

# My Story



*My life long  
spiritual journey,  
that always brought me  
back to God!*

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## My Story

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Dedications

## ***Follow me on the journey that is my life.***

I am nobody special, or famous, and just like you, my life has lead me down many roads, and around many corners. I have never done anything noble, or interesting for that matter. I have learned much on this journey, and it has been interesting to me.

I was born in 1958 in Decatur, Illinois. I am the youngest of 6 children. Janie turned 13 just after I was born. Linda only lived for 24 hours, she would have turned 11 on her next birthday. Bill (Sonnie) was 9 when I was born. Vicki turned 6 on her next birthday. Debbie would turn 4 on her next birthday.

I used to sit and look at the picture Mother had of Linda in the very back of an album. I didn't understand at all what was meant by "dead". I used to talk to Linda, and I felt connected to her somehow.

Like most people, I have very little memories of childhood, but there are a few things that have always stuck with me, even through the years. I guess like anyone, these are some of the things that add to what made me who I am today. Things that contributed to my love of certain things, and my dislike of others. They say we gain most of our personality traits by the time we are 5 years old. In reflection, I can see some of that.

My first memory was around 2 years of age being in my Mothers arms, wrapped in a blanket and waiting to board a train. I don't remember the train ride, I just remember her holding me, and the train beside us. I did learn later that we were joining my Father in Pennsylvania where he was stationed in the Army. I think we lived there for about a year.

While we were in Pennsylvania, I remember one morning, there was snow on the ground, and I was going outside with Mom. We got out on the little landing porch and I looked down the stairs and the bottom step looked funny. I ask Mom what was wrong with that, and she told me a porcupine had chewed it up. What was a porcupine? Where was it

now? being just over 2, I had lots of questions. Reflecting back now, I don't know if I actually looked over by the tree line and saw it, or if I have created that memory. I guess that taught me to be curious about animals.

I suspect it was cold the entire time we were there, in Pennsylvania, because all I remember then was that it was cold. One of us was sick, can't remember who, but a doctor came to the house and gave us all shots. I don't remember getting a shot, I don't remember being afraid of a shot, I just know he was there to give us all shots. I do not remember leaving there, or riding a train again, or even where we went immediately after.

Just know, I am just me,  
I am a Child of God,  
and I am telling my story.

So follow me to my first real memories in Maroa, Illinois!

## **1 Maroa, Illinois EARLY CHILDHOOD**

My first really clear memory is being around 3. I was with Mom and Dad and we were looking at a house they wanted to buy. We walked in and the first thing I saw was the stairs leading to the upper level bedrooms. There was a curve at the top, and I tugged on Mom's coat and said "Look Mommy, that is where I can hide." I didn't know what I was hiding from, it was just a good place to hide. I found a lot of little places to hide in that house, during 7 years we lived there.

I have many fond memories of that house. I have some not so fond memories of that house. Love, Laughter, Sadness, Pain, all these things that helped to form my personality, and

to shape how I looked at the world. I will admit, I was sheltered.

I loved being the star of the show at home. If there was an audience I was performing. Singing, playing a character like on TV. I tried so hard to be funny. Oddly now, I have no sense of humor. The family was always a captive audience. They all made me feel special. They all made me feel loved.

I cherished the 'get together s', when outside family members would come to visit. It never dawned on me they were not all truly 'family', but close friends also. They would come and play cards, or just for dinner. When my Dad's family came they usually brought instruments with them, which meant music in the air. I loved music. My Dad always played the bones. Yes! They were real bones from a pig's ribs. He had made them himself, by drying the bones, sanded them down, polished them and finally oiled them to a shine. I loved to hear him 'rattle them bones'.

I didn't like it much when the big people around me argued. Not just Mom and Dad. There were a few times I remember when there was a lot of yelling.

One time Mom and Dad were yelling at each other. Mom told Dad to get out! Dad then told her she could get out! Dad also said if she left she had to leave the kids. She would never see us again. He would send us all off to a 'boring school'. I didn't know what that was, but I didn't want to go anywhere Mommy wasn't going to be. I cried really hard, and Debbie (my third sister) and Sonnie (my brother) put their arms around me and told me it would be okay. Debbie told me she would never leave me. She would always take care of me - and she DID.

Another time this guy Skip came over. He was always around. I didn't really know what kind of family he was, but everyone loved him, so I did too.

Dad and Mom were yelling again and along with Skip and my oldest sister Janie. I don't know what they were yelling about, but a week or so later they were getting married and

everyone seemed happy. I guess they were yelling about what kind of cake to have or something. Next thing I know I am not the baby anymore, I am just "Old Aunt Sue". That new little person cried a lot.

Mom had a shop across the street where she sold yard sale kind of stuff. It was also where we kept boxes of stuff that people gave us.

Someone gave us a boxes and boxes of Kraft Marshmallow Cream. It was a new thing and I guess they wanted us to tell them if it was any good. In the evening when we were together watching TV, we all had our own jar to eat. It was messy but it sure was good. I was kind of sorry when the last box was empty.

Sonnie got a guitar. After that there were all these boys that started coming around all the time. This one guy they called Shorty, he was the biggest man I had ever seen, I could not understand why they called him Shorty. He played the guitar and sang. Sonny played what was called a base guitar. A guy named Dave played the drums. I liked Dave, he made me laugh. Mom made a painting of a Joker from a deck of cards and put it on Dave's drums. That was the name of my brother's band.

They played some songs that I really liked. One these songs was called "Little Brown Shack". I thought that sounded like the perfect hiding place. "Hang on Sloopy" was another one I really liked, but I have no idea why. Then there were the ones that just made me laugh like "One Eyed One Horned Flying Purple People Eater". I was safe from him, since he only ate Purple People, and I wasn't Purple. MY FAVORITE was a song by Johnny Cash, called "A boy named Sue!" They wrote a song about me, or so I thought it would me, as soon as I turned into a boy. Not sure how long that would take though.

There was one night that a building caught on fire. The Fire Station was just two doors down from our house, and the building that was full of fire, was around the corner, right next Mom's shop.

I was so scared that Mom's shop would burn too, but Debbie reminded me of a TV show we watched. A boy prayed to a mustard seed not to let his horse be sick.

I ran up to the bedroom window where I could still see the fire burning and I prayed "Mustard Seed! Mustard Seed! Please save Mom's shop".

It was late at night. The Fire trucks came from all the towns around us. It was hard to tell, sometimes, what was fire and what was flashing lights.

It was almost daylight before they got the fire out. The building was an old pool hall and the hotel. It had burned to the ground. That mustard seed must have heard me, because Mom's shop was okay.

It was about then I started going to a church just down the block from where the hotel had burned down. I liked going to church and singing about this guy named Jesus. I didn't know who he was, but they talked about him a lot. He liked little kids like us, so I thought he must have been a really good guy. They told us we could talk to him and ask him for things, and he would give us things. I asked where we could see him, and they told me you couldn't see him. Now I understood, he was like the invisible people I talked to in my hiding places.

I asked Mom if she would teach me to pray. It was Debbie that took me by the hand, got the family Bible and found the Lord's Prayer. She prayed with me for days, until I could remember it on my own. It was easy to pray, and then after I said that prayer, I started just talking to him, like I talked to my other invisible people. My family said those were my pretend friends, but to me they were just invisible. I loved them and they loved me back.

I always liked talking to grown ups. I loved to talk to my Grandma when Mom had to go to Decatur. She would be gone for a long time, and Grandma was so much fun. We played hide and seek, baked cookies, and Sonnie came to her house for lunch when she had 'Punkin Blossoms'. He loved fried 'Punkin Blossoms', and Fried Green Tomatoes. I didn't like them, but I liked helping her make them, because my big brother loved them so much.

When I was bored, I would go visit the little old lady next door. We called her Aunt Minn. I loved to sit and talk to her, and listen to her stories about when she had babies, and what it was like 'in her day'. She was really old and she ended up going to a home where my Mom helped cook lunch.

I went to visit her one day and I told the lady in the front that I wanted to see Aunt Minn. They asked me her last name and I said Minn. They didn't have anyone there by that name, what was her first name and I said "I told you, Aunt". I had to be less than 5, I wasn't in school yet.

Someone recognized me as 'Norma's little girl' and the next thing I knew Mom came out and I got to see Aunt Minn. She didn't look the same. She looked really tired, and her skin was paper thin. She didn't recognize me. I never went back.

The Police Department was right across the street from our house so I used to go visit the "cop" that worked there. He told me that COP meant Constable On Patrol. I didn't know what a Constable was but I was glad he was one. I could talk to him for hours. He showed me on the big map on the wall where our little town was. That was when I knew where Decatur was that Mom used to go to all the time.

There was a shop across the street that made cabinets. We used to get saw dust off the floor for our cat Dusty's poop box. I really liked the smell when I walked in the door. If they were not really busy the guys would stop and talk to me while I got a paper bag full of dust. They were really nice guys. I liked talking to them.

There was a girl in a house next door to the cabinet shop that I didn't like very much. I got a Thumbelina doll for Christmas and she took it home with her. She wouldn't give it back and that made me really mad. So I never played with her again.

When all is said and done, that experience taught me how to forgive. While I never

played with her again, I did not hate her for stealing my doll.

I had a friend right next door for a while. One time she came to play with me on my swing set, and Dad was building a boat. She asked me what he was doing and I told her "Well, he is always telling my Mom what they will do when their ship comes in. I think he got tired of waiting for it, so he is building it instead." She agreed that made sense. She moved away, and I really missed her a lot.

Dad and Grandpa Benny (that was his Mom's Husband, but he was my Dads age.) started going to these secret meetings above the Fire Department. I didn't know what was so secret about them, there were a lot of people going in there with them. Kinda made me think my Dad was some kind of a spy like on 'Mission Impossible'. It wasn't until years later that I understood what those meetings were. When I brought it up to my siblings, they didn't remember the meetings, but that's okay, it helped me to know that about my Dad. Grandma and Grandpa Benny moved a long way away to a place called Florida. Dad's sister Aunt Betty lived there, so they were moving to be with her. I had met her a few times, and she really loved me a lot for someone I didn't really know. She sent me stuff all the time from Florida, like when it was really cold outside, she sent me a can of Florida Sunshine. I wanted to open it to see the sunshine, and when I finally did, the can was empty. It must have leaked out.

After I had my tonsils out, she sent me a coconut. That was the biggest nut I had ever seen and it wasn't like those big nuts we had a Christmas, this shell would not break. I liked the monkey face on the top of it, that looked really cute. I took it to school for show and tell. Skip was in the Navy and went out on a ship. He did that a lot. Sometimes he came home and then before I knew it, she had another baby. The next one was a girl, then they had another boy. Shortly after that they moved off to a place called Hawaii, and Skip told me it would be a long time before we saw them again. I missed them a lot, but it was quiet without the babies

around.

I had to go to school, I didn't like it much. The teacher didn't seem to like me at all. She made me color these boxes, and I never could seem to get it right. If I didn't color them just right, I didn't get to go outside with the other kids during recess, except when it was really cold outside, then it didn't matter if I didn't get them right, she made me go outside anyway. The next year my class was right next door to the other one, and the kids I had in my class last year called me a flunky and went a long way down the hall. I asked the teacher what that meant and she told me I was still in the first grade. Mom told me that the first teacher didn't think I was grown up enough to go on to the second grade. Well, I guess that is okay. I like this teacher, she was nice.

My second grade teacher was nice too. I really got tired of reading about "run spot run". School was so boring I just wanted to be at home.

That summer Mom took us to Decatur, we had been there before, a lot, we all liked our Uncle Lenard and Aunt Phyllis. She was a lot of fun, and I liked their son Mike a lot. He was really cute. He was Debbie's age though so he just saw me as a little kid.

Uncle Lenard sold motor cycles, he was a pilot and had a plane, he said he would take us for a ride in his plane. I wasn't afraid when we got really high up off the ground, and I was really excited when we flew over our house in Maroa. I looked down and the trees, and yard, and the whole neighborhood, and realized I had seen it all before, and it looked just the same as when I flew like a bird in my dreams.

In the third grade my Dad was sick. He was in the hospital for a long time. I didn't understand, but I know Mom was upset about it, and that made me feel bad.

I didn't like this teacher much. She wouldn't listen when I told her the boy that sat behind me would not stop pulling my hair. She told me he was her nephew and he would not do that. Some how I knew she had just called me a liar. I did not like that at all.

We had a few pets during these years, I don't remember some of them that the family talked about. I do remember the cocker spaniel Tina. She was a really sweet dog, but she stayed out side. She had puppies on the back porch and I sorta got to watch. I was really young, but Mom did not think that was something I should be watching so she made me get away from the door.

After the puppies were born they made Tina and the puppies live outside in the dog house. All the puppies died but one, and Dad said I could keep him. I named him snoopy because he was always snooping around. I did not know about Charlie Brown at that time.

He was all black and didn't look anything like his mama. But he was fun to play with and I loved him very much. His mama got sick and Dad had to "put her down", so she would not suffer, a couple of weeks later he had to put snoopy down too. He had the same thing as his mama. I was so angry that Dad did not do anything to save him. I was angry at him for that for a long time. Sometimes I still have a dream about him coming out from under Dads chair and playing with me.

The big kids brought a kitten home for Mom and she fell in love with her. They called her Dusty. She was a long hair Tabby, and when we moved to Florida she came with us. When Grandma moved to Florida she left me with her cat. I was supposed to take good care of him.

One night the front door was open, and I took him to bed with me, but he didn't want to stay. He ran away down the stairs and out the front door. We didn't see him for three days. Debbie had gone home for lunch, and when she came back to school she found me outside the girls restroom and told me that Dad found him. He was dead. I cried, and I think I went home for lunch and did not go back to school that day. I had failed Grandma, I let her cat die. I was ashamed.

Dad got a phone call from Grandma, Grandpa Benny had died. Mom and Dad and me drove all the way down to Florida to go to his funeral. He looked like he was sleeping. I

wanted him to wake up and play with me. I cried when they told me he could not wake up. Aunt Betty took me to the India Reservation to ride the pony. That was a lot of fun. When school ended that year we packed up the car, they sold the house, and we moved to Florida. I was 9 at the time and the move turned out to be good for me. I got to spend time with Grandma and Aunt Betty, and I got to go to the beach.

Follow me to all the adventures that await me in Hollywood, Florida.

## **2    *Hollywood, Florida*    **LATE CHILDHOOD****

Mom and Dad both had jobs lined up at a hospital, I think they were both cooks. Sonnie had stayed in Illinois with friends and Vicki, Debbie and I all shared a bedroom. It was a nice house that they rented for us to live in.

Grandma brought us a new Kitten. We named him Periwinkle she said that was the Florida state wildflower, and she liked them. He was a really pretty dark tabby, and I love him a lot. We still had Dusty and it took them a while to become friends, but they did.

I don't remember a lot about the house, except for the room off the dinning area that had a door going out into the back yard. There was a really bad smell outside, to me it smelled like really strong table pepper. We couldn't play back there because it didn't smell good at all.

The room was not an big room, but I liked it. I could hide in the back corner and no one would bother me. I had a little organ that I could go back there and play, and a little sewing machine so I could sew clothes for my Barbie Doll that Aunt Betty bought me. It was around then that I was told she 'favored' me because she thought I was named after her. Dad made it very clear that I was NOT named after her, my name (Suzanne) had 2 z's (he said it was the french spelling), Aunt Betty's middle name was Suzanne.

The school was a lot farther away than where we were. It was a long walk, and Debbie

could only walk me part way because she was in a different school. She told me it was okay, I could do this. It was scary at first, but I learned to like it. And I could make it all the way home without her too. That wasn't so bad.

My 4th grade Teacher was Mrs Friend. It took me a while to learn how to read her name, and she was really patient with me. She taught me how to sound it out, and then remember the whole i before e thing. I liked her a lot and really want to make her happy.

Some of the kids could be mean. We didn't have a lot of money so we didn't have store bought clothes like the other kids. I had clothes that had been Debbie's before they were mine, and Mom had made most of those. Mom made me a New Dress that was all mine, and I loved it. I wore it to school a lot. Everyone said it looked like a nightgown, but I didn't care, it was all mine. They just didn't know how special it was that Mom had made this one JUST for me.

When it came time for our reading class, I had to go to a different classroom, which other kids made fun of me for, they said that was the dumb kids class. They said if I was in that class it was because I couldn't read. I knew I could read, so I didn't know what they were talking about.

One day we had a reading assignment, then had to fill out a paper about what we read. I finished mine and sat quietly at my desk waiting for something else to do. The teacher asked for my paper, and took a long time going over it, then she went to my regular teacher and she spent a long time looking at it. Later my regular teacher asked me to do another reading assignment, I did, she looked at it and ask me to stay after school. I was so sure I was in trouble.

Turns out, they were really confused how I had gotten sent to that reading class. She said I belonged in her reading class, which was a higher reading level than what I was supposed to be in. I didn't understand what they were saying, but if they told me to change, I

did.

After that things kinda started changing pretty quick. I still had trouble with math, but turns out I was pretty good with reading, and my writing assignments kinda made her raise her eyebrows too. We had an assignment to write about something we had seen on TV. All I could think of was the commercial for Excedrin aspirin. Instead of just a boring report, I wrote a skit. I called it 'The Mean Mad Mother,' or 'Excedrin Headache number 464'.

In my skit, the mother was a magazine writer who had an article due that day. Her husband couldn't find his tie, her son couldn't find his shoes and her daughter could not get the 'rats' out of her hair. All this with burning eggs on the stove and lunches to get ready. She was never going to get that article done on time and NOW she had a headache. Time to reach for the Excedrin.

I got an 'A' on the assignment, and I told the teacher, who was so pleased with the results, that if she wanted to she could let the kids in the class perform it. She thought about it and said, "No!" I was dejected. Then she smiled and said "YOU will do it. YOU will pick the people to play the parts, YOU will direct it, and YOU will be responsible for putting it on for the class." I was happy, confused, and scared to death, but I did it. I picked the players, and I was surprised when everyone wanted to be in it. There was this one boy I really wanted to play the Dad, since I was playing the Mom, but when he auditioned, he wasn't very convincing. The boy that I did pick really nailed the part. The brother and sister were likewise NOT the people I thought would be good for the parts, but they were the ones who were meant for the parts. I suppose time wise the skit only took about 3 minutes to perform, if that, but we did it for our class, and everyone laughed and enjoyed it very much. Then the word spread, kids started telling other kids, and the kids told their teachers, and my teacher told other teachers, and then we were touring the school all the way up to the 6th grade.

Everyone loved it, and I loved that everyone laughed.

At Christmas we formed a Christmas Choir, and went caroling around the school. That was the first time I had the opportunity to direct a Choir, it would not be my last. In fact, it was just the beginning.

That was by far my favorite school year forever. I felt more valued than ever before and had never felt that valued, ever again. I did have other great years, and a lot of valued experiences in school, but my 4th Grade year with Mrs Friend was the best ever.

Sonnie had come down to stay with us. He went to work for a shoe store and for my 10th birthday he bought me a stuffed German Shepard dog. I loved that thing. It was nice having him around. I had missed him.

He joined the Navy and went off to boot camp. He was there for 9 weeks and we went to Orlando for his graduation. We were traveling at night. We were on a 4 lane divided highway (we did not have interstates then), when some police cars sped past us like they were going to a fire. Then up in the sky we saw this really big bright light. We watched it hover for a minute, and then it shot straight up into the sky and disappeared. Up the road, the police (about 5 of them), were standing on the side of the road, looking up, pointing, shaking heads. I think we were all wondering what on earth that was. We all agreed, a UFO!

After that school year, Dad decided he was home sick, he missed the snow at Christmas, and Florida was just too hot. We loaded up the cars again and headed back 'home', so follow me on the next stage of my journey in Decatur, Illinois.

