and I was no longer physically unhealthy. It was like life was just beginning for me. The key to my new life that broke down the prison gates is a key called “divorce” and I finally have that key, halleluiah!

Chapter Twenty-Three

There Is Freedom In Divorce

When I started writing this book, I really felt that it's sole purpose was to help those who have been through childhood sexual abuse, but that is not the only purpose. God has shown me through writing this book that my purpose is also to tell Christians who have gone through a divorce or are contemplating one, that there is freedom. I don't know if this is happening or has happened to you, but I was shunned by Christians when I separated from James. It has been a very tough road, but the Lord has been with me all the way. He never left me once through this traumatic experience. So many people said that God hates divorce, and, yes, He does. As written in The Living Bible Paraphrased Edition in Malachi 2:16, the scripture says, "For the Lord, the God of Israel, says He hates divorce and cruel men". Now cruelty can be physical or emotional. Abuse is abuse and it destroys no matter how you look at it.

I'm not here to condone divorce. It is a very serious decision, but if it is prayerfully done, good can come out of it. Seek counseling in how to balance the everyday life for you and your kids. If you feel that you have no other choice and you've done all that the Lord requires, if your finances are tight, then you may want to seek a Pro Se Divorce. It is a complicated, time intensive process requiring commitment and attention to schedules and details. There are many books and clinics to help you along the way. You can get a video at the library called "A Guide To Pro Se Divorce." You must be diligent in seeking out your own answers and ask God for help. Keep in mind, this is your divorce, and you are responsible for making it happen with His help. If you let anything slip through your fingers, you won't be able to experience the freedom you deserve. But if you do all that's required, you, too, can have your prison gates broken and experience freedom in divorce.

After all that I have been through, my prayer is that this book will aid you in your healing process. Remember, if you have been freed and your prison gates are opened, it's because the Lord has opened them for you. There is no reason to feel guilty! You and I have been given the gift of leaving a destructive, dysfunctional and abusive marriage. Even though nobody else sees the scars, God does, and He honors our motives to do the best thing for our children and ourselves. So don't allow the opinions of others to dictate your life like I did for so many years. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight," Proverbs 3:5-6. May God bless you while you prayerfully move on!

To Be Continued...

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