### **3    *Decatur, Illinois Still Late Childhood***

We didn't move back into our old house, and we didn't even move back to the same town. We moved into the city, close to the railroad tracks which I loved, because I could

sit and watch the trains go by. The late night traffic was kinda hard to get used to.

I made friends with a girl that lived in an apartment, she was a lot of fun. She introduced me to the girl that lived across the tracks, in a house. She had a bicycle and we used to take turns riding it. We lived on a 4 lane highway, so we were not allowed to ride it out on the road.

I had done something wrong, (I can't remember now what it was,) so I could not ride the bike. I did anyway, and I fell off into the gravel drive way. I to a rock stuck in my knee, and Mom had to dig it out. I told her it was because I broke the rules. She just laughed. I could ride the bike for a long time.

There was a store just at the end of the block that I could go to. I used to take my allowance and buy ice cream bars. They cost a dime, and I went in, picked up the ice cream and started talking to the girl that worked there. I left and when I got out side, I opened my hand to see the dime. I rushed back in saying "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to steal it." The girl laughed so hard. She took my dime and promised it would be our little secret.

This was during the Vietnam War, and Debbie had a guitar and was thinking about the halfway house up the street, and the train tracks, and just how sad it was about our 'boys' going off to war. So she wrote a song 'In Vietnam'. Me and Vicki sang it with her and we did really nice harmony. We sounded really good together. We played it almost every time we went to the 'Hootenanny', just the family and friends getting together to play what I always though of as 'hillbilly' music.

They were a lot of fun, we would all eat, play music, then the kids would go off and do all kinds of fun stuff. We did that every 3rd Friday.

Vicki had gone out on a date with Shorty then a few weeks later Mom and Dad, and Shorty and Vicki were all fighting. Then they took a trip so they could get married. I found out she was gonna have a baby. Shorty had been around my whole life, so I figured it

was nice having him a brother for real.

We moved across town and I had to change schools. Which was a good thing. I didn't like the teacher I had much. No one ever told me I was supposed to bring my spelling work book home to finish it, so every Friday when I didn't have it done, I would get a lick with the paddle. If someone would have told me, I know I could have gotten it done.

The new school was a lot better. A couple of the boys from the old school had moved, and wouldn't you know, we were in the same class at the new school too. That was pretty neat.

I knew about people of color, I had just never been in school with them before. There were two boys in my new class. One was Robert and he was so proud to be black. He would tell you he loved it, and no body better mess with him. I liked him, he seemed confident to me. Calvin was not like that at all, he just wanted to be white. I asked him why and he just said, 'You got it so much better'! I told him that wasn't true, and he should not be sad. We became really good friends.

This teach taught us about 'Current Events'. Everyday we did the 'Morning News', each week we would change people doing news, weather and sports. I liked doing the weather, and the news was okay, but I really didn't care much for sports. It taught us the importance of staying up to date on what was happening around us, and it was really good at making each of us comfortable about talking in front of other people.

I had some friends that I got pretty close to. They asked me if I wanted to come to their house after school. Mom told me it would be okay, so one day I walked home with them. We were walking down a red brick street and I said that My Aunt Ginny had lived on a street like this, and then I looked to my left, and I told them, actually, that was her house. We went on down to their house.

Later, on my way home I went and knocked on the door. I was really glad when

it was my Uncle Tony that answered the door. He knew me right away, and we visited for a little bit, before I had to go home. I stopped by a few more times, when Mom knew I was going to. It was nice to see him, and talk.

This house that we lived in was really cool. Our bedrooms were upstairs. The one that us three girls shared was really big, and had two really big walk in closets on either side. They were so big, that Debbie made one of them into her bedroom. She had her bed, and a little dresser and night stand next to her bed. They both had windows in the back, and the other closet became one of my hiding places. I liked to stand at the window at night and watch the stars. The stairs were another good hiding spot, they went down two different ways, one was to the kitchen, the other to the living room.

Periwinkle liked the big Oak Tree in the back yard. He loved to climb way up to the top, but he didn't like to climb back down. We had to call the Fire Department to get him down.

We went to visit Moms Sister in East Moline. We were there for a few days, and since my Dad loved to fish, we went to the Mississippi river. There was a guy there that had some puppies, he called them cockapoo's. Mom said I could have one and we named him Rocky because there were rocks on the bank of the river. He was the first puppy I had since snoopy. We had to give him away, because he bit me. It was my fault, I woke him up and scared him. I cried when they gave him away.

Janie called from Hawaii to say they were coming home. Mom couldn't wait to see them. They had another baby while they were there. This was another girl. Her name was Dawn. Mom Planned Christmas in June.

After Christmas in June we packed up and headed back to Florida. We had two Pontiac Station wagons, a box trailer and a boat on a trailer. Everything we owned was packed up in them.

We were loaded up and ready to go, and when we tried to put Periwinkle in the car, he was having none of it. He climbed up the tree, and the neighbor said she would get the Fire Department to get him down and keep him for us. Dad agreed that would probably be best. One cat on the trip was bad enough.

This started a whole new adventure for me. I had no Idea how different things were going to be. Come Join ME as we head to the place I still call HOME! Okeechobee, Florida.

#### ***4 Okeechobee, Florida Pre-Teen***

Vicki had taken an airplane a head of us to Florida. She was staying with Aunt Betty until we could get there. That left Janie and her 4 kids, Me and Debbie and Mom and Dad. I would switch between Mom's car and Dad's car. Dad's was filled up to the front seats, so I had to sit in the middle between Dad and Debbie.

Mom made sandwiches, and we had soda in ice chests, and we decided to stop for a picnic. We talked on walkie talkies and Mom said she saw a sign for a camp ground. We turned down a long dirt road, and Dad didn't see Mom hit the breaks. Dad was following to close and he ran into Mom. Mom had the boat, and Dad hit her so hard that he shoved the boat up through the back window of the car. Totaled the trailer hitch, and destroyed Dad's front end. It was a lucky thing that all the kids and the cat were toward the front of the car, no one got hurt.

We had to make the trip from Clarksville Tennessee to Florida in one car. Mom, Dad, Me, Debbie, Janie and her 4 kids, and a cat. The car would only go 45 miles an hour.

We met some nice people who wanted to come to Florida for vacation anyway, so they said they would bring all of our stuff, and the box trailer to us. We got what we could in Mom's car, but it was tight. We got there a couple of days before they got there with our

stuff. I was selling newspapers by the drug store when I spotted them.

It had been really late at night when we got into Okeechobee. We were all so tired, we just wanted to lay in a warm bed and go to sleep. Dad was driving, and we stopped at the first motel we came to. We got two rooms with two double beds in each room. Dad had a real way with people so he talked the owner into giving us a good deal until we could get someplace to live. It took 9 days.

The first place we lived was a duplex apartment. Me, Mom Dad Vicki and Debbie lived in one side, Janie and her 4 kids lived in the other side. Some people lived a few doors down that had a rabbit as a pet. Her name was Samantha, Sammi for short, and they had to move, and could not take her. They gave her to me. She was my most precious pet. She was litter trained like the cat, so she had the run of the house. BUT she liked to chew phone cords, so she had to have a cage on the screen porch.

Vicki had her baby on the first day of school. We had only been here for a month, and I wondered where on earth we were gonna keep a baby. Our little bedroom, just got more crowded.

There was a small pond on the other side of some bushes, and I used to spend a lot of time sitting and watching the water. This had become my new hiding place. It was quiet, and no one bothered me. There was a little bigger pond across the street, but I didn't go there much.

At Halloween a long haired tabby kitten showed up, and Dad named him 'Spooky' Now we had two cats and a rabbit, and a baby. I loved the rabbit best.

I rode a school bus to school, and the first day I met this boy. I thought he was kind of a snob at first. He called me chicken legs. Then he heard me tell someone that I had to tell the English teacher what we did for the weekend, and all I had to tell was that I had played horses with my sister. She always got to be the horse, I was always the cowboy trying

to lasso her. After he over heard that, he kept asking me 'How's the Horses' It was annoying.

He was a year ahead of me in school, and as I was going into my second period class, he was coming out of the same class. I had PE 1st period, he had PE Last period. So all day long, I would pass him coming out of class when I was going in. And then we had to wait on the school but after school. I could not get away from him no matter how hard I tried.

Eventually he told me he liked me. He told me where he lived and said I could come over sometime. I walked down the road in back of the apartments wot where he said he lived. I could see it from the road back then. I saw that he had a pool and decided he was just too rich for my blood. I came from poor stalk. It didn't take him long to convince me that didn't matter, and before we knew it we were 'an item'.

His brother in law drove a dune buggy (It was a hippy thing in the 60's) and I used to watch for it to go by. I really don't understand why. I guess I wanted to see if he was on it.

I was still flying in my dreams. I could fly over the ponds, and all the subdivision. I loved the free feeling it gave me. I didn't tell anyone about it, that was my special thing. I never actually flew in an air plane again, but I did not have to guess that what I saw in my dreams was accurate. I had always wished that Uncle Leonard would fly his plane down for a visit, and take us up so I could be sure. We lived really close to the airport, we could see the spot light at night.

Janie moved into town, into a house behind the post office. I started spending a lot of time at her house. I liked being in town, I could walk to the swimming pool, I got to know her neighbors. I got to go to church with her. When I was twelve I even joined her church. (more on that later)!

I found out later, that when Janie had come back from Hawaii, and Skip was not with her, he went some where to get some special training to go to Vietnam. He came for a

short visit, and then was off to 'Fight in Vietnam' just like in Debbie's song. That kind of scared me.

I only had one memory of anything with the 'fighting' over there. When we were still in Maroa, I remember Mom watching the news. and crying. There was a story on the news, someone had filmed a boy being caught in some kind of battle, and he was laying on the ground. I remember hearing him say 'my legs, my legs, I can't feel my legs'. Mom was crying about it. It was on the TV, which I had always KNOWN to be entertainment, but this was upsetting her. I did not know at that time, that news was (supposed to be) real.

I talked to the 'invisible people a lot about that. I didn't want him to be like that boy on TV. I didn't want Janie to cry like Mom did that day. In fact, I was talking to the invisible people a lot around then. For all kinds of reasons. I still sat by the pond, and talked, and listened.

During the summer we moved again, but it was just further into the sub-division if Basswood. I thought we were getting a bigger house, but turned out to be exactly the same design. It looked exactly like the apartment, except the screen porch was closed in, and called a Florida Room. That is where Debbie had her bedroom. I really can't say I remember sharing a room with Vicki and her son Roger, but I must have. I guess maybe that is why it didn't bother me to spend so much time at Janie's.

When Roger turned a year old, Vicki wanted to throw him a big party. She wanted to have a clown, so the boy that I had a crush on agreed to be a clown for his party. Mom made the costume, and we did his make-up and he was the 'clown'. We took all kinds of pictures. I kept them for a long time, but I have NO PICTURES today to share. (that will all be obvious later),

During this next school year, the boy (His Name was Frank), was in the 8th grade and at that time, that was high school. We were not at the same school, and did not ride

the same bus. We did not see each other everyday, but we talked on the telephone, OFTEN. I had another boyfriend, and he had his 'nerds'. I don't know what he did during that year, and to this day, still do not care.

My 7th grade year was awesome. I found myself in all kinds of interesting situations. The next two years for me would be true freedom years. Today I can look back on it and realize how enlightening they truly were. These were years that I JUST NOW realized set me up as a survivor! I learned how to stand on my own and fight my own battles. FOLLOW ME and see how talking to adults helped me learn to become a Spunky Pre-Teen.

## **5 *Pre-Teen Spunk!***

Debbie started dating. She was going off without me. I could not understand this dating thing. She was not around much anymore. Mom was working, and if Dad wasn't working he was fishing. Vicki was off dating some guy, I didn't understand that, Shorty was in the Army and they were still married, she should not have been dating.

I didn't know what to do when school started, Frank was my main friend in school, and he wasn't there. I felt so lost. I talked to the invisible people more and more, I was afraid I would be alone, and I know I didn't like alone. I was really scared. I didn't have anyone I could talk to except the invisible people, they didn't judge me, they just listened, and held my hand, until I could feel better.

During the summer I had started hanging around with some neighbors, I had met George and Corabell and their dog Red. He was a red bone retriever and he was the sweetest big dog I had ever been around. While they were at work during the summer, they asked me if I would take him for a walk, and I was happy to do it.

Becky, one of my neighbors had a Labrador so we walked the dogs together. One day, the dogs spotted something across the street and red pulled away from me and crossed

the street. There was a gas truck coming and he didn't see him. He died before he stopped rolling. I was so heart broken , and I felt so bad that I had let that happen. I still say the gas guy should have been more aware that there were two kids on the road with dogs, but I guess accidents happen.

When school started I hung around with a few different people, some good friends and some just friends. I had joined the Choir, and that gave me different friends. I was still going to church with Janie sometimes, but there wasn't that many kids there, that I felt like I could hang out with. So, I just learned to be on my own, and do my own thing.

I took Home Economics because it seemed like the thing to do. That is where I learned that even I could destroy a perfectly good, brand new sewing machine. I made shortcake for my cooking assignment, and they turned out really good.

I had a Math teacher that helped me with my math skills, fractions are still hard for me. He didn't think I belonged in the slower classes that I seemed to always get assigned to, but he made the best of it for me, and helped me a lot.

I had a science teacher that was a 'funny' guy, always making jokes. We had a real tangle one day when we were going to take a quiz, that we all knew was coming. A friend had borrowed my pencil, and it was the only one I had. She was sitting on the other side of the room, and I kept telling her I needed it. When the teacher came into the class, and started handing out the quizzes, I told him I needed my pencil and he started giving me a hard time. I told him this was serious, I needed my pencil if I was going to take this quiz. I guess he didn't believe me, when he put it on my desk, I told the girl one more time to give it to me, he got mad because I would not be quiet so everyone could take the quiz, so he told me to sit in the corner. I told him No, make her give me my pencil and I will be quiet. He refused, got upset with me that I refused to get in the corner, so grabbed my arm and I hung on to my desk while he drug it around in circles. When he released me, I walked out of class and straight to the

councilors office. I was gonna tell my side of this before he could write me up.

I told her what had happened, and that he had no right to grab me by the arm, a fact that the entire class had been witness. She wrote it all down, then told me to go back to class. I told her, I would be happy to sit in the office until the next period.

The next day I got called the the principals office where the councilor was sitting as well. I didn't get into trouble, because I had come to her first. He didn't get into any trouble either, he thought he had the right. We finished the year without further incident, but he knew he could not just bully me.

I had a social studies teacher that I liked a lot. I don't know how the subject came up, but I told him that the male seahorse carried and gave live birth to the babies. He said that was not possible. We made a bet. Course, there has to be something to bet, so I don't remember what I got if I was right, but he would get my next report on Hawaii as an oral report in full costume. It didn't matter that I proved him right, I did the oral report anyway, I just had to see the look on his face when I came into class during the winter, in full grass skirt costume over a bikini. I even attempted a hula dance. He gave me an 'A'.

In the spring there was a group of girls who kept telling me they were gonna jump me and beat me up. I have no idea why, but I kept walking away from them. this had been going on for a long time, and they kept coming back. I got concerned that one day they really would jump me, so I went to Mr Holder, the principal, he had liked my 'spunk' since the science teacher incident. I explained to him about the girls, and that I really did not want to fight, but if they did jump me, I would do as my Dad had always taught me, and defend myself. He warned me not to fight, and went on my way.

About two weeks later I was sitting on a log under an oak tree with some friends, and the next thing I know I was on the ground. I came up swinging and ended up brawling on the ground. The teachers came and broke us up and we all had to go to the office. Mr Holder

called me in and told me he had to suspend me for three days. I told him he couldn't. He said 'What do you mean I can't, you were fighting, the penalty is suspension.' I said 'Yes sir, if I had not told you about this two weeks ago, and warned you that it was going to happen, and you had done something to keep it from happening, then you could suspend me, HOWEVER, it is your responsibility to keep us safe while we are in YOUR CARE. You failed to do that, and I told you I would defend myself. Ask the people I was with, they saw me get jumped from behind.' You would have thought I slapped him in the face. He looked dumbfounded. He cleared his throat and told me I was free to go. A lot of adults underestimate children who like to talk to adults. They don't realize we are learning from them.

The next year, my 8th grade year was the first time I had a study hall. I don't do study halls, I could not sit still that long. So I became a teachers aid for my English teacher. It was probably a good thing, because most of the time he was late for school, so I started class without him. I gave the spelling test on Friday's and the grades went from C's and D's to B's and C's with in the first few weeks. He had a really hard accent, and the kids could not understand what he was saying. I know, they should have known what the words were they had studied, but it was fun helping them get better grades.

Choir was always a lot of fun, and I really liked the teacher, Mr Z. He was also the teacher at the high school, and since I never sang unison with the class, something that really irritated him, he knew I could sing harmony. He was trying to get me to take choir when I got to the high school the next year.

Debbie was a Senior at the high school that year, and in a group called the Madrigals. I had gone caroling with them at Christmas, and decided that is what I wanted to do. When Mr Z asked me to join the Choir I told him No, I want to join the Madrigals. He said that was only for 10th - 12th grade, but I told him, he knew I could do it, and he knew I could sing all the alto parts, since I had been doing it for 2 years.

On veterans day we had to do a report. I loved writing, and I had some strong feelings about this day. Skip was in the Navy and in Vietnam. Shorty had been in the Army, had been in Vietnam, and came home 'AWOL' because he couldn't handle what he had seen. Sonnie was in Italy, not seeing any 'action' but he was doing his part for our freedom. I wrote a paper, and the teacher said it brought tears to her eyes. She asked if I would read it for the Veterans Day assembly. Well, of course, being on stage was my forte. The newspaper was at the assembly and interviewed me took my picture and wanted to print my report. Sure. That was cool.

Skip came home just before school let out. I had been going to church more and more then, and had gotten to know some of the kids. They were cool, and it would be good to be friends with them when I started high school the next year. Skip got a job managing a gas station, so I had a job during the summer, pumping gas, cleaning up, and washing cars. It didn't pay much, but It was something to do.

It seemed like it was a long summer, I was really getting excited to go to high school. Debbie had graduated, we had moved again, and she was working. She was dating a big guy, and they took me to some carnivals, and movies and things, so I wouldn't feel left out. It was a good summer, but I was glad when the school year rolled around.

Won't you please follow me as I continue my journey as a Freshman in High School .

## **6 Freshman Year**

I had gotten to be friends with a couple of people in church, so when I got to the high school I wasn't totally alone. I had my friends from Basswood, the community we lived in, and then friends from previous school years. Of course different surroundings led to meeting a lot of new people too.

Mr Z, while it didn't make the upper classmates happy, had agreed to bring me into the Madrigals, but once they realized I was a really strong Alto they let it go. There was only two other Alto's and neither of them were strong. I never needed anything to amplify my voice, so I actually had to tone it down, so I didn't stand out, I had to really learn to blend.

I was also in the regular choir, which really needed help, so I tried to get as many of my friends to join as I could. We needed another Tenor, and I knew Frank had a good voice and was a Tenor, so I talked him into joining. We were not a couple at the time, just good friends.

It didn't take me long to find teacher who would appreciate having an aide. Remember, I don't do Study Hall. I usually and a couple of teachers lined up to do work for, usually making 'ditto' copies. I really loved that 'ditto' machine. We had some thermal imaging machines as well, all precursors to the copiers we use today.

It was the early 70's and we were still having growing pains from the desegregation movement. The Blacks didn't like being with the Whites and some of the Cowboys really did not like them being there either. I didn't understand any of that. Even at 14 I didn't understand what all the fuss was about.

It had been rumored that there was going to be a riot. I didn't know what that meant, but I wasn't worried. I didn't bother anyone, so didn't expect anyone to bother me. I was running around for some teachers when the trouble started. Lots of yelling and screaming and girls running like they were on fire. I was outside the Library when this big guy came up on me with his big belt buckle raised ready to hit me with it, when this boy I had known from Jr High came between us.

His name was Robert, and we had done some singing, and plays together in lower grades. He told the big guy to leave me alone, I was OK. He backed off and Robert told me to go stay in the Library until he came back for me. I like the Library, so that was okay.

I don't know how long it lasted, or how it ended, but Robert came back and told me it was all clear, and I went back to work. The rest of the day was tense, but there wasn't any more trouble.

One of the boys from Church Edwin, was in my Math Class. I didn't recognize him at first, he was sitting down whenever I came into class. When he stood up, he was 6'3" tall. I was 5'5". His sister Kat was 6'8" in the 10th grade. Edwin finally asked me if I was ignoring him, and I had to admit I didn't realize it was him. We started dating after that.

I think it bothered Frank that I had a boy friend, and a guy he didn't know. He started hanging around more and more. Trying to get me into his crowd. I kinda turned it around on him, and told him to come to church with me. He did, he joined and then when Edwin and I broke up, for what ever reason, Frank moved in again.

It was around this time we had moved to another street in the community. I really liked this house. I was really getting into the church and Dad was not totally happy with that. We had some pretty deep conversations about it, and he finally agreed that it couldn't hurt for me to go to church.

Frank started spending more and more time at our house and My Dad was okay with us being around each other. He wasn't going to let me 'date' until I was 16, but it was okay for us to go to school dances together, and church activities and such.

I spent a lot of time in town with Janie and Skip and the kids, which is where I did most of my church study. Janie had been pregnant again, and lost twins. I stayed and helped with the others while she was going through some tough depression. She did that a lot. Skip was always working or doing something for the Church, so he wasn't really 'there' for her.

I never saw Dad go to church and it had been years since I had seen Mom in a church. It never really bothered me, after all, they were grown up they made their own choices, as long as they let me make mine, I was good with it.

Down the street from our house was a guy who drove a big truck. (18 wheeler). He had a Black German Shepard that I was just in love with. I didn't have a really good hiding place there, so I spent a lot of time wandering around in the thick bushes around the house. When I struck up a conversation with George about his Dog, we started talking and when he would come home and take the dog for a walk we would talk.

Dad didn't like me talking to this Truck Driver, and didn't want me going anywhere near his house when he was home. I was not even allowed to go down and talk to his Mom who was alone when he was off on the Truck. I didn't understand it, and in so many ways I still don't, but I was forbidden to have anything to do with him.

George had a brother, who came to live with him and his mom. His brother was my age and had been living in Illinois with his Father. He came to live here and to finish school here. It was kinda nice having someone else my own age on the block. Dad Had a cow. Not only was I not allowed to have anything to do with George, but his brother was doubly off limits. I was not even allowed to stand on the same side of the road that he was on while waiting for the school bus. If he wanted to go to a Church event, I wasn't allowed to go. It was really crazy, and I never understood it. (I kinds figured things out later, but the only time I have ever known my Father to be wrong, was about George's Brother).

Debbie married Buster in April. I was a brides made. I liked Buster, but I guess I was a little jealous. I was losing my big sister. He promised me they weren't going anywhere.

I don't remember exactly what Dad and I had a fight about, something silly I am sure, but I was angry with him. I was in one of my hiding places, and told God sometimes I wished I had been the one that died at birth. I went to sleep that night and had a dream.

At first I thought it was Debbie all dressed in white and I asked her why she was dressed like that, She said 'Susie, I am not Debbie, I am Linda. I want to tell you not to be

angry with Daddy. You have had him all these years, and he loves you, but soon, he is going to come be with me. Enjoy the time you have left with him.' and then she was gone.

I woke up and thought what a silly dream that was. About a week later, Frank had been playing around with Tarot cards and did a reading for me. He turned over a card, looked hard at it and put it back in the deck. I told him I was pretty sure that was not the way it was done, that card was part of my reading. He didn't want to tell me it was the death card. He finally said that someone close to me was going to die. I laughed.

Two weeks later, Dad was diagnosed with Bone Cancer. The next few months were pure hell.

I knew I had gotten a message from both God and Satan. There was no way I could deny what I had been told.

Don't give up on me now, life is just starting to get interesting. Follow me now to my Sophomore Year.

## ***7 Sophomore Year***

After Dad got sick, Frank and I didn't see much of each other. We broke up, and I got to know a guy in my science class that turned out, had a crush on me. His name was Jeff and I figured, with the class we were in, he was another 'nerd'. He was a nice guy, so we started dating.

He came from a more middle class family. His Mom didn't like me much. I wasn't good enough for her little boy, and she let me know that as often as she could. Never really being direct, just acting like it.

Jeff introduced me to a whole different group of people, some that I never would have met with out him. They were not 'nerds' like I was used to hanging with, they were more

'preppies'.

A lot of them were in my Humanities class, so it didn't take much for me to join in their group. I had gotten away from Franks crowd and was trying to grow in a different direction.

I had joined the Journalism club, but the only column they needed covered was the sports column. Remember the 5th grade??? Not my favorite subject, but Jeff was on the wrestling team, so it gave me a good excuse to be at his matches. Baseball was okay, but football was so out of my league. Needless to say, I didn't make any huge impressions on the school newspaper, however, one of my fellow student reporters felt the need to send me to talk to his father, who was the Editor of the Okeechobee News which was, at the time, a once a week publication.

I went in to talk to him, his son had provided him with some articles, and he said he could tell that sports was just not my thing, however, he saw something in my writing style that he felt tugged by.

He asked if I could write a column about anything, what would I write about. Man, did I feel lost. I couldn't think of anything, then, quietly, I heard a small voice way in the back of my head say, 'write a fishing column.' What??? Where did that come from??? Then the voice said, 'Dad is Uncle Bill the Great Lake Okeechobee Speck fisherman, everyone knows him'. SOOOOO I looked the Editor squarely in the eye and I said, FISHING! He laughed, and he said that was really funny, they had just been talking in meetings about adding a fishing column, This was Okeechobee after all, and we ARE KNOWN for fishing. BUT he said, what do you know about fishing. I told him about Dad, how everyone knew him, and he would be my news source.

He said, 'you have one week to show me a story, if I like it you get a by line'. In the Newspaper business a by line at that time was a really big thing. It got your name out

there.

When I told Dad about the article, you would have thought I gave him a gold medal. He was so excited that he went out and bought me a Polaroid camera, (depending on your age, you might know what that was) and I was off getting information for my first Article. The article measured 3.5 printed inches and had 3 photos of Fisherman's Catches, NOT ONE of my Dad.

I had my byline, complete with my picture as Cookie's Fishing Column. I went fishing with my Dad every chance I got, and interviewed countless fisherman.

One day we went into a bait and tackle snack bar, and there were a couple of guys sitting at the counter talking about the fishing column in the newspaper. My Dad was beaming. One guy said he didn't know how that little lady knew where the fish were but she was sure spot on. The other guy laughed and said he was sure right about that, and the picture wasn't bad to look at either.

Dad wandered up to the counter, put his hand on the guys shoulder, and of course they recognized him as Uncle Bill. He looked at them as said, easy guys, that little lady you are talking about is my 15 year old Daughter. Their faces were stark white, Dad smiled and said, it's okay boys, she's right here. They were all smiles. They were more than happy to let me interview them.

Dad was getting Chemo Therapy and Radiation Treatments. He was sick all the time. He didn't go fishing much anymore, so I had to rely on phone calls for my column.

It was around March that he said he wanted to go back to Illinois. He said he wanted to go hunting in the snow, one more time. I think he just wanted to go back and say good-bye to his family.

I had to make a choice to go with Mom and Dad, or to stay here and finish out

the school year. I would be staying with Janie and Skip if I stayed. I was auditioning for the school play. We were doing Oklahoma, I wanted to be Ado Anne.

The Choir was going to District Competition, I had a solo. I was excited. I used these two events to help me know what God wanted me to do. If I got the part of Ado Anne, or If I got recommended for State Competition, I would stay.

I was 16 and pretty used to taking care of myself. Mom and Dad didn't care much what I did as long as I wasn't getting into trouble. Skip on the other hand, said we had not discussed if I was even going to be allowed to be in the school play, or go to state competition. That really made up my mind for me. He WAS NOT going to change the way I lived my life. I didn't get the part, and I didn't get recommended for state, so in April I went with Mom and Dad to Illinois.

We left before I could get my year book, so Frank said he would pick it up for me and have everyone sign it. He set it to me, with a really sweet poem he had written, which I promptly memorized. (I have forgotten most of it now). It was really touching.

We were in Decatur from April to September. Before we left here the temperature was so hot for April. I kept thinking about the lake at the bottom of the hill from the house we were moving to. (It was my Mom's Fathers house). I thought I would jump right in the water when we got there. I didn't realize it was just early spring there, and that there would still be snow on the ground. I thought I would freeze.

School was a nightmare and kinda good all at the same time. The school building I was supposed to go to was just up the hill from the house, and I could have walked. There was a rail road that ran behind the school and this being an industrial area, the tracks were often used for car storage. There was a Propane tanker stored there, and I have no idea how, but it exploded. Totally took out the back half of the school, and did damage to buildings for miles.

The school board had devised a way that we could share school space with a school in town. We did split sessions, and I was really glad our school had the late session. I didn't have to be to school until 11:00 am. I was in heaven.

It was so late in the school year (only 6 weeks left), and they were so far ahead of the schools in Florida, that I could never catch up with them. Most of the teachers understood that, so even if I should have failed, they passed me with a D.

I met some great friends, but I was so depressed and home sick I just didn't want to do much of anything. Church was the only thing I really enjoyed.

I got a part time job for a while, working at as a 'Curb Hop', for a 'Dog n Sud's'. I just wanted to make some extra money to help out around the house. It wasn't a lot, but it helped. I didn't work long, I didn't really have to, and there was a lot of church activities I was missing out on.

We spent a lot of time at my Brothers house. When we went to their house to eat, Mother expected me to do the dishes after dinner. I hated Dishes, but I loved my Mom, so I did the dishes. (I will come back to this).

Sonnie worked at a car lot, and got Mom a good deal on a Lincoln Continental, her favorite car, and he got Dad a little Volkswagen Station wagon. It was stick shit, and when Dad felt up to it, he would take me out for a driving lesson. It was fun driving it, and the hills didn't bother me at all.

The church group planned a trip to Palmyra New York for a passion pageant. I really wanted to go but we just didn't have the money. The Bishop talked to some of the other members, and they all pitched in and paid for my trip. They even made sure I had spending money.

We stopped in Kirkland, OH and vised the first temple built by the church. It was inspiring when we read the stories about it's construction.

From Kirkland we went to Niagara Falls, and crossed over the Canadian side. The one and only time in my life I have been outside the US. And that was only into the gift shop of the other side. We were there for maybe an hour. Niagara Falls was awesome, and I was so glad I got to see it.

From there it was up to Palmyra, where we spent a couple of days. The Spirit there was so strong, and the pageant was breath taking. It was a memory of a lifetime, and I could truly feel the energy of the Holy Ghost all around the hill.

Here is where I back track. The night before we were to leave for the pageant, Sonnie and Karen came for a cook out. My Dad never cooked that he didn't make a huge mess. I was trying to pack, and get everything together for the trip, and I had to be up by 5am to be ready to leave when they came to pick me up.

Sonnie and Dad cooked steaks out on the grill, and we had all the fixin's, baked beans, potato salad, dinner rolls, and the Kitchen was a mess. Dad told me I could not go to bed, until the kitchen was completely clean. No one even helped clear the table. I was so angry that Karen didn't help that I just cried, the whole time I was doing dishes. I will come back to this later as well.

Shortly after the pageant trip, we went to Mom's sister's (Aunt Vera) cabin in Minnesota. It was on a lake and the water was so cold. It felt good though and I swam every day. My cousin Jeannie and her Husband Jim were there, and I got along great with them. One night Jim taught me a relaxation technique, that I still use today. I slept really good that night.

The next day Dad had rowed out to the middle of the lake to fish. We were sitting inside the cabin, and I thought I heard him yelling, so I ran out to the end of the dock, and he was coming back in with only one oar. I ran in and told Mom something was wrong with Dad.

He had caught a fish, pulled up on the pole to set the hook and his collar bone snapped. He was in so much pain. We were going to stay for a whole month, but we cut the trip short to bring him back to the hospital in Decatur.

I told Mom I could help her drive home, it was a long way, took us over night. She was so tired she was falling asleep at the wheel, but she refused to let me drive her car. She actually made Dad drive, and he was in so much pain. He didn't complain though, he just asked me to sit with him, so I did.

They really could not do anything for him in the hospital, so they taped him up and sent him home. We called Debbie and Buster, they flew up and we all drove back to Florida. Mom Still would not let me drive, even the Volkswagen.

I hated leaving my friends in the Church. It was so much different there than in Okeechobee. I felt really accepted there. We left after our youth group meeting on Wednesday, and they had a surprise going away party for me. Of course I cried.

School had already started in Okeechobee by the time we got back, so I just picked up like I had not even been gone. Jeff was glad to see me when we got back, and we started dating again. It only Lasted until January, when his Mother finally put her foot down, and made him break up with me. We had a good time while it lasted.

I did not get along with the people on the school bus, and Frank had a car, so he came and picked me up for school. Dad asked me what Jeff thought about that, and I remember telling him it didn't matter what he thought, he didn't have a car, and I was NOT going to ride that bus.

Mom got a job and a retirement home in the afternoon, so I had to come straight home from school and take care of Dad. By now he was totally bed ridden. I hid out in my room a lot, when he was sleeping, and listened to records. My favorite son was 'All by Myself' and I would play it over and over.

Vicki was pregnant with twins and about to pop so they spent a lot of time at our house. Mom asked her husband John (Vicki and Shorty divorced shortly after he came home from Vietnam), if he would 'teach' me to drive the Volkswagen. I could have argued with her that I already knew how to drive it, but that would have been pointless.

I didn't really like John much, and he set that in stone when we were driving. He took me down a deserted road, to practicing backing up, and told me to park. He then proceeded to tell me that since Vicki was so pregnant they could not have 'relations'. He said he always found me so attractive in my short shorts, and he really wanted me to be with him. I started the car, drove home, told him to stay the hell away from me, and never went driving with him again. I didn't tell Mom or Vicki what had happened.

Mom sold the Volkswagen because John told her I would never learn how to drive it. (it was a stick shift), which again, I already KNEW how to drive it.

I asked her why she had sold it, that Dad had promised it to me, and she said I couldn't drive it, that was why I had quit going out with John. That is when I told her what he had said. She told Vicki, and Vicki called me a liar. That was my family for you.

Dad was getting real bad, and Vicki and John stayed the night one night. Mom said I needed to let them have my bed, and I told her NO. I told her they had a perfectly good bed at home, and I had school, I was NOT giving them my bed. They called me a spoiled brat, but I slept in my Bed.

Dad wanted to get out of bed to go to the bathroom. John was helping him out of the bed and slipped and Dad's arm hit the door jam and snapped. The bone was sticking out. We called the ambulance and he went to the hospital.

Debbie was working as an Aide at the hospital when they brought him in. She worked with a Nurse name Hallie. She was an old Army Nurse and was very set in her ways. Every minute that she had she was in his room. Everyone was always in and out, and

obviously just waiting.

One day Debbie over heard Hallie talking to another nurse saying she couldn't understand what all the fuss was about, it was just a broken arm, and Debbie WENT OFF. She asked if Hallie had even bothered to read his chart. She was HIS NURSE she should KNOW he was dying of cancer. She really put that old Army Nurse in her place. I was so proud of her.

It was about a week that he was in the hospital. Everyone was at the house, all the time. Sonnie and Karen had come down, Janie (she was also pregnant) and Skip and their 5 kids were always there. I tried to concentrate at school, but my head was always some place else. He died on Tuesday October 28th, the day after Skips Birthday. I was afraid he would die on his birthday, and that would really make it hard.

Jeff was really sweet during the whole thing. He was at the funeral with me, and really helped me get through it. My 17th birthday was the most solemn birthday I had ever had.

The day after the funeral we all went to Disney World too take Mom's mind off things. Then Everyone went home. Debbie and Buster spent a lot of time with us. Mom was having a hard time adjusting to not having Dad.

Janie had her Baby Girl on November 6ths, the day after my birthday. Vicki had twin boys on the 8th. I was still just being me. I missed Dad, but I had to keep moving.

At the End of November Mom went to Illinois. I had no idea why, I thought it was just to visit and re-group. Later when I found out why she had gone up there, I felt really ashamed. I had been so clueless.

Mom and Dad's wedding anniversary was January 18th. Debbie's birthday was January 17 and Janie's Oldest birthday was the 19th. We were afraid to say anything about the birthdays, we didn't want to remind Mom that she was spending her anniversary without

Dad.

Money was really tight, and Mom was struggling. I was worried about her, and I prayed about it. One night I had a dream, outside the Choir room, Dad was standing on the side walk. He was dressed in his fishing gear, with his hat that had fish hooks in it. I asked him what he was doing there and he said 'I have a message for your Mother!' He said 'She is really worried about the money, but tell her that she is going to get a check in pink envelope that will take care of everything.' And then he was gone. I never said anything to Mom, but a few weeks later she bought both of us a car, and made the down payment on a house. She bought furniture and appliances for it and we moved in.

I didn't know if the check had come in a pink envelope or not, I never saw it, but I found out that it was her part of my Grandfathers Estate. He had passed away on December 3rd just after Dad. I was so ashamed that I did not know that until later. I didn't know what she was going through, and why she was struggling so hard.

Life is getting really interesting about now. Join me now for my Junior Year.

## **8    *Junior Year***

After Jeff and I broke up, Frank was always around. He still picked me up in the morning for school, and we spent most of our free time together. He was my best friend. His friend Conrad spent a lot of time with us too.

It was 1976, The Bicentennial Year. Frank was a Senior and I was a Junior, so there were all the activities at school like the bonfire, homecoming, prom and grad night at Disney World. We did it all together.

On April 23rd we were at his house, and he got down on one knee and proposed to me. Of course I said yes. When we told his Mother, she said 'We'll see.' I thought she liked me? A few days later we had 'relations'. Maybe that was the reason for the proposal, I don't know. I

didn't really know him at all as it turned out.

We started planning for prom from the beginning of the year. I was sure that we would do the whole colonial theme, but by the time we got to prom everyone was tired of the bicentennial. I had my dress had made, and at the last fitting it was too tight. I started exercising every day, and dieting, but I could not get into that dress, and they didn't go with that style, so Mom took me to buy an new dress.

When we got to prom he took off with Conrad, and me and my friend Sherri sat there toasting her promise ring. I never danced with Frank once, but there was this guy that was a really good friend. His name was Pat. He never let me go to a dance that he would not dance with me at least once. We never dated or anything, he was just a really good friend. From the 6th grade up.

Grad night was a hoot. We went on every ride we could, and they had just completed space mountain. A roller coaster. I never really cared for roller coasters, and I begged him not to make me go on it. We saw a sign that said if you were pregnant not to go on it. I joked and said, I can't go on it, I might be pregnant. We went on it anyway, and when we got to the bottom he promised me he would never make me do anything like that again. He thought I was going to jump.

We had a farewell assembly where they gave out predictions of where everyone would be in 10 years. They said Frank would be the Editor and Publisher of Cookie Cooks Cook Book.

We moved into the house just after graduation. Mom bought me a Toyota Corolla. It was a cute little car, and I liked it. I didn't drive it much at that time, Frank took me everywhere.

He was working. with Conrad, as a bag boy at a grocery store. Conrad was off work one night, Frank had to work. Frank told me that Conrad was kinda lonely, since he broke up with

his girl friend, and he wanted me to go out with him. Show him a good time. I asked him what that meant, and he said, 'Anything he want's you do!'

We went to Fort Pierce to eat and then walk on the beach at night. Later he started rubbing me and putting his hands in my shorts. I made him stop and we came home. He went home and called Frank and told him he thinks he lost his class ring in my Pants. Franks mom was sitting their listening when he asked me to check.

(Much too late I realized he just set me up.) I was really angry, and hurt.

Vicki moved in with her 4 kids, her and John were fighting. He had threatened my Mom, and had beat Vicki black and blue. I swore if he came around I would kick his arse. I did not like him at all. His daughter had been here, and she told Vicki that her Dad had sexually abused her and beat her Mom like that too. Always when he was drunk, and he was drunk a lot. Vicki didn't believe her either.

He came around one night and the kids were terrified. They told me some of the stuff he did with them, and I tried to tell Vicki. She didn't believe them either, and we got into a big fight. This was Friday July 2nd. In the fight, it came out that I thought I might be pregnant, and she could not wait to run to Mom.

Mom was beside herself. She called Debbie, and her and Buster came over. They talked for a while and told me to call Frank to come over. Frank had seen this coming so he brought Conrad with him.

Frank suggested an Abortion, Mom suggested sending me off to a home for pregnant women, Debbie suggested her and Buster could adopt the baby, and NO ONE seemed interested in what I WANTED.

Eventually Frank suggested we could get married, and live with his parents, his Mom could take care of the baby while I went to school and he works. I told him, that I was NOT going to marry him just because I was pregnant. I had seen that go bad too often to want that

for us. I said he should go on to college, and I would finish high school and then MAYBE we could get married.

The arguing went on until about 3am. The only thing that was decided by everyone else, was that nothing was going to get decided right now, so everyone went home. When Frank walked out the door, I asked him if I would see him tomorrow, and he said no probably not. I asked him if I was going to see him again, and he said no probably not. He was walking away, and was not going to look back.

The great Bicentennial Celebration fell kinda flat for me. I could not believe that this 'man' that I had loved, had just walked away from me at a time when I needed him the most. True to his word I did not see him again.

I went to the Doctor in July and she told me my due date was January 27th. I told her to mark it on her calendar NOW, this baby WOULD BE BORN on January 18th. She laughed. She did not know the significance of the day.

My sty is becoming very real during my Senior Year.

## ***Senior Year***

Eventually Mom realized that I did not want to do any of the things that everyone had suggested. This was my baby, and I wanted to keep it. No I didn't know how that was all going to work out, but I had to try.

I got back to school and a girl came running up to me and whispered, 'I heard you are pregnant, is it true?' I said yeah not whispering at all, and she shushed me. I said 'Why? It isn't like I am gonna be able to hide. And I am not ashamed.' For the most part it really surprised most people, they all thought I was a 'goodie two shoes'.

Being a Senior and only needing two credits to graduate, I only had to go for 4 hours. My first hour was a study hall, so I was the Choir Directors teachers aide. Mr Z, had

retired and we got a new guy. The second hour was now Swing Choir, and I was the student director, my third class was English and my 4th was History.

The Swing choir was dancing while singing like in a musical. I had an Assistant Student Director, because everyone had to have a partner, and he had some really good choreography ideas as we worked well together.

Our first concert was around Christmas. We had rehearsed really hard and everyone had their moves down great. It looked really good. The assistance mother had come to our dress rehearsal, and that was when she realized I was pregnant. VERY pregnant! since we were going to be dancing together, she refused to let him dance with me. I told her it isn't like I was contagious, but she forbade him to dance with me.

I had to go out on stage by myself. It was not easy doing some of the steps since they required a partner, but I managed to muddle through and the show didn't suffer at all. Everyone else did a great job. Of course I was the laughing stalk of the school for the next few days.

I decided to go on home schooling until after the baby was born. Not because I had to but because I could. I was working for a podiatrist 1 day a week filling out insurance forms. He was so into my pregnancy you would have thought he was the Dad. His wife told me that they would baby sit any time I needed them to and I did the same for them. We were more like family than employer/employee.

My best friend at the time, Sherri and her boy friend, Roger were not going to let me get out of doing cool stuff my senior year. I turned 18 on my birthday, and they all came over for a 'party'. I baked my own Cake and, I kid you not, it was so bad that the roaches would not even eat it.

In November, Karen had twin girls, and Mom went up to help out. While she was gone, she wanted me to go stay with Debbie. I told her, 'I am 18, about to have a baby, I

don't think I need a baby sitter.' She made them promise to keep an eye on me, and I had a friend come stay with me while she was gone. I felt she was just really being overbearing. It made me angry that she would not allow me to live my life.

In December, I woke up at about 3am, sat straight up in bed and hollered, 'Oh My God, this baby is going to have red hair.' Franks Mother was a red head. I didn't think of it again.

It was really cold outside that winter. The ground was actually frozen. Debbie and Buster lived in a little concrete block 'cottage' and the heat was broken, so they came and stayed with us. We didn't have very good heat either. Florida house builders didn't think we needed heaters in the winter.

We had been up late playing cards, and I was very restless all night. I kept waking up with a back ache every hour. I told Mom in the morning that my back really hurt, and she asked me how it hurt. I said I didn't know, it just hurts. They decided after it kept having spasms that I must be in labor, so she called the Doctor. Then the nurse she had on standby to be my delivery nurse. The phone rang, and it was the Doctor I worked for. He had some paper work, he could really use me to come in, and Debbie told him she didn't think I could make it. He said, 'She's in labor isn't she.' Debbie said 'Yep we think so.' And he said 'She said she would have that baby today, she kept telling us all.' I had not even realized it was January 18th.

I didn't know what to expect. My baby doctor had not told me anything about giving birth. I guess since my sister had 7 kids, she would tell me all I needed to know. I was having a contraction, the nurse (NOT the one I wanted), came in and said I was flushed, what was wrong. 'She said oh, you are having a contraction, let's just take care of that'.

Before I knew what she was doing she gave me a shot of demoral. I was so out of it, I couldn't tell you anything. I slept through the birth. When I woke up in the room I asked

what I had (we didn't know before hand then, we didn't have ultra sound pictures), and they told me a girl. Skip was smiling from ear to ear and said, 'She has BRIGHT red hair.' OF COURSE SHE DID.

I don't have a girl named picked out. The Doctor was almost sure I was having a boy. Looking at her the only name that came to me right off was Kimberly. The girl who stole my Thumbelina doll was Kimberly, so NO WAY I was naming her that. Then I remembered Danielle. I really liked that name, BUT It had to have 2 sets of double letters, so I made it Dannielle, and I thought that Suzzanne as her middle name flowed really well.

My Mom always tried to be proper, and she was so afraid people would call her Dani Sue that she forbade me calling her anything but Dannielle. I really like the name, and I never wanted to shorten it. But a neighbor did, right straight to Dani. Rarely do I call her Dani and most people call her 'Red'

I returned to school around February. I continued to work for the Doctor after noon on Wednesday when my classes ended. The rest of the week I rushed home to be with Dannielle and Mom.

Sherri and Roger introduced me to Rogers Brother Kenny. He was a nice guy, and we sort of hung out together, mostly to be with Sherri and Roger. It was a relationship that was just friends and was not ever going to be more.

Before Prom, Sherri broke up with Roger, who was a sophomore, and he really wanted to go to prom. He asked me if I would take him. AMD I told him I had no intentions of going to prom.

I didn't go to grad night or any of the other things that one might do during their senior year. I had a baby to take care of, and that was always more important.

As we came up to graduation as a class we had to pick a class song. For the late 70's you can imagine some of the choices. The song 'Memories' or 'Those were the Days'. I

was a fan of The Carpenters and they did 'We've only just begun.' We voted on which song to sing, and that song was voted in. We decided on the traditional Purple Gowns with Gold sashes for the honor students.

The class gathered in the Choir room to rehearse the song. The Choir teacher called me up to the front and told the class I would be directing the music. Some of the students had an issue with that, however, he put an end to it by saying that for 2 years I had been the student director over the Choir, as a graduating Senior, it should be me, not him that directed the music. I had not expected that. The girl that had played the piano for the past 3 years was also graduating, so she had the honor of playing for graduation. It all seemed so rational, and grown up. I didn't feel rational, or grown up, and yet I was a MOM!

School years behind me and my whole life in front of me. What was I going to do. All I could do. I had to face life after school!

## **9    *The Future Life after School***

Quoting a line from the poem Frank wrote for me, 'Who can say what the future holds, Surely not you or I'. I didn't have a clue. I didn't have any plans. I knew College was out of the question, I could not survive on one day a week at the Doctors office. I just didn't know what to do.

Vicki wanted to go to nursing school, she went to Indian River Office to register. While she was in the office, she found information on a program that would pay students to go to school. It was a training program for those who could not afford college or trade school. It was an attempt to educate the 'under privileged' out of poverty. I qualified, being a single Mom.

The Doctor I worked for thought that taking some secretarial classes would be

good. Then I would have something to show to other offices, and find a good job. Secretarial Science was the title of the program in which I enrolled.

It seemed redundant taking all the English and Math classes that I had been taking all through high school. But they were still included with all the typing, learning business machines, and computing stuff. Computers at that time took up whole rooms. What we worked on were 'terminal' that connected to a main frame.

Shorthand was interesting. I knew I would not be good at it. I had a problem with taking what I heard and translating into the characters. The issue was not comprehension. It took a little longer for my brain to process the information. I passed the class, but my speed was not good at all.

Translation was easier. You listened to a tape and typed what you heard. I could do that. I was actually pretty good at it. I could see how that would work in a Doctors office.

Xerox machines were OFFICE ONLY, very expensive and BIG. Putting paper in it required special training. Do Not get me started on refilling the ink, we didn't have cartridges then. A gallon jug of black ink and a funnel into a tiny ink tank. What a nightmare.

I finished the year without any real 'stories' to tell. School was always just school. I was placed in a temporary job with the Game Commission. If I could turn it into a full time job, that would mean state benefits.

The boss' name was Frank, just what I needed! He was a 'hard' man. I don't know how to say that any different. He didn't smile, he didn't participate in any office 'antics', when he spoke it was 'hard'. He was not my kind of person, but he was the boss.

He was working on his thesis for his doctoral degree in Wildlife Conservation. Any time I didn't have something to do for the office, he wanted me to type up his notes for his book. Not a problem for me, I hated sitting and waiting for something to do.

The end of the year conservation study report, something about ducks, was in it's

final stages. The only thing left to do was write it up and send it to the main office. Easy Peasy right? WRONG!

There were 5 members of this team. The Boss and 4 researchers. Each of them had their own part of the report to work on. I had to type up each of their reports, in triplicate. Remember, we didn't have copiers in that day, and Xerox machines were rare.

I typed up the first one, and handed it to Frank. They had a meeting, made some changes, and handed it back to be to be typed again. By now I had the second one done, and they had another meeting, the same thing. I made it to the fifth report, then started on the changes for the rest of them. I can't tell you how many times I re-typed those 5 reports, in triplicate before we got to the final copy to be sent to the main office.

It took me days to type this report. It was 26 pages and included information about water tables, rain fall history, and very little about the Ducks.

This was the final copy so I took great care NOT to make mistakes. I turned it in, they had a meeting and they came back with, 'You have to re-type it again, you made a mistake on page 15.' I had typed 'the' instead of 'the'. I could have fixed that, but that was not good enough.

I went to lunch, I always went home. I was so 'steamed' about the fact that they wanted me to re-type the entire thing, for one little mistake, that I was positive would make no difference in the decision for the grant for which they were applying.

I made up my mind!

I brought a box with me when I went back to the office. I started packing up the stuff I had brought in for my desk. Frank came out of his office and asked what I was doing. I told him I was going home, I quit. He looked stunned. 'You can't do that!' he said. 'Watch me!' I said. I told him that I didn't mind the work. The team was great to work with. I didn't mind typing up his notes. It kept me busy. I didn't mind answering the phone, or filing

reports. I was trained to do it all. Why I was walking out had everything to do with his 'hard' way of doing things. I worked hard on that report. I did everything they asked me to do, and never said a word. There was no reason for me to type that report so many times, when they could have sat in the meetings, gone over each others notes, compiled ONE report and THEN had me type it all up for revisions. THAT I would have had no problem with. But to type it soooooo many times, just to be told I had to do the final ONE MORE TIME was not going to work for me. I walked out the door and never looked back.

I started a job at an Insurance agency. I was the book keeper. I had not trained for book keeping. It wasn't difficult. I picked it up quickly. I was responsible for 'petty cash'. I told the boss that if I was responsible for money, NO ONE, including him, would go into the drawer without my knowledge. He agreed, but the office manager did what she wanted.

The boss was offended when I would not go out for a drink with the crew after work. I told him I did not drink and he asked if it was a religious choice. I told him it was more of a personal choice. He did not press me after that, but I think I lost favor with him because of it.

A client came to file a claim, I was given the task of taking his information. The next day a dozen red roses showed up at the office for me, along with a request for a date. I was flattered and being easily influenced, I accepted the date. He was a truck driver and gone over the road often. We started dating. It didn't take me long to realize he was very controlling. He bought me a ring, showered me and Dannielle with gifts, and talked about our future together. I just could not see a future with us together.

I started buying my Mom a single carnation every Friday. I just wanted her to know how much I appreciated everything she did for me. I found a nice little flower shop, and then realized that our Senior Class President Karen owned it. We talked every week. It was the first time I knew that she had actually seen me in school. She knew who I was, and what I

was about. I think we got close at that time.

Karen was getting married to her high school sweetheart. There was never any doubt that was going to happen. She invited me to her wedding and I felt recognized. I did, however, tell her that as much as I loved being invited, that I would just NOT fit in with the other guests. She accepted my decline, and we have remained friends, to this day.

It is hard to say everything that happened after I left the Insurance company. I did not fit in with the staff, or the clients. I had problems with money coming up missing from petty cash. I felt like there was someone intentionally messing with receipts and the books, I could never get them reconciled. I know the office manager did not like me. Rather than stay and be accused of something I know I was not doing, I left the job.

It was then that I took a job as a Nursing Assistant at the hospital. We did not have to be certified at that time.

Here I pick up and continue a story now from my youth. Remember the Truck Driver, George? Well Now I am 21. George is working as an orderly in another area of the hospital, turns out we work the same shift.

We see each other in the cafeteria one day and we strike up a conversation. Sometime within the first week of meeting up with him for lunch, I realize exactly what my Dad was so afraid of. This guy is strange. He even admitted having thought about it when I was 15, but he didn't do kids. BUT now I am an adult so it's okay.

I was alone, vulnerable, needed a friend, so well, you can guess the rest. It was a fling for a flings sake and nothing more. As years go by, we meet up again, have another fling, and over the years a couple more. Then worse things happen and he is no longer with us. I still cannot understand ONE, why my Dad didn't just tell me what he thought this guy was like, and TWO what was so wrong with his Brother, who was my age, and nothing like his

brother?

I can't say how long between encounters with George, when the last one was, or how many there were. I just know that I never felt threatened.

As my spiritual life, I was certainly off key. Nothing about my life was going along with what I thought My Holy Father had planned for me. I was feeling pretty lost and alone.

I had been attending church most of the time, and trying hard to do what I thought was right. I felt alone most of the time and tried more often than not to find solace in my time at the church.

Hiding places were very hard to find, when I had a daughter to consider. Someone had to take care of her, while Mother worked, and when I worked Mother took care of her. So I found it harder and harder to find a quiet time that I could reflect on life, it's meaning and all that life encompassed. This was certainly not the way I had felt as a teenager, when I knew that My Holy Father Loved me and I could feel Jesus hold my hand, or give me a hug, and when I could hear and see and feel the angels around me to give me strength and encourage me. I could not quiet my mind enough to even talk to the 'invisible people' that I always knew were just a whisper away.

I felt my job at the hospital was rewarding, and I believed I was good at it. Caring for people was an honorable job, and making them feel safe, and comforted when they were hurting, felt like it was a good way to live my life.

Most of my patients appreciated the time I spent at their bedsides, making sure they had everything they needed. I passed juices and snacks before bedtime, and made sure that everyone that wanted one, got a back rub. I made sure that before they went to sleep their pillows were fluffed, sheets were straightened, trash was emptied, and beside tables were

cleared of trash and clutter. I was not a nurse, and never pretended to be, but when I went to work I knew I was going to help people feel better.

One day I went to work to find out that a patient who had been there for a while was finally going to go home the next day. I was so happy for him. His wife was so relieved, it was a very exciting time.

Shortly after I got there, he told me to tell the nurse he had a really bad case of heartburn, could he get some Maalox. I told the nurse, she said she would take care of it, and I went on to my next patient.

I tried to make it a point to see every patient every 15-30 minutes unless there was a problem that I could not get back right away. So I made my rounds, went to have a quick sip of coffee and started my rounds again.

When I got to his room, he smiles, still thinking how glad he was going to be to get home. We talked for a few minutes about what he was going to do when he got home. As I started to walk out of the room he said, could you tell the nurse I still have really bad heartburn. 'Yes sir, I sure will', and I did. The nurse said she didn't know why they fed heart patients such spicy food. And said she would see to it AGAIN.

This went on for most of the evening, and I did not think anything of it. The nurse was a great nurse and she was doing her job, and I was doing my job. I was not a nurse, I was not a professional, in those days you didn't have to be certified to be a nurses aide. I made my final rounds, wished him a great night, said I hoped we didn't see him back any time soon, and be safe going home. I went home and was off the next day.

The next night, one of the other nurses that was a good friend called me. She said Mr Jones had passes away at about 3 am. My jaw dropped to the floor. What happened, I asked, and she said he had a massive heart attack. But he was going home! All his vitals were fine, his color was good, all he complained was.....HEART BURN.....! A year of

working on the cardiac ward, and I didn't see one of the biggest signs. I felt responsible. I was not a nurse, I was not a professional, I could not be responsible. I felt responsible, I should have pushed the nurse harder, I should have told her it was signs of a heart attack, I should have known something. I was not a nurse. I was not a professional; BUT ,, BuT,,,But....

]I had a two week vacation coming. I went to visit my sister in another state, and I didn't come back to work. I didn't look back. I stayed with my sister for a few months, where life happened like it always happened. I went to church, I prayed, I went through life's motions, but I still didn't get my alone time.

There was a young man in the church, younger than me by a few years, and he was going through a hard time, with some of the same emotions about our spiritual life that I was having. We met a few times prayed together, and talked about what we were feeling, and what could we do to change it. Other people in the church we were talking to, individually of course, didn't seem to know what we should do to make it better.

One even we had been praying together, reading scriptures, studying and trying so hard to figure out this thing called life, that time got away from us. When I got back to my sisters, much later than intended, I was met with the most accusing attitude I have ever seen. They actually accused me a defiling this young man, just because we had been out late, and we must have been doing bad things.

Nothing like that had happened, and that was not the first time that I had been accused of being an aggressor toward men. That the only reason I was even in church was to find a husband.

More and more church was becoming a place that I dreaded.

I was accused of hateful things and yet these were supposed to be people who were loving and caring and help you find answers to life's questions. Now I was even more alone than I had ever been and I was surrounded by people.

I finally made my way back home to my Mom, and still had no further answers than I had before I had left. Everything felt like it was my fault. I was a terrible person that allowed people to die, that hurt people, that no matter how hard I tried I brought grief. How could God Love me.

Hiding was almost impossible. There was just no time, and no place, and it was totally pointless.

My life had gone from Failure to Insanity!

## ***10 Failure to Insanity***

I have reached such a low in my life that I don't know where to turn. I pray often for some relief but it feels like God doesn't talk to me anymore. The church is less and less comforting, and I fear going to meetings because I am such a bad person that no one could love me anymore.

I broke down and went for counseling. I poured my heart out to this woman who had sworn an oath that what ever I told her would not leave that building. I told her everything. I told her about George who at one point in our flings had been married. I told her about my feelings about Mr James, and how I allowed him to die, I told her how I sometimes felt I made a mistake keeping my daughter. I told her EVERYTHING.

My sister came home and told me EVERYTHING I had told the counselor. I was so broken. There was no healing me. NOW, to be fair, the counselor was telling a fellow practitioner, all be it a nurse, not a counselor, that she had this girl come in that was totally 'broken' and she didn't know how to help her. She told her fellow, all about the flings with this guy, who she named, because she also knew him, and could not believe that another one had fallen for his stories. She also told her about the big things, and little things this girl had laid at her feet. It doesn't take a sister long to recognize her baby sister's story. That still didn't

help me feel safe going back to counseling.

I felt so totally broken that I got on my knees and I prayed more fervently than I had in a very long time. I told God that he had PROMISED me a companion. HE PROMISED I would not be alone. I was trying to be patient, and I know I am not supposed to ask for a sign, but PLEASE GOD, give me something.....

He gave me a dream, he gave me a NAME....I had to find Michael. I was around 23 at the time, but I had a name, I had hope. I felt safe.

I worked a lot of go no where jobs, didn't make a lot of money. I was working at McDonald when Dannielle started school. I asked to go to a day shift so that I would be home in the evening with my child, and was told no.

A few weeks later, I took a large bill at my register and gave it to the assistant manager on duty, who took it to the back. I had done my job, and thought nothing more about it. The next day, I go into work and was told I was suspended from the register for ten days. I had been \$50 short in my register. I said no way, told them I had given the AM a \$50 bill they needed to figure it out. I went back to work, NOT working a register and did that for about 3 days.

We were really busy on the 4th day, and the manager needed someone on the register that they new was good, fast and friendly. She called me up and told me to get on the register and I said no ma'am. She was really angry but I told her, they believed that I took \$50 and I should not be trusted on that register.

That is when she pulled me to the back and let me in on the 'secret'. They were trying to find a reason to fire the AM and this was a trap for him. I told her to take her job and shove it, went to the home office and told him what had happened.

I don't know what happened after that, but I was not going to sit back and allow these people to use me to do their dirty work. I had another job within the week, and it was one that

allowed me to be home in the evening with my daughter.

I had been asked to come and be a live in care giver for an Alzheimer patient. Her husband was a fine upstanding member of the church, and she had been the pianist in the church when I was a teen. I adored her, and wanted to be of help, in any way I could.

Dannielle had started kindergarten and we had moved in with this couple. It was an exiting time for Dannielle, she loved animals and we were surrounded with cows, goats, chickens, dogs. Wildlife that would wander up. It was wonderful. I had plenty of places that I could go off and Hide while the Mrs was sleeping, and Dannielle was in school, I just had to be close enough that I was aware when the Mrs. was awake. Life seemed like it was getting back on track.

I don't remember how long we were there exactly. I know that taking care of the Mrs. was so much harder than I thought it would be. I never knew how strong an Alzheimer patient could be.

She didn't recognize anyone, didn't know where she was most of the time, and would take off walking saying she had to go get food for the babies. We were 17 miles from town, and I was alone with her.

After about the third time that this happened, I was beginning to think this was more than I could handle. I told Mr, that he was going to find someone else. I would stick it out as long as I could, but that she was just too strong for me. He made some comments that reflected things he had heard at church, and I packed my bags and left that day. I thought he had wanted me to come and help with his beloved wife, then I found out he wanted me to be her replacement. No way no shape no form, I was outta there, and again I felt like I had failed.

It was around this time that Mom had found out she had a small cancer on her lung and had to have surgery. They removed a cyst that was about the size of a dime, and the

Doctor was praised for even having spotted it.

My two oldest sisters were planning for her death, what they would take, how they would do things. And I went off on them. I could not believe they had her dead and buried before she even had surgery. I wonder if they were disappointed when she survived.

I bounced around from job to job, had some lengths of unemployment and finally found myself working for Dairy Queen. I had been promised when I started that I would be trained as an assistant manager, but that didn't happen. I worked for a long while, they kept promising but nothing, so when a manager from another city came in and said they were looking for an assistant, I jumped at the chance.

I was off to Sebring. I took a small efficiency apartment where I stayed in while I worked. I was back in Okeechobee on my days off to spend with Mom and Dannielle. I was doing okay, but I missed being at home. Living alone was not what like I had dreamed.

I was really frigidly all the time. Then one day, I realized that when I was all keyed up, I went outside for a breath of air. I walked through the back room where the smokers were gathered. As I stood talking to them, I felt better. I realized that my whole life I had lived with smokers. Now I was not around the smoke, I was having withdrawal. So, I bought a pack of cigarettes to help me get past these fig-gits. I still smoke.

On my 29th Birthday, I did some reflecting and I realized I weighted 250 lbs. I had started smoking. I was alone with no 'prospects' in sight. I was going absolutely no where with my life. I have not even met anyone named Michael and was for sure beginning to think that it really had just been a dream.

I started Drinking, and I drank the whole bottle of whiskey and I wallerd in self pity the entire night. When the sun started coming up over the lake I was reflecting at, I walked back to my little apartment and fell into bed.

A few months later, Dannielle was turning 11. She loved horses. I passed a riding

stable every time I went to or from Sebring. One day, I stopped and asked about bringing Dannielle for a day ride. Arrangements were made so on her 11th Birthday I took her to the stable, signed all the papers, paid the bill and left her to have the time of her life. I went back to the apartment to gather up the stuff I wanted to take back home with me. I opened the fridge. There was a beer that a neighbor had left. I thought it would help me relax, and I almost drank it. I thought, 'No I have a long drive, I'll save it for when I come back'.

On the way back to the stable, there is this really weird intersection. It was hard to see around the corner to know when it was safe to pull out. There was a pick up truck in front of me waiting for a clear path. It looked to be like the traffic was clear, so I thought he went. I didn't see the person crossing the road, but he did, and he didn't move. I did move and slammed into the back of his truck. He got out all angry with me, and I told him it was totally my fault. We called the police, exchanged insurance information, and my car was towed to a local body shop.

I don't remember getting a ticket, but I probably did, it didn't matter, I was wrong and I was accepting responsibility. When we went to report the accident to the insurance, I gave them the mans name and I told them it was totally my fault. He did NOTHING wrong, it was all on me. From what my adjuster told me sometime later, he really tried to make it sound really worse than it was, but when he realized I had assumed full responsibility, he accepted what they offered, and let it go.

I had called the stable, told them what happened, and told them than Mom was on her way to pick me up. We would come get Dannielle as soon as we possibly could. We all had a good laugh about the turn out of the day, but Dannielle had been in heaven out on the trails riding the horse.

When I called the body shop to find out the damages on my car, they told me it was totaled. I was now without a car. I sold it to the body shop for what was owed on storage

fees, and found a little car that I could make payments on. It would not go over 50 miles an hour and was totally on it's last legs. But it got me to and from work and that was all I needed.

After the accident I had whiplash, I went to a Chiropractor for several months, which helped with the back pain, but not the emotional pain of failure.

I was so depressed. I felt like if maybe I started to lose weight I would feel better, so I devised a diet I thought I could live with. I only ate when I was really hungry, and only enough to satisfy the hunger. I ate what ever I was craving, just in reasonable portions, or just enough to satisfy the craving.

I worked at Dairy Queen and my dinner before usually consisted of a Large sandwich, large fries, super large hot fudge Sunday with triple hot fudge and nuts. After I started my diet, I might grab a piece of burger that had broken, or a hot dog that had been on the warmer too long. No bread, but if I had a craving for the ice cream I might eat a baby cone, or just a few bites of plain ice cream. In just a few months I had started losing weight.

It was still not enough to take away the pain, so one of my neighbors suggested I take a day off and 'hang' with them. I called Mom and told her I was going to stay over, I only had the one day off, and then was on for three, I would be home on the weekend. That was okay by her, and she said to have a good time.

We went to the lake the next day for a picnic and to just hang out. They pulled out a joint and we smoked it and I felt nothing. Later they pulled out some cocaine and we snorted it. I felt nothing. This was really frustrating to these guys, and they were determined to get me high. They broke out the crack. I took a hit, and I felt nothing. So they figured maybe I needed to get drunk first. They bought more beer. We smoke more weed. We did more cocaine, and we smoked more crack. I still felt nothing except the beer.

That night, convinced they were gonna get me high, they set up a huge rock of crack on a pipe and coached me on how to hold it in until I just couldn't hold it anymore. When I finally

exhaled, I felt and saw sparks fly off every nerve endings in my body and I swear they were covered in rainbows. I had a rush of excitement like I had never had before. In less than a minute I was falling at what felt like terminal velocity. I crashed so hard that I thought I was breathing my last breaths. My heart was pounding my ears were ringing and I could not breath.

The neighbor helped me back to my apartment and slept in the chair all night, just to make sure I didn't quit breathing.

At some point during the night, I had hocked my sisters VCR to pay for more drugs, and when I realized what I had done, I felt like more of a failure than ever before. I worked long enough to get the VCR back then I tucked tail and ran back to Okeechobee. I had left a job that I thought I wanted, but that was nearly the death of me. I know I could have died that night. I had been given the choice, but, my work was not done. I chose to stay.

They say everyone has a bottom. I was falling fast. I know now, I was only Half way Down.

## ***11 Half Way Down***

I needed a career. I had tried secretarial the first time around. Had never really made a go at it. I needed something that would benefit me for the future. I though going back to school might be the answer. I had to do something, I was sinking financially, physically, emotionally, and even worse, spiritually.

I checked out a college in Fort Pierce and they suggested Paralegal. Seems they thought I had the right mindset for the law. So I took out some student loans, bought a reliable car to get to and from school, and I started a new adventure.

The course was 18 months, but by taking more classes I could finish in 9. Anxious to get started in a new career I signed up for all I could. I found that I was really

liking the idea of working with lawyers... I had a good head for it.

I met some really friendly people that I was able to spend some time with. One of the girls had a son that was close to Dannielle's age, so we got together and went to the beach and started hanging out. I went kinda wild, and when Dannielle was not with me, I stayed pretty close to these new friends.

I took a job working at a gas station close to the school so that I could go to school during the day, work in the evening and get home soon enough to get some sleep and start it all over the next day.

My friends started talking me into staying over more and more often. It was a good plan, better than driving all the way home every night. With this staying over, came the drug use again. Still could not get high off of cocaine. Pot was okay, but not the high I was chasing. Whiskey was still my drug of choice.

I got through school with a 3.8 grade point average, which to me was an abject failure. I should have had a 4.0 average. I had a professor that I let beat me and it cost me .20 grade points.

This is a story truly worth telling. It adds to my strong will and belief in my ability to be strong. This Professor had given an assignment to demonstrate our ability to do research. We could choose any subject. I chose a question that affected me personally.

If I were to get married, would I be required by law to get permission from my child's natural father, whose name was NOT on the Birth Certificate, for my husband to legally adopt my child? I did the research, made sure all the legal references were documented, and included any precedents. He gave me an A on the paper.

With about 4 weeks left of classes, the class was discussing any legal questions we had. One of the other students asked that very same question. The professor told her that she was absolutely required to get his permission, it didn't matter that his name was not on

the birth certificate. I raised my hand, told him that while she might be morally obligated, she was not legally obligated to do so. His face turned bright red. He told me I was a student and that I did not have the right to practice law. I told him, I was simply referring to the research that I had done. The paper for which he had given me an A, and I was not practicing law, simply offering an opinion on another student's question. Also that Moral obligation is not considered in a court of law.

The next week we had a test that was mostly essay questions. When he handed them back he had given me a C. I got with another student who was a friend, compared her answers to mine, and found that although the thoughts were worded differently, they both said the same thing. She had gotten an A.

She agreed with me, that this was just vengeance. She had seen how red his face got when I had 'challenged' his opinion in class. We took our tests to the Dean who also agreed they appeared to be the same. He said he would speak with the professor.

The grade was corrected, he did not apologize, and sent me to sit in the back of the class. I was not allowed to participate in any conversations or ask any questions. We took our final exam, for which I received an A. There was still 2 weeks of classes left, and I could not bring myself to go back to that classroom. I did not realize that those two weeks out of his class would affect my grade.

I had graduated, I felt confident, and thought for sure this was the end all to my troubles. Then the other shoe dropped.

Mom wasn't feeling well. She went to the doctor then, into the hospital to have every test you could imagine. They didn't find anything to cause concern. Still she didn't feel right. That was in March.

Debbie had talked to our Brother and she told him that if he wanted to see Mother again he needed to come that summer, that she didn't believe Mom would be with us

by Christmas. Our Brother came that summer and we had a huge family reunion and everyone enjoyed the time together.

Mother was so excited that Sonnie was coming for a visit. It didn't matter how bad she may have felt, she had to plan everything for their visit. This is where I recall that cook out, when I was going with the church to New York.

Thankfully Sonnie and his family stayed with Debbie. Everyday we got together at Mom's house to visit, eat, play music and such. Mom always agreed paper plates, plastic cups, and flatware was best. I only made one demand. The disposable dishes would be disposed. I refused to wash any of that plastic stuff, and I refused to be the only one doing the clean up.

After dinner, everyone would go outside to the picnic table and talk and have fun, while I was stuck with the clean up. I refused. I told them so. I was tired of being pushover. I got help.

September, Mom was back in the hospital having a tumor removed from her belly that, the Doctor said, was the size of a basketball, and it wasn't even half the tumor. They said she had 4 different types of cancer of the female organs, and the prognosis was not good.

Our Brother went home, My oldest sister lived in Fort Pierce and just could not sit and watch her mamma die, the second oldest sister(the nurse) would have to charge us \$250 a day to come home and take care of her, and Debbie was a Police officer in Belle Glade. Debbie came everyday when she got off work, even when she worked a midnight shift, so she could sit with Mom while I got some rest.

Mother never seemed to sleep. She was incontinent and had to be cleaned up constantly. She could barely walk. She needed help to the bathroom, to shower, sometimes

even to eat. I just got so tired I didn't know if I was coming or going.

Dannielle was going to school, but there were days when I forgot to get up to get her to school, sometimes she just didn't go.

Mom Passed on December 22, 1988 and my life as I had known it was over. I didn't know how to go on. I lost my companion, my best friend, my mother and the best part of my life. I totally melted down.

From 1988 to 1994 I was totally lost. Nothing was right, my life was a blur, I didn't care if I lived or died. I did everything I could to die. It just would not happen. I never tried to commit suicide, I just wanted to go to sleep and not wake up. I kept waking up.

This is where the story gets really hard to tell, but if you have read this far, I beg you to continue. I am writing this, not for myself, I have these thoughts in my head everyday, but if ONE PERSON reads this and gains even an ounce of spiritual HOPE, then GOD has finally fulfilled his purpose for me. He was NEVER NOT THERE for me, even in my darkest moments, he was holding me up, and moving me toward something. Those invisible people were always holding me, caring for me, and watching over Dannielle and me, keeping us safe and protected.

I had been delivering pizza for a while, since before I went to school, It was a decent Job, I worked a lot and made a decent paycheck with tips. I was not going to get rich from it, but it kept me going.

Frank had gone to State College after graduation, then joined the Navy to finish his education. He got married and had a daughter and I caught up with him when he was home for his Fathers funeral.

That was a hard thing to take. It struck me that now Dannielle would never know either of her Grandfathers. I was sad by that, since I had loved my step-grandpa so much.

There was a guy that I worked with that became kind of important in my story. He was married, but it was never really a love relationship. I liked his wife as a person, we had a lot of laughs and she told me about her life growing up, why she married Chuck and he adored their daughter, so she stayed. His mother never approved of her, and it made things even worse. Chuck was really all about doing what his mother wanted, but when it came to his daughter, that was the key. If she didn't get to see her because she had done something against his wife, then things got better for a while.

They would come to the house and play cards with me and Mom, and while Mom didn't think it was right, since I knew Chuck from work, and she knew we were close. She enjoyed the company, she liked his wife and Dannielle didn't mind having the little girl around. It was a good time for Mom. I was glad Chuck was around when Frank got out of the Navy. He needed a temp job, we needed help at the pizza place, so he came to deliver pizzas.

I went to pickup my paycheck, I didn't know he was there, and when I walked in with Dannielle it totally hung him up. The manager had to tell him three times to answer the phone. He finally snapped out of it and said he sorry, he was a little distracted. Yeah, he just saw his mother at age 12. He decided that Dannielle had to be his.

We had some conversations about the fact that my Mom was sick and wasn't going to be around long. He started working at the power plant making really good money as a nuclear chemist. I approached him about helping Dannielle financially. I hit him where it hurt him most. I told him he could either start paying child support, or I could take him to court and sue for 13 years of back support. He decided that \$200 a month to support his child was a small price to pay. He eventually opened a credit union account for her, and paid her directly. (AT MY REQUEST) that was her money, not mine.

Chuck was a big support to me during that time. Frank didn't work at the

pizza place for long, but it made it easier to deal with the short time he was there that I appeared to have friends and a life.

Dannielle was happier getting some of the things that she needed for school, and some clothes and shoes she had always wanted. At 12 she was really responsible with what little money she was given. I had always been honest with her about her father. When she had asked I told her he had not been ready to be a Dad when she was born. I didn't speak bad of him around her. I told her that it was her choice if she wanted to spend time with him, get to know him. She had to form her own opinion of him. For a while she kinda liked having a Dad.

When Mom got really sick, I had to quit my job to take care of her. I did all the responsible things, like calling about her life insurance policy. Checked over all her health insurance papers, found some extra cash I wasn't aware of by comparing her health policies. We got some refunds from the hospital that really helped with the bills.

After I graduated from paralegal school I did a two week temp job for an attorney in Port St. Lucie and was able to get a form for a will. I sat down with mom, and we filled it out, it was really standard. She wanted to leave the house to me and Dannielle, but I didn't think that was fair, so I put in a clause that IF I lived in the house until it was paid for, it was mine. IF I could not make the payments or pay the taxes, or IF I chose to leave the house, the house would be sold and profit split 5 ways.

There was a clause at the very beginning that said something about a proper marker, that was not something we had discussed, but I had ideas about what I would like to see. Everything in the house was to be distributed according to who had given her what, if they wanted it, or else it all went to me and Dannielle.

I tried to be prepared for the end, but that just wasn't possible. Debbie was there everyday, but I felt like all the pressure to take care of her was on me. Our niece

came to stay to help out for a while, and she went through my drawers while I was gone one day. She found a small amount of pot in my drawer and immediately called her mother the NURSE and told her I was spending all of grandmas money on drugs. Fact is that one of my friends had given me the pot to help me stay calm. I was a wreck most of the time.

I knew Mom was not doing well. Everyone had come on Thursday. She was really uncomfortable in her chair, so we asked her if she wanted to go lay in her bed, She said No, she wanted to lay on the couch so she could be out there with everyone. We helped her to the couch.

That night when Debbie got off at midnight she came and sat with us. We were talking, Mom had not talked all day. Mom got this really angry look on her face.

Shortly after Dad had passed she told me she had a dream that Dad was going off with a younger woman, and she always felt angry. When she got that same look on her face, I asked her if Daddy was here, she nodded yes. I asked if he was with that 'younger woman' and she frowned deeper and nodded yes. It dawned on me right then, and I said 'Mom, meet your Daughter, That's Linda!' Her face calmed, she looked peaceful and you could just feel the love in the room. I could feel the hug they shared. It was a beautiful moment, and a memory I will always cherish. I felt honored to be apart of that reunion. Debbie felt it too, and we talked about it often when we reflected on that night.

It was three days before Christmas. I had been a sleep for a few hours, and when I woke up I found Mom breathing really heavy and she sounded congested. I called the nursing service. They came over and listened to her lungs and said she was 'fine'. I new they were lying, but I needed a break so Chuck and his wife came and took me to lunch. I had gotten a beeper (no cell phones then,) and told my niece if there was any problems to send me a 911 code to the beeper, and I would get there as soon as possible.

We had just sat down to eat when the beeper went off. My niece was freaking

out because the rattle in grandmas chest got louder, she didn't know what to do, We hurried back to the house.

It was Janie's birthday and Vicki was arriving from Texas that night, so we had all agreed everyone would be at our house. It was a Friday night, so all the kids were going to go skating with Dannielle and Shannon. We didn't live in a big house, but when everyone got there it was a lot smaller. Sonnie was not going to make it until the next day but he was trying his best to get there. That has always made me think of the Everly Brothers song, 'The Lightening Express'.

Vicki arrived from Texas. She was really upset that Mom was on the couch. She immediately started barking orders about getting her bed set up and getting her moved in there. She didn't listen to me or anyone else that told her that is not where she wanted to be, but she didn't care.

Janie and Skip were on their way, but running a little late. Debbie was at work so I was the only other sibling there to deal with it all.

Chuck and his wife had stayed, knowing that I was dreading the arrival of Vicki. She had always bullied me, and got her way. Chuck was a volunteer fireman, and he had called the ems, to see if they could at least come suction Moms lungs so she could breath better. I knew in my heart it was a death rattle. I had never actually heard it myself, but I had read enough to know what it was. I was out side on the drive when the ems arrived, and I heard my niece scream. I ran into the house to find her holding Mom's hand and just crying. Mom was gone.

The em's came in and pretty much handled calling the police, and the coroner. I ran out to Chuck and his wife, we shared a hug, I cried and then snapped into the responsible role and went in to deal with the paper work. I was as prepared as I could be. I had all the information they needed gathered into a box.

Dannielle and the other kids all left to go skating and I couldn't believe Dannielle was still going skating, and she told me, she just needed to be with her friends. That I could understand so we hugged and I let her go. I was sure she didn't have a lot of fun that night, but she was with people she could share with and could relate her feelings.

The next few days were a blur. The funeral was planned. Debbie and Skip handled the arrangements. There was not a lot of insurance money so there was some financial decisions to be made. I had met with the funeral director about a week before, and he told me he knew how this was going to go, but to stay strong. He handed me \$100 and told me not to let them run me down. I don't think he was happy that I didn't have much say in what was being planned.

Sonnie arrived and spent all his time with Debbie's family. Vicki was staying at the house with me, and barking orders at everyone. All I could do was try to keep my head straight but I didn't know what to do. Christmas was not going to be joyful. We had all exchanged names to buy gifts for under the tree. We gathered for dinner and gifts exchange and when everyone had opened their gifts, there was one tiny package under the tree. It didn't have a name on it. Dannielle had bought it for Grandma. Everyone cried.

These were the Darkest of Times.

## ***12 Darkest of Times***

When the dust had settled and everyone was gone and I found myself alone in the house. I felt totally lost. I rearranged the furniture, I put records on the turntable, (yep there is that age thing again) and tried to act like everything was okay. Chuck and his wife came over often, but I could not sit on the couch. I had a hard time even looking at it.

It was about a week to Dannielle's 12th birthday, and I wanted to do something really big for her. I started making phone calls to the parents of her friends that I knew, and sent out letters to others. I wanted to have a big sleep over party for her. It was to be a boy girl party because her "gang" was mixed, and they all adored her, as she did them. I had promised all the parents I was not going to sleep that night. Given that most of them knew their kids, and Dannielle they agreed to give it a try. There was a couple of moments when I felt like I had gone too far, but they were handled and everyone had a good time. I didn't know that one of the boys had brought a bottle of alcohol with them and spiked the punch. But to the best of my knowledge no one got hurt, and everyone made it home safe and sound the next day.

I had been trying to find a job. The new owners of the Dairy Queen came and offered me a job. I accepted it, as an assistant manager, but their son was the manager. He was 17 and of course in their eyes he could do no wrong. I think I lasted 2 weeks. Every time I would hand out an assignment, or ask who was responsible for doing this or that, he over rode me, and let his friends get by with a "warning". They had a good laugh.

My emotions were so fragile at that moment that I broke down more often than not, so I quit to save them the trouble of firing me. I was actually feeling like I wanted to hurt someone. Not kill, just hurt. So I became very isolated. I didn't go outside the house, it was even hard to go to the mailbox at the end of the drive.

I had not noticed that Dannielle had not been going to school. I guess I forgot she still had school. When the lights got turned off, I sent her to stay with Debbie, so that she could at least have a hot meal. A few days later the water was turned off, and then the phone. I tried to stay in the quiet dark house, but Chuck and his wife came to my rescue and told me to come stay with them. Dannielle was having trouble staying with Debbie. She wanted to be where I was, so she came to stay at Chuck's also. When the school year ended and her report card came in, they had failed her due to attendance. Her grades were all still

really good. A's and B's, but she had not attended enough days.

I made an appointment with the principal and explained to him how the school year had gone. Grandma being in and out of the hospital, me spending all my time between the hospital and Dannielle and trying to keep it altogether, then after grandma had passed my isolation and drunkenness, She was afraid to leave me alone, not knowing what she would find when she got home. They had a meeting, he presented the case to the board, and she was promoted because even through all that, her grades never slipped. It would have been a waste to keep her back because of these circumstances.

That was a long summer, and I can't remember most of it. I do remember living with Chuck and his wife was a very trying time. Having them as friends and living with them was quite different scenarios. Living there, it became very evident that they were not in love. While he loved her dearly, it was not returned. She told me about her life before him, and the man that she always felt most in love with. She even told me that she was not sure that the daughter was Chucks child. She didn't feel strong motherly pulls to her daughters either.

She had two daughters from a previous marriage, and they came for the summer. They got along with Dannielle and she tried to show them a good time, but in the end, they were really not interested in her 'childish' activities. They had told her that they did 'adult' things when they were with their Dad, and his boyfriend. I didn't really think anything about it at the time. I thought they were just trying to make themselves more superior.

After they had gone home to their dad, Chucks wife told me she was going to make Chuck leave. She had a plan so that she would keep everything. When I asked her what was going on she told me that Chuck had been touching her girls in bad places. I didn't believe it, but I was angry. He had been baby sitting Dannielle while I worked. What if had touched her too. I would have wanted to do some really terrible things to him. (this was

before the Lorna Bobbitt story, but....) Lets just say that Lorna Bobbi was not alone in her desire to do what she had the guts to do.

I asked Dannielle if Chuck had ever done anything like that with her.

(Remember, she's 12-13) her exact words to me were "OH HELL NO! And if anyone ever said he did they are lying."

Okay, so did he do it to the girls? I told his wife what Dannielle said, and she told me to move out. I didn't have a clue where to go, but I knew I had to go some place. While I was living there, I had trouble making my car payments, so I let it go back. Now I had no car, and no place to live, and I was lost.

Debbie had taken over executor of Mothers Estate, because I was not emotionally capable of doing it. The house was headed for foreclosure, even though I had told all of the siblings that I could not pay the bills. I told them what they payments were, what the taxes were, but they all said it was my house and my responsibility.

Debbie had decided to quit her job in Belle Glade and come back to Okeechobee. She had worked at the hospital before in the Respiratory Therapy department, and went back to work there. She withdrew her retirement from the Belle Glade PD (about 5 years worth) and paid the house out of foreclosure and moved in it with her family. Dannielle and I went to live with them there.

Chucks wife had filed charges against him for child molestation, and he was arrested. I got pretty friendly with his Mom as we were trying to get some kind of defense. Dannielle still said that she did not believe that he would have ever done that, and then told me the stories that his wife daughters had told her during the summer. I was sure that all the evidence would set him free, but his attorney didn't seem to care.

I started researching at the library, you know, that paralegal training? I presented all the precedent I could find, to the lawyer I told him he needed to depose the girls

and their Father and "the boyfriend" and that there would be enough evidence to cause doubt to a jury. The lawyer had a heart attack and died. We found another lawyer to take the case, but she urged him to take a plea, do house arrest and let it go. I found out later that she had never taken a case to trial.

He took the deal so he would not go to prison, but he lost everything. He moved in with his Mother. He had lost his jobs, he always had more than one. He found out about a potato chip delivery route. It was selling chips to businesses, bars and homes. It was the entire Lake Area. I went with him, to help him out, and stay busy.

Things seemed to be looking up and I thought, WAS THIS A LIGHT?

### ***13 Was this a Light?***

I was working a midnight shift at a convenience store, doing the best I could to appear normal. Frank had started putting Dannielle's money in a Credit Union Account for which she had the debit card, so every two weeks she got money on her card to do with what she wanted. We never discussed what she did with her money. She was a very responsible kid, and it was her money, I didn't need to know.

Frank started coming around the house, to visit Dannielle, so he said. It always bothered me that he would come when I was home. I had never really gotten over his leaving and I still loved him like I did when we were teenagers. It was like all those years didn't happen.

When it came time for Dannielle's 13th birthday we planned a big skating party. That was the same night that Desert Storm happened. The adults were glued to the TV while the kids skated. Seemed to me that the world was finally ending and I almost felt relieved. The war was over so fast that no one had time to even think about it. Life went on and situations remained the same messed up like always. I still had no car, and was living with

Debbie.

Frank chose one night after Dannielle had gone to bed to profess his love for me. He said he could not believe that I had carried this torch for him through all these years, and what a fool he had been to leave me alone. Now remember, he's married and has another daughter. Somehow in my mind that didn't matter, he was mine first. Dannielle was his first born, she should have a right to her family reunited.

He took me vehicle shopping, and made the down payment on a van. We rented a small trailer and Dannielle and I moved in. He promised he would make all the payments on the van, the trailer and pay the utilities. I felt like this could work out

I was setting things up in the trailer, trying to make it comfortable, and I needed to use his drill to hang some pictures. He brought it over then tried to instruct me how to use it. That was the first time I ever stood up to him. I told him in no uncertain terms that he was not going to teach me how to use a drill, I had been using one of those since I was 16 years old, and did not need to be educated. He referenced his wife and that she would not know the difference between a wrench and pliers, I reminded him that I was NOT his wife a fact he would do well to remember.

Boy, did that feel good! I believed I was back on track to being the confident self sufficient woman I believed myself to be

It was about three days after we moved in. It was a Friday night and Dannielle had gone skating as usual. She came home before I left for work. I told her to lock up behind me and get some sleep. She hugged me, and I left for work. When I got home, I noticed the ashtray on the coffee table, strange, I didn't normally leave butts in the ashtray, so I picked it up, washed it and put it in the drainer. I went to the bathroom and there was a hand towel wadded up on the sink. I figured Dannielle must have gotten up in the night and just didn't hang the towel back up, and then I went toward the bedroom and noticed that the

screen in the window of the back door was poking out, and wondered what was up with that;..I tucked it back in and went to bed.

Dannielle got up a little while later, and I got up with her. She had been crying and when I asked what was wrong she told me that one of the guys she called a friend from skating had showed up with his uncle after I had gone to work. She said they broke in the back door, that the older guy, the uncle, and told his nephew he was gonna 'get a piece of that'. I can't say I know exactly how she got out of it, but they left and she said they never touched her, but she was scared. She had taken a butchers knife to bed with her and it was under her pillow.

I hunted down the kid. I found him riding his bicycle and grabbed him by his shirt collar. I told him if he EVER did anything like that again, to ANYONE, and I found out about it, he would not have anything left to ever do it again. I went to Frank's, told him what was going on, and he decided that the only thing to do was for him to move in so he would be there at night while I worked.

We talked about the fact that I was trying really hard, and I asked him not to bring alcohol into the house. I had a problem with it, and I could not afford to go back to drinking. I was trying to get right again. He agreed and moved in. It lasted 16 days.

One day he told me that he needed to go conference with his wife about her bills, he had always said he could take care of both households with no problem. I was cooking dinner when he came back a few hours later, and when he kissed me, the stench of sex gagged me. I pushed him away and said it didn't surprise me at all, but he could have at least washed his face before he came back. I would not let him touch me the rest of the day.

I had a small box cutter from work and because it had been so easy for someone to come in before, I started sleeping with it under my pillow. I knew I wasn't going to kill anyone with it, but I could hurt them really bad, and there would be proof that they

were not there for good reasons. Apparently Frank found it under my pillow and was afraid I was going to use it on him.

From what I learned later from his sister, his wife had given him an ultimatum. His wife had told his sister about me, and Dannielle and that Frank had moved in with us. They had met Dannielle, but were not totally convinced that she was his child. Even his mother (who she looked like) was not convinced.

His sister knew her brother all too well, and she told his wife that she should tell him she wanted a divorce, and that she would take the house, all the cars, and half his money. He would also pay her alimony, and child support for her daughter and that in the end he would have enough money to support himself, if he was lucky and lived cheap. OR she said he could come home, turn his back on me totally and all would be forgiven. He could still support Dannielle, she was his child, after all. That was the end of that.

The night that he left was a Friday night. (gotta love Fridays!) Dannielle went skating and when she came home before I left for work she had two guys with her. I didn't know how old they were, but one had a cigarette and the other had a beer. She looked me in the eye, (again, 13 years old) and told me that "You are going to work, I have these two boys here, and If I want to have sex with them there is not a damn thing you can do about it." I wanted to scream. I took a breath, took her by the hand. I told her she was absolutely correct, but if she was going to do that, use these contraceptives. I said I was not ready to be a grandmother yet, and I went to work.

All I could do for the next 8 hours was think about what was happening at my house. What was she doing? What were the boys doing? What was I gonna find when I got Home? I don't even remember what I did at work that night, I could have been robbed and not known it.

When I got home, and the house was neat, the boys were gone and

Dannielle was asleep in her bed, I finally let out the breath I had been holding walking up to the door. I was so relieved that everything was okay, that all I could do then was to be seriously ANGRY! I opened the cupboard to get a glass for water, when I spotted a bottle on the top shelf. Frank had left this really expensive bottle of really smooth bourbon behind.

I thought, well, one drink might help me calm down. I really needed it after the night I had, and maybe it would help me look past the anger. So I took a drink. Okay, still angry, didn't see how she could have done that to me. What had I done to deserve that, I need another drink. An hour and a half later, the bottle is empty, and I more pissed now than I was before. I can't go on like this. I can't deal with this life if this is all I am ever gonna have.

I just wanted it all over. But, I can't kill myself, and have her wake up to find me, I don't want her to live a life that ends up like mine, so the only answer is to kill her, then myself. This was the first time I ever truly considered killing anyone else, or myself. I didn't see any other way. I grabbed the butchers knife, took a deep breath and headed to her room.

I stood in the door and watched her sleeping. I was crying uncontrollably and it must have awakened her. She looked at me, and I turned and ran, throwing the knife in the sink. I ran to the van, drove to a pay phone and called Frank and told him to come get her or I was gonna kill her. He was to the house before I got back.

Dannielle had no clue what was going on. She only knew she was losing her home, her mom and was being thrown into total unknown. It broke my heart to watch her go off with him. From that point on, I was allowed very little contact with her, and even then, he listened to the conversations.

After they left, I took a shower, changed my clothes and went to the mental health clinic to set up counseling sessions. I went to my first one, told the woman Phyllis, what had happened and that I needed help. She sent me over to the Doctor who labeled as paranoid schizophrenic with bipolar tenancy and manic depressive. He put me on a

whole bunch of pills which made me feel worse than dead. I could not function, I could not think clearly, and so was unable to work.

I lost my job, I lost the trailer, and I lost my van. I had no where to go except back to Debbie's. I don't know how long I stayed there, but I remember finding a couple of different jobs as live in house keepers or care giver. I kept thinking about Mr, James, and I didn't want to be responsible for these poor people. I could not lift one lady out of her wheel chair on to her bed. I caused a skin tear and that was enough for me. I am kinda lost as to where I was for the next little bit. I just know that I kept waking up everyday, pretending that I was living.

I continued my therapy sessions, but told them I would not continue on the meds, they made me feel more crazy than without them. I was hearing voices, that did not sound like the invisible people I had always talked to. These voices were dark and made me uncomfortable.

Debbie had moved into a bigger house, and rented out Mom's house. She allowed me to come live with her, and in return, I kept the house clean, did the laundry and cooked the meals. It was a good arrangement and everyone seemed happy. Dannielle came there to live, and shared a room with Shannon (they were like sisters already). I got into a routine and life felt about as normal as it could be. Buster used to jokingly, tell people he had become a Mormon and had two wives. Debbie was in Nursing school and when she graduated she went to work at the Hospital in Pahokee. I was there to keep the house running.

I guess it was about a year or two when the landlord told her he needed the house back, they were moving back in. The next house that she found, did not have room for me and Dannielle. We tried to move back into the house, but still could not afford it, then she went to live with friends, never again returning to her Fathers house, that had ended very bad. I had leased my own chip van, and wandered around it that for a while before I found a little

apartment. I thought that would be okay, but the longer I was there the more I realized just how lonely I was.

I couldn't pay the rent, I couldn't pay the lease on the chip van, and I could not go on living. I just wanted to die. Not kill myself, I was back to just not wanting to wake up.

Chuck had taken on a paper route at night. The newspaper had gone to 7 days a week, and they needed drivers. I was going with him so as not to be alone. When a route came available, he helped me get a car so I could have my own route.

I still needed a place to live, I had been moving around anywhere I could find to stay. It was getting more difficult to find some place safe . I knew Dannielle was safe she had gotten a job and had her own little apartment.

Debbie had a client through a nursing service, that needed someone to stay with her. She was just alone and needed a companion. I could continue with the paper route and do light housekeeping and such in exchange for room and board.

The lady was sweet and we got a long well. She didn't mind me being gone all night, or sleeping late in the morning. She was a night person also.

I don't know how it started, I was using crack again. At first, it was just a little to get me awake in the early afternoon, so I could get the chores done. Then it was in the middle of the day to keep me going, then at night so I could run the paper route.

The lady I lived with had a granddaughter who came to live with her. She and her husband moved into the spare room, and it seemed okay. I spent most of my time in my room after that, and well, the crack was there, I might as well smoke it.

One of the people that had attended nursing school with Debbie worked for the nursing service also. His name was Tim. He became the lady's nurse. One day while I was out running errands he had come. I don't know why, but he went into my room, opened my desk drawer and found my pipe. He knew what it was, and when I got home they confronted

me, and kicked me out. I was not even allowed to get the stuff out of my room. They boxed it up and put it on the porch and told me to come get it.

Everything I had left was in that room. All of my legal books from school, everything that I hadn't left at Debbie's was there and they only gave me part of it back. They kept my books because they said I had stolen them from the school. You knew they had never gone to college, because they don't lend you books in college, you buy them. I had spent a fortune on those books, and now those too were gone.

I had no place else to go, I rented a warehouse, brought what little I had left and moved in. I knew I had to be careful, but I had no place else to go. A week later my car was repossessed because I had forgotten to make the payment. I could not run my paper route without it. Janie had a car that she felt she was supposed to give me. I had given her Mother's car when she passed, and a year later she tried to sell it back to me. I took it so had a way to keep my paper route.

Living in the warehouse wasn't pleasant at all. I stayed there for a while. I had a microwave, a coffee pot and a cooler. I kept Ice in the cooler so that I could have a days worth of lunch meat or something. It wasn't ideal, but it was at least dry.

I was at my lowest. Life had no meaning. All I wanted to do was not wake up. I had very little contact with Dannielle and Chuck was so hung up on his mother that he allowed me to be homeless. No one wanted me, and that was okay, because I didn't want me either.

Crack seemed to be the only thing that mattered, and I stayed high all the time. It cost me a small fortune, but I still paid the warehouse rent so I had a place to stay out of the rain.

The only time I was not alone was when I would go with Chuck to his Counseling sessions in Jensen Beach. That was part of his plea agreement. We went twice a week, I read,

or slept or found something to occupy my mind while he was in his session, then we would go get something to eat and head back to town. He would drop me off at the warehouse, where I would immediately start smoking until it was time to go get the papers.

In March we were sitting at the 5th Ave traffic signal, there was a big truck in front of me, and I hung way back. I could not see the light. A pick up came barreling up behind me, and I knew he wasn't going to stop. He rear ended us so hard that it pushed us way forward. Thankfully, the light had changed and the Truck was moving. I was driving, Chuck was asleep in the passenger seat and he woke up in the floor.

I got out of the car, asked the guy what he was doing. I could tell from his breath he had been drinking. I had not yet gotten high. The police never took a breathalyzer test, never questioned his drinking, never did anything but call it an accident. He was walking away without any kind of a ticket or anything.

I had whiplash again, started seeing a chiropractor, and we hired a lawyer to sue the guy that hit us. I was in so much pain all the time and between the drinking, the pain pills and the crack I still was not able to do much of anything. But I ran my paper route. 7 days a week, and never had a day off.

If we wanted to take a day off, we had to hire our own subs. I had trained two and never got to take a day off, because the newspaper hired them away from me. So I felt trapped, but I needed the money so I kept going.

I had quit seeing the therapist. She never wanted to talk about the things that I thought really bothered me, the men who had done me so wrong forever, the lack of love, and the apparent lack of compassion they all seemed to have, Including Chuck. All she ever wanted to talk about was my Mother and what kind of bad things did she do to me. She never would believe that My Mother was my everything, that she was the only person in my whole life that I KNEW loved me. It was like she thought that I had some deep dark secret of some

horrible abuse at the hands of my Mother. I DID NOT! My Mother was far from perfect, but she was never a monster, and she loved me.

It was late September. Mom's birthday was just around the corner. I could not believe it had been 6 years since she had passed, and I still could not function without her. I got really really depressed.

I talked to everyone about my crack problem. I begged everyone that would listen to help me get off it. To help me get my life back. I prayed so hard and I believed he was not listening. He had promised me, He told me I would have someone. This was not what he promised me. I could not live like this anymore.

One night, I found a quiet place to park while I was waiting on the papers, and I started smoking. Usually I kept moving around, so that it didn't look suspicious. This night I stayed right where I was. I figured it was late, everyone was asleep, and I wasn't easily seen. I was wrong.

I had smoked all but a tiny sliver of crack, and my pipe can was in the floor board just barely under the passenger seat. I was sitting working on my route sheet when a police car pulled up behind me. No big deal, I was just doing my paper work. Just like always. This guy was out to prove himself, and he shined his light in the car and spotted the rim of my pipe can just under the seat. He asked to search the car, and what could I say.

I was arrested, my car was impounded and I was in jail. All I could think about was Debbie. She now the Nurse at the Jail, and her Buster was the Road Lieutenant. It's a small town, everyone knows who is related to who, but that didn't matter, I was going to jail. I was going to embarrass the two people who had never let me down. I had truly hit bottom.

As I was being processed all I could think was Where Are YOU?

## **14 Where are YOU?**

When I finally got settled in my cell, on the top bunch, my pain level from my back injury was through the roof. In the blackness of my soul I heard a small voice, one of those invisible people asking "Where are you?" I cried even harder. I was so lost. And I heard it again "Where are you?" My only answer was, I don't know.

I spent 11 days in the county jail. At my first appearance I told the judge I took full responsibility. Yes I was guilty. What else was I supposed to do. I was guilty and I had to pay the price. I could not lay on the top bunk because of my back hurting so bad I could not climb the ladder. I put my mattress on the floor and Debbie arranged to have my prescription pillow brought in. I spent most of my time on my mat, reading. I don't even know what I read, I just had to keep my mind off the question that kept going through my head, Where are you?

There were a lot of women who had messages of hope for me. They saw that I did not belong there. This is not who I really was. They knew I was lost, and they did their best to help me find my path. So many nights we prayed, and sang hymns after the lights went out. Still the question, Where are you?

Chuck had talked his lawyer into taking my case, and 11 days later Debbie talked to the judge and told him that I was getting really bad mentally and that if I didn't get released RoR, I was not going to do well. She knew I would not go any where, my life was fully and completely here. He allowed me out RoR and eventually I was given 18 months probation which upon completion I would not have a record. I had fines to pay and probation fees, but I was not going to stay in jail.

During my 11 days in jail, I didn't get real coffee except when Debbie, knowing I was really wanting a real cup of coffee, would call me down to her office. I would sit

and talk with her and drink a couple of cups of real coffee, and then go back to the cell.

Everyone in the pod, knew I was going crazy without coffee. It was my lifeline.

I think it was a Monday when there was an Narcotics Anonymous meeting in the jail. I didn't want to go, they were not going to help me any more than anyone else had. BUT there was going to be all the coffee I could drink in an hour. So I went, but JUST FOR THE COFFEE.

There were a couple of women in the room when we went in. I hit the coffee pot first, and then sat down. They started the meeting and the Woman said her name, and that she was an addict. Yeah Yeah. She started talking about her story, and about how God had helped her find the program. I started getting a warm tingling feeling and something just struck a cord. I knew that this was Gods answer to my prayers. I had to go to these meetings.

I got out of jail on a Tuesday, there was a meeting that night. Chuck had paid to get my car out of impound so I dug out the only decent set of clothes I had, and I set off to the meeting. I was so nervous. These people could never understand.

I walked into the room, looked around, and just took an inventory of those that were seated. There was an old guy with a hat that reminded me of Dad's fishing hat. He was an addict? That old guy? Then there was some young people and a couple and this guy that looked like a bum. He really caught my attention. He had long straggly hair, a long beard and mustache that were matted and dirty, and his clothes looked like they had not been washed in weeks. Yep he was a bum. Must be here for the donuts.

As I looked around I did exactly what most of the first timers to the rooms DO, I said I didn't belong here, and if felt a hand hit me in the back of the head and said "Yes you DO!" so I got a cup of coffee, and I sat down.

The group chairperson opened the meeting with the serenity prayer which

I learned was the way it was always done. The we went around the room introducing ourselves. Everyone was Hi, my name is so and so and I am an addict. BUT THEN we came to the bum. He said "Hi I am an addict, MY PROBLEM is Chris." HUH?? He must have said that wrong. But I had this really strange feeling that I needed to listen to him. When he told his story, I realized that he was not just an ordinary bum. He said he had to work late and that he didn't get to go home and shower before the meeting, and he didn't want to miss the meeting. He said he worked building fences, and that it was a challenging job that he really didn't like. He talked about that a lot in the meetings.

He always introduced himself the same way, and he never wavered. His problem WAS himself. We got to know each other pretty well. A group would go to a restaurant for after meeting coffee, which was more an extension meeting if you needed it. Sometimes we would go to another members house and play games and just socialize. I always had to leave early so that I could go deliver the papers.

I realized, shortly after starting meetings, these were the secret meetings my Dad used to attend over the fire station. I tried to confirm it with my siblings. None of them seem to remember them. Again, God working in wondrous ways. It made me more connected to Dad, even though he has been gone for years.

It was New Years Eve of 1994 when a girl that had befriended me from the meeting asked me what I thought about Chris. I said he seemed like a really nice guy. I thought he really had a handle on his recovery, and I believed he had a message for me. By the time it got back around to Chris, we were having orgies every night at this girls house and we were jumping bones. He was so incensed by it that he confronted me on the stairs leading up to the meeting room. This was in January. I had only been attending meetings since October, here we go again, tongues wagging, people judging. How am I supposed to get back where I need to be if this is going to happen all over again?

He told me he didn't want to talk to me ever again, he didn't give a damn about my problems, and he said "Make my name taste like shit in your mouth." I crumpled down the steps, he went into the meeting and I was broken all over again. How could I go into that room and face those people. AND THERE IT WAS AGAIN "WHERE ARE YOU???".

AND IT DAWNED ON ME, Here "I AM", help me. I can not go through this again. I would rather die, than face this all over again. I have no defenses. I have no place else to go. My tears dried up, I took a deep breath and went back into the room, and shared my story. I could not let this set me back, so I went to meetings every time a meeting was held.

Around February or March, an old biker/truck driver that attended meetings told me he had just bought a house. He said it was a nice sized house and he thought he might rent out a couple of bedrooms, sort of a boarding house thing. He had heard I lived in a warehouse, and would I be interested in renting a room. I jumped at the chance. Guy went to meetings, how bad could it be. So I moved into one of his spare rooms, and life was good.

We were all sitting around the table at the restaurant at an after meeting gathering when Chris came is beaming. He seemed to be in a really good mood. We had not spoken about the night on the stairs, and we were friendly enough with each other, but we were just two people who shared the meetings.

He had just gotten his motor cycle endorsement on his drivers license and he was showing everyone. He was so proud. It got passed around the table and I was the last to get it, as he was sitting to my right and it was going back to him next. I looked at it, but never saw the endorsement. I never got past his first name. "Your name is Michael," I squeaked "Nope, my Name is Chris" he said firmly. "But this says your name is Michael" and he said "Yeah, that was my sperm donors name. My name is Chris". I didn't matter, I saw it, his given Name is Michael. I felt the warmth go through my body, and I felt the whisper "THERE

YOU ARE!"

I wasn't sure what was happening, but I felt for sure I was on The Road Back!

## ***15 The Road Back***

Dannielle had gone to work when she was 16. She worked at a grocery store for a couple of years in school, and Frank helped her get a car. She rented a small efficiency, and became independent and I was so proud of her. I didn't have much opportunity to spend time with her. She still felt some resentment for me abandoning her. I know she didn't fully understand what I had gone through, but she knew I loved her, she just wasn't sure if she could totally trust that love.

She called me one day, and told me that Frank told her to tell Chris if he wanted a motor cycle that he had, just to come get it. I thought Chris knew what she was talking about. I called him and told him about it. He didn't have a clue, so I told him we could go check it out if he wanted.

He picked me up and we went to Frank's house. It was a really nice bike. Frank said he couldn't keep it running. He had rebuilt the carburetor several times, but it still sputtered. Chris asked what the catch was, and Frank said just bring a trailer and haul it off, I want it gone. The carport of the boarding house had a new addition so that he could come by on his lunch break and work on it.

Lunch time everyday he showed up, and sometimes he actually worked on the bike. One weekend he was there, trying to get it to start. He was cleaning all the little connections. He pulled the cover off the starter and realized there was a tube fuse that had a broken clip. He fixed the clip, installed the tube fuse, and the bike started right up and purred like a kitten.

I laughed so hard my side ached. He said he really hated to tell the guy that was all that was wrong with it, I could not wait. Mr Genius (Nuclear Chemist) had no way to figure out that it was just a fuse. I still laugh out loud when I think about it.

Chris already had a bike that he loved, so he sold that one to pay off the one that he kept, and did a really nice hand paint job on it. He loved his bike, and rode it most everywhere he went.

His mother had a new boyfriend, and Chris wanted to give them some space in the house. He rented the other empty room at the house. It gave him a break, had a nice place to work on his bike, and he felt less dependent on his mom. Of course living under the same roof we became good friends.

We started riding to meetings together, because I had a car, and we even did some district meetings for the group out of town. We were both really involved in everything, and I learned a lot from him. I was with him looking through some pictures he said were his "brothers" from his fathers side. I noticed a picture of one guy on a bicycle that was a church missionary. I could always spot them a mile away. He said that was his brother, his name was also Michael. Wow, that struck a cord. I let it go.

Dannielle graduated from high school, and Chuck went to her graduation with me. When it was over we sat in the parking lot talking. He knew I was getting really close to Chris, and he didn't really like it. He thought he still had me wrapped around his finger. He really didn't like what was happening with me going to these meetings either. He knew I was moving away from him. In a desperate attempt to hang on, he asked me to marry him. I asked him if his Mother knew he was asking and when he said he would tell her soon, I told him No. I swore I would never date a man who had a living Mother again.

The landlord biker/trucker guy, started getting really cranky and his girlfriend didn't feel comfortable spending the night with us there. She had been renting a small trailer

from her uncle and offered it to me so she could move in there. Of course I asked Chris to move in too. He was not happy about the fact that there was only one bedroom. I told him, I worked nights, he worked days. I would sleep while he was working, we could have a meal together in the evening and then he could have the bed at night. He finally agreed that we were good enough friends that we could work it out.

I told him not to worry if he wanted to bring a girl home. If he let me know and I would find something to do before going to work. He asked me why I thought he would do that. I told him because he was a healthy young guy and he should feel free to bring a date home if he wanted to. He said yeah sure, okay fine.

There was a category one hurricane that year. Everyone in trailers were told to evacuate, so I went to the school. Chris went to his Mom's house. He offered to take me there also, but I had not yet met his Mother, and I was not comfortable going there just yet. That kinda hurt his feelings, but I didn't know that at the time.

There was a day that he brought home a red rose, and put it in a vase on the table. I did not want to assume that he bought it for me. I just commented how pretty it was. Again he felt a bit dejected. He started riding along with me on my paper route on the week end, and I didn't want to assume it was because he wanted to be with me. I didn't want to assume anything. So, when he came home, and threw this little piece of concrete type stuff on the table, I asked him what it was, he said, "I got bored at work today." I picked it up, looked at it, and was speechless, he had carved my name in it. I told him, that was by far the most romantic thing that anyone had ever done for me. I think he sighed with relief or a FINALLY! There was no doubt that we loved each other. We were best of friends and of course we were more, but I don't know when we actually FELL in Love.

Dannielle had moved into a new house with her high school sweet heart. She got pregnant and I was almost ecstatic. I was gonna be a grandma. Her Doctor was out of town,

so I could not go every time to her appointments, but I went when I could. She had a really bad cold, and a family history is that when we get colds they go straight to our chest and we get really deep lung coughs. She had been coughing for days, and she started spotting. I took her to her Doctor, and he pulled me to the side and told me that he was a little concerned but not worried. The cough had caused her to spot, but that was not the issue, that would go away with the medicine he had given her. What was concerning him was that in all the ultra sounds he had done, he had never seen the babies stomach. I didn't even know they could see their organs like that, so I asked what that meant. He said it was possible the baby had just not swallowed yet that day, or it could be that there is a problem with the esophagus. He said not to worry there was a very good Doctor that he would have on standby, if that proved to be the case.

I took her home, and let her stay with me a few days so that I could take care of her. He had given her a medication that would stop any contractions, since she was only 25 weeks, or just a day or two over that. After a couple of days her skin was gray, she was weak and she could barely breath. I rushed her to the doctor who sent her by Ambulance to St Mary's Hospital in West Palm Beach.

I was frantic to get there. I had her rent money under my car seat, and I was so afraid something would happen to her and what I would end up doing with that Money. Chris had been at work so I didn't have a chance to let him know what was going on.

When I got to the hospital I tried to call the NA hot line, and would you believe they put me on hold? I didn't have time to wait, I had to get to my baby girl, she needed her Mom. They admitted her, put her on steroids to help the baby grown and did everything they could to keep him inside her as long as they could.

I was driving back and forth between the hospital and home every day. I would go home long enough to grab a shower and head out to do the paper route. When I got done, I

went home, ate breakfast, had a pot of coffee then headed back to the hospital.

About 10 days later, Chris was off work for some reason, and he asked me if he could go with me, OH MY GOD YES! I wasn't sure I could drive that one more day. So we go off to the hospital, We had been visiting for a while so Chris and I decided to go to the cafeteria to get some coffee and maybe something to eat. We got about half way back up the hall, and a page went out over the loud speaker for the doctor to come to a room number. It was my daughters room, I started running. I got to the nurses station and heard someone say, room 202 was gonna have a baby today. WHAT I was not planning on That.

I immediately started trying to get a hold of the Baby's Daddy. Chris would go get him if he had to. He was no where to be found. I called Danielle's step mom and let her and Frank know that she was in labor. Frank was working but his wife headed over. Chris was head over heels with the experience, and he was very calming for her. He was such a jokester, and Danielle is one to never show emotion.

She would have a contraction and if the machine had not beeped we would not have known it. He showed her the chart on the wall, and told her she was supposed to make one of these faces so we could tell where she was in her labor. She actually busted out laughing at that. It took a few hours, but they finally called the doctor in to deliver the baby. He was born at 27 weeks gestation, he weighted 1 pound and 13 ounces and was 13 inches long, and when he came out, he cried. He should not have been able to cry out. That really surprised the Doctor.

It turned out that he did not have an esophagus, so they had to do surgery to drain his throat out his neck so he would not drown in saliva. They put in a feeding tube for nutrition and he was in the hospital for two months before he could come home.

On the way home after his birth, I was so worried that Danielle would not bond with him that first night. She did and loved him more than anything. She was a great mom

and had so much patience with his issues.

From the moment of his birth I knew he was truly a miracle. The more he grew and progressed more of the miracle appeared. (Remember my Linda had died as at 24 hours old? She was 8 months gestation.) He never had a moment of breathing issues. His lungs should not have been that developed even with the steroids they had given her. His heart was strong and steady. These things we knew before he ever came home from the hospital, but as he grew we realized he was right on target of where he would be if he had been born at 9 months. We rolled over when he should have, sat up when he should have, crawled, walked so on and so forth. They tested his hearing and it was fine, his vision was fine.. He had so many test the poor thing felt like a guinea pig. The only problem he had was the esophagus.

His stomach finally got big enough when he was a year and half old, that they could do the surgery to create an esophagus for him. They had to take half his stomach and form it into the right shape and attach his throat to his stomach. Finally after he healed, he could eat. Real Food and swallow it. Another miracle.

I could write a whole book just on this Miracle Child, but this one is about how my faith was largely restored at that time by his existence. I wanted him to always know what that he is a miracle.

The lawsuit for the car accident finally settled and I got enough money to pay off my probation, make a down payment on a car for me, and a truck for Chris and give him a really special Christmas surprise. It felt like things were beginning to come together.

I was really sick with what I can only assume was pneumonia. I had it before, so I knew what it felt like. I tried to rest as much as I could, but I still could not get a sub to run my paper route. I had to work through it. I needed to rest so I missed a few meetings to rest.

I had paid off my probation fees to the end in advance. I still had about 6

months left to serve. I didn't want the fees hanging over my head so I paid them off. The next day my sister called me and said a friend of ours (I had actually gone to school with him) who was a sheriff's deputy said he had just gotten a warrant for my arrest. He said I should come turn myself in, do a walk through and they would release me. What on earth was I being arrested for.

My probation officer, who really did not like me from the beginning, had violated me for #1, lack of payment of funds, and #2, not attending AA meetings. I called my attorney, we had a meeting. I gave her the receipt where I had just paid off my fees, in advance, and showed my NA 1 year medallion that signified I had been attending meetings for a year.

I had my day in court, and my attorney never said a word. The judge was having a bad day and when I tried to tell him about my receipt, and medallion he told me I was in enough trouble and need to keep my mouth shut. I just looked at my attorney. He found me guilty, which meant that my charges would not disappear like it was agreed to, and now I had to pay all those fees all over again. It made no difference that I had paid 6 months in advance.

I went to the probation office and asked who my officer would be and they told me I would have the same one. I put my hands out and told them to take me to jail. I would rather sit in jail for the next 6 months than have to deal with someone who was never going to let me succeed. He was that kind of guy. I was not the only one he did this sort of thing with. Rarely did one of his clients ever succeed.

I served the rest of my time with a new officer who was really great. There was no problem paying the fees, since I was making really good money, Chris was working and life was going pretty good.

Things had changed so much and I felt so good, I knew the future was ahead and I was facing New Adventures!

## **16            *New Adventures***

It used to drive me crazy, when we were watching TV and Chris would point out a location and say, I have been there. I had never been anywhere. When we moved it was a straight through drive with no stopping for site seeing. It was a lot of driving through the night. The biggest travel story I could ever tell was the Clarksville Tennessee event, and that was not a fond memory.

Chris wanted to go back to Arkansas to be at his step daughters high school graduation. I was off probation by now, and he got permission to leave the state for this event. We loaded up the truck and took off for Arkansas.

I was a little concerned, because our relationship was so new. I didn't know what to expect when we got there. I knew he still had questions about his ex-wife, he still had strong feelings for her. I know that there would have been NOTHING that could have led me back to Frank, no matter what, but I felt really strong that he had not completely closed that door with his ex.

We got there just in time for graduation, and his step daughter was so excited to see him. She came running up and gave him a great big hug. It was nice to see that she loved him so much, even just a step dad. That meant a lot. He had been good to them.

We stayed with his best friends and I was welcomed with open arms. I felt comfortable, and at ease. Kat was about the most welcoming person you could ask for. She didn't care about who I was, or what my past was, all she knew is that Chris was happy with me, and that made her happy.

He had made me a promise, and I was hoping I was not going to have to hold him to it. He promised me that if for any reason, things went different than expected and he did not

want to come back here, that he would make sure I got home. That kinda stuck with me when the day came that he went to see his ex. I knew he was planning it, that was one of the big reasons we went. It didn't help that I was just so unsure of myself.

One hour passed, and well, that's okay, then two hours and then three. I was so scared. Kat told me not to be. She said, "He ain't gonna do NOTHING there. Don't you know he is crazy about YOU?" If I didn't know that, how did she know that. That was Kat, she was insightful. She saw through people right into their souls.

He came back, gave me a big hug and a kiss and told me he was glad I was there. They had a really good talk, she tried to do what he kinda knew she would, and I was scared she would, but he realized that what he had waiting back at Kat's was much more desirable than what he was walking away from. (Oh gosh, I still blush.)

We had a nice few days and headed back to Florida and I was one happy person. All my fears had been unrecognized, He chose me. Life was good.

The next few months all he could talk about was moving to Arkansas. He had never pulled any punches about how much he hated Florida. He came down here as a teenager to help his Grandmother move, and it kept pulling him back. That is a known problem with Florida, if you ever get sand in your shoes, the sand always wants to come back.

He had been working for a construction company for a few years, doing A/C duct work for newly constructed commercial buildings. He was good at his job, but he moved from one job to another after each completion. He never had a steady Franks with any one company. Finally one job ended and the chance for him to move on to another didn't look good. He got on unemployment, and we took the opportunity to move to Arkansas.

We moved into a small house near Kat and her family. A little while after that we moved into a bigger house with them, and things were good. I had a waitress job for a while, but I wasn't very good at it. So I went on to other things.

Kat and I started helping our land lady clean out some of her clutter from some of the houses that she owned. I had never met a hoarder before, and that was a term I didn't really know at the time, but this lady was a huge hoarder. She actually bought new properties just so she had room for more stuff.

She had owned restaurants over the years, that when they closed, she kept everything out of them. She have never thrown anything away. She didn't keep empty pizza boxes or stuff like that. She threw away newspapers and magazines, but stuff she never parted with, not even clothes.

She had one room that was a studio. The pile started a foot inside the door and went from wall to wall and was at least 3 feet high. She told us that there was a box, right in the center of the room, that had a watch in it she wanted. We started clearing away clutter, and by the end of the day we found her box. It had a watch in it, and it was exactly where she said it was. This woman was not young, and that box had been in that spot for a long time. How did she even remember it was there.

She still didn't let us throw anything away, so even when a pen came up missing, she knew it. We had to dig it out of the trash. We just moved stuff from one place to another, one property to another, and so on. We just made pathways so she could get to things easier, even though she never needed to get to anything.

Chris wasn't working and he had a great idea that he wanted to become a truck driver. Kat's husband was his best friend and a truck driver. He went off with him. I stayed and worked the Kat moving stuff around. It helped pay the bills.

When he came home, he could not quit talking about it, so we decided to check into driving schools. We called a couple of companies that had driver training schools and one of them was based in Utah, and big surprise, they required us to be married if we were going to be a team. There was another one that did not require that. We considered both companies,

talked about it, and Chris called his Mom. He said "Well mom, I guess we are getting married." What? When was that decided. Of course I didn't mind, I wanted to be married, but I think I would have rather he had asked me first. Not find out when he told his Mom. When Kat's husband came home he told us we were getting married Wednesday. That was 3 days away. It wasn't the wedding of my dreams, but I was getting married to the man God had promised me in my dream. That made it all Okay.

We had decided on the trucking company that didn't require us to be married, obviously that was not an issue. At least I hoped we hadn't gotten married just because we wanted to go trucking. We had already been together for two years, I didn't figure I had anything to worry about. We packed up our stuff and headed for Missouri. We were sitting in the bunk house, watching TV when the news broke about Princess Di being killed in a car accident. That was kind of a bummer. I only mention it as a timeline thing.

We went and got our Missouri drivers license so we were one step ahead. I messed up when I signed it and had to have it re-done. I signed it with my maiden name. I was not used to using my married name yet. Oh yeah, and my initials never changed.

We went in for our first day of orientation, and was not impressed with the things he was telling us he expected. When I told him I expected to be able have the time off to go home for my grandsons surgery, and he told me that his job was more important than my grandson, that was not gonna fly with me. Then he told us that we would be expected to move trucks around the state alone, with nothing more than a learners permit. Yeah, that was not going to work for me either. We were out of their right then and there.

We went back to Arkansas, and did not have a clue what we were gonna do now. I started working for a hamburger stand, just to have some cash, and after 2 weeks the owner made me the manager. By the end of the month he wanted me to take it over, and lease it from him. This was the beginning of October. I told him to give me to the first of the year, so I

could get it ready for health inspections, and to do the requirements research.. Again we didn't have computers then, so it was a lot of phone calls, and leg work.

I was working on getting things cleared away and cleaned up. I was learning about storage requirements, temperature, cleaning and all that. I had been at it for about 3 weeks when he asked me again if I was gonna lease it from him. I reminded him that I would do it in January, when I could get it licensed. We had started making pretty nice money each day, so much so that I could afford to pay Kat to come in and run a shift for me, so I could take some time off.

There were a lot of things that happened that week that could only be contributed to God. I was working on Tuesday, and someone had a whole bunch of books on tape for sale. There was like \$200 worth of books on tape, and he was only asking for \$30, he just wanted them out of his truck. I don't do books on tape, but something told me to buy them anyway. It was only \$30 and you might find a need for them.

Another day we were driving down the road and a really nice 6 foot ladder fell off a pick up truck. We stopped and picked it up, and tried to catch the guy that dropped it, but we could not find him, so we took it home. There were a few other things, I don't remember what all there was, that were happenstance kind of acquisitions. Things we really did not have use for, but take it anyway.

It was Friday (Still gotta love Fridays. It is just NOT my Day.) Halloween 1997; I had taken the day off to do shopping for the stand, Chris needed tires on the car (For which the boss and owner of the tire store, told us I could pay for them from work) and we needed to get a service done. We did all the maintenance stuff and then went to the market for supplies.

It was early afternoon and Kat was working the shop. Her hubby had come in the night before, the kids were in school so he came up to the shop to just visit with the boss man owner. They had a few beers and were talking about my plans to take over in January. The

boss man still did not understand why I wanted to wait. So Kat's hubby, in his typical self, decided that we should not wait, and agreed to take it over right away.

We drove up, I started unloading the car, and the boss man came out to talk to me. He told me Kat's hubby had agreed we would take it over right away. I asked him what he meant and he said they had signed the papers and we were now in charge of the stand. I was so angry. There was no way that place was going to get legal the way it was, and I could not make it happen overnight. When I told Chris what happened, he snapped. This guy had been one of his best friends since they were kids. And he had just totally disrespected me, by going behind my back and making a deal.

I unloaded the car, gave Kat the keys and told her to enjoy her new business. She said HUH? And I told her what her husband had done.

We headed back to the house, started throwing all of our belongings into the car, and we added a kitten we had fallen in love with to them mix. I had been saving all the change I had collected since we got there, and all the tips from the stand, into a jar. We had \$68 in change. We had just spent all of my paycheck for the week on the oil change and other stuff we needed so we had no real cash. We might make it back to Florida on \$68, but that didn't count for anything else. Then I remember the strange acquisition.

We went to the truck stop, got on our CB radio and started advertising the ladder, the books on tape and what ever else it was. We sold the Ladder for \$20 right off the bat. Then a lady driver hollered about the tapes. How much, I threw out \$80 because we were desperate and she hollered back, SOLD. Not only did she not question the price, she also took us for a ride in her truck and we had long talk about how God worked in our lives. It was a talk that lasted for hours, and was just what both of us needed. It helped lift our spirits and get us back to Florida with faith, if nothing else. We did see her a few years later when we were driving. It was a really amazing time.

We made it back to Florida, with no plan what so ever. I don't even remember where we stayed until we found a place. I know that we ended up sort of renting a house from a guy that was in the program. It didn't last long, but it was long enough for Chris to get another a/c job and we found another place to live. We had not given up on the idea of going trucking, just had to put it on hold, until we could figure it all out.

There are so many stories I could tell about this time, but I don't think they fit in with the spiritual side of things, so I am going to leave them out this go around. The one thing I do know is that God always put events, opportunity, or people in our path when we needed them the most. I also believe that he took certain events or circumstances to teach us about discernment. He would allow things to happen and allow us to decern the truth. It was often a challenge, and I will agree that we sometimes got it very wrong.

Chris had all his tools stolen from work one weekend, and since he could not work without tools, and we didn't have the money to buy more, things went kinda downhill. That was the encouragement we needed to find a truck driving school. There was one in Orlando that did student grants and financing.

Janie lived in Orlando and Skip worked at Disney. We asked if we could stay with them while we went to school. We would, of course, contribute anytime we were able. They talked about it, and apparently my sister won, because we were allowed to stay. I learned later that Skip had been concerned, saying "Once a drug addict, Always a drug addict." I have had to bite my tongue over the years. I wanted to say to him, "Once and Alcoholic, Always and Alcoholic." It's very true, we can always change our addiction, but addiction always exists.

Having made the choice of the school, arranging for an interim job driving cars to the auction, and having a place to stay we were moving forward. Completely out of my Comfort Zone!

## **17 Comfort Zone**

We got to Orlando, went to interviews for student aid and found that we qualified. They paid for our schooling. It was a six week course, and then there was some help with job placement. Chris was a pro, and passed most everything. He had a little problem with the paper work, but I aced that. We were going to compliment each other in the truck just fine.

We had chosen a few companies to go to work for, but settled on one out of Chattanooga TN. Covenant advertised as being a Christian Based company that took on graduate drivers. They accepted us and we headed to Tennessee, via a bus.

We got in on a Sunday and went to hotel. We thought we would have the rest of the day to rest but as soon as we got our room, we were shepherded down to the conference room to start filling out paperwork. They wanted to know everything about our lives, and I figured they had to be careful, so I answered the questions HONESTLY. Chris always said answer the question honestly, but do not elaborate. So the question was had you ever been convicted of a crime. Well, yes I had. Then it was please explain. So I said exactly what I was charged with. It had been 5 years, I was clean and I knew I was not going back to it anytime soon, if ever.

For the next 3 days we attended conferences from the time we got up to the time we turned in to bed. It was exhausting. We filled out enough paperwork to fill up a landfill. We were told from the beginning we would be separated, Chris would go with one trainer, I would go with another and training was 6 weeks. We did not know who our trainers would be, or where we would be going. It was going to be hard, but we would get through.

On Wednesday they gave us our compensation (comp) cards which was the way we got our advances and fueled the truck. They had said if we had any problems activating them to go to the office upstairs. I activated Chris' and he headed over to check in with the

bus he was leaving on. I called to activate mine, and it could not be activated. I went to Chris told him I had to go upstairs to find out what was wrong. He was busy with the team leader.

I went into the office, told the woman who I was and she asked me to sit down. This is never good. She told me that I had been Disqualified on Monday due to my 'drug' charge. ON MONDAY!

I told her I thought this was a Christian organization. God forgave me of my transgression and led me back to the right path, but you HUMANS can't forgive. (this was not the first time I had faced this very problem. ) Men think forgiveness only comes after some sort of punishment. God doesn't think that way.

By this time Chris is really getting concerned. They were really trying to get him on that bus. He told the leader that he had to find his wife and the guy told him to get on the bus, he walked away and headed toward the building. At the door another guy told him to go back to his bus, and when he said he was looking for his wife, the guy said he needed to go back to the bus,. Chris said he told them he was not leaving until he knew what was going on with his wife, and he headed upstairs.

He had not even made it to the door before he heard my very emotional voice screaming about God forgave me, but you can't. He knew there was a problem. He came in and the lady told him he needed to get on the bus, and he told her he wasn't leaving until he knew what was going on. She told him he had been accepted and he needed to get on the bus, He said not without his wife and we left the office.

The small consolation was that they gave us tickets for the bus ride home. We had to get a cab back to the bus station. The thought of another 2 days on a bus was not something to look forward to, so we sat down to catch our breath. We barely had enough cash to go get something to eat, and no way to get there anyway. AND AS ALWAYS, GOD was there.

A lady was coming out of the building. We had seen her in conferences but had not spoken to her. There were hundreds of people in this group. She saw me crying and Chris was madder than mad.

She came and asked if everything was okay and I sobbed out what had happened. She said she had been disqualified as well. Her drug test had come back 'cloudy' so they could not be sure she wasn't doing drugs. She said she had been on a cleanse shake type diet for a week, and that is what caused the cloudy test, but they didn't want to hear that.

What was wrong with these people?

Her name was Virginia. She lived in Atlanta and had driven up, so she had her car. She suggested we go get something to eat, because it was getting late, and just take our mind off the immediate problem to get some perspective. Of course we told her that we didn't have a lot of money, and no real ideas about what we were gonna do, so she said no problem, lunch was on her, but we could always cash in the bus tickets. She took us to the bus station, we cashed in the tickets and had a bit of cash in our pockets.

She took us to an all you could eat pizza place, the food was soooo good. We sat and chatted for a long time, I would guess a couple of hours. She told us that we were not going to solve anything in the restaurant, so why don't we come back to Atlanta with her, spend the night and see what we could come up with. I remember asking her why she would do that? She didn't know us, and she had just found out that I had a 'past drug' issue. How did she know we were not just there scamming her. She told me that something told her we needed her help. I still tear up over it.

Her apartment was very inviting. We had some dinner, sat and talked into the night. She called the bus station to find out when the next bus was out to Florida, and it turned out to be the next day. We got up, had some breakfast, then she drove us to the bus station. She had already prepaid for the tickets herself, so we would not be going home broke.

We hugged and thanked her one more time, and said good-bye We would see her a few years later.

Unsure of where to go from here, we got home, called the school to see what other companies might be available, They told us about a local company. They were not really sure how good they were, they had been bought out by a larger company and they didn't have much of a good score as far as drivers went. We figured we needed a job, and if they needed drivers, what could it hurt. Thus we were Goin' Truckin'!

### ***18 Goin' Truckin'!***

I could write another whole book on our driving experiences, there were so many good stories, but I only want to stick to the ones where God was really showing his work in our lives. He was

always there, but only a few times was it in your face evident.

We had been driving our dedicated California run for a while. I was asleep in the bunk, and Chris stopped at a truck stop in Santa Rosa, New Mexico to use the restroom. I woke up, we were sitting on the fuel island. I knew this was not a regular fuel stop. I grabbed my cigarette case, and figured I would pass him on the way out of the fuel desk area.

I went into the restroom, and when I came out the truck was gone. I thought maybe he decided to park and we could get a bite to eat. He didn't come in. I went out to look and he wasn't there. I realized I had been left. I was sure he would have checked to see that I was not in the bunk.

I had my cigarette case, which meant I had my comp card. I withdrew my advance for the day. I went into the restaurant, where they had phones at the table. I called the dispatcher and asked if she could tell me where our truck was. She asked where I was, and

I told her. She said she would love to tell me where the truck was, but the communications to the satellite went down at 3am until 5am for a daily reset. She promised me as soon as they came back up she would send a message.

I ordered coffee, and told the waitress I was going to be there for a while. I told her what happened, and she was fine with me sitting there. During the next 3 1/2 hours I went through all the stages of grief.

When I figured it was close to time for him to show up, I told the waitress to hold my table, I was going outside. He was pulling in and I was laughing as I walked up to the truck. He thought I was gonna be totally steaming when he came in and was surprised I was laughing.

Over breakfast he told me he really thought I was in the bunk, he checked and he thought he saw me there. He was just about to cross the state line just after 5am when the qualcom started beeping. He could not figure what they wanted at 5am, so he pulled off the road, looked at the qualcom and it said "Chris. Check the bunk. If Sue is not in it, go back to the TA in Santa Rosa and pick her up!" He jumped up, checked and beat himself up on the hours drive back to Santa Rosa.

That is a story worth telling. By the time he got back I had released all my doubts and fears and was willing to laugh about it. I know it strengthened us both. It was not done on purpose, and it gave us a great story to tell.

I will say this, the right person was always driving at a critical time, even if it broke with our normal routine. Every time we would switch places on a route, there was a reason for it, and not all of them bad. There was the first Ice incident, when I would have normally been driving, but Chris had the wheel. I want to say it was because I told him I didn't want to drive in the snow, but by now I know God told me I didn't want to drive in the snow.

We were in Texas, the highway patrol had been all over the radio telling drivers, if at all possible, PARK IT. The roads were icy and there had already been several incidents. We saw the sign for a truck stop, and decided that was the best thing to do. We came to a down grade and Chris started to slow down. We could see an accident in the road ahead, and as we were slowing down Chris said he could feel the trailer get really light. He looked in the side mirror and realized the trailer was coming around pretty fast, so he listened to the voice in his head (one of our driving instructors) saying, "steer straight and feather the throttle." He kept hearing that in his head over and over, and when we got stopped he was shaking, and couldn't believe it worked.

Then there was the accident in Jackson Mississippi. I would normally have been driving at this time, but since I had started out from the terminal, when we stopped for our routine Fresh Fried Chicken from a little truck stop, Chris took the wheel.

It was only about half a mile up the road where three major roads merge into one interstate. It was right around Noon and Church had just let out. The traffic was crazy at the merge. Chris had seen one car weaving in and out of traffic and seemed really in a hurry, but he didn't react to it. We were on the fully merged road and coming up on an exit. A car came speeding up the exit lane, and I barely caught it out of the mirror on my side when I felt a hard bump. Next thing I know Chris hits the brakes hard, there is a car turned sideways in front of us, and just before we hit the car the driver gunned his engine and we caught the back panel of the passenger side of the car. It spun around and nosed into the drive tires of the truck which threw it off into the run off grass. It was a lower level open area beside the road. It Chris pulled off on the shoulder about 100 feet past the exit and headed to the car full of teenagers. We had a cell phone by then, so I dialed 911 told them what happened and she asked if there were any injuries. I told her I didn't know, I had not gotten to the car yet, but I did not see how there could not be, this was a car that tangled with a big truck 3 times.

I reached the car and 4 young men were getting out of the car. The rear passenger door wash crushed, the front tires were laying flat on their sides, the car had a visual bend in the center, and it was a horrifying site, but all the kids got out, and there was no blood.

Chris said he walked up to the car, shaking from head to toe and when the boys all got out and when asked if they were okay they all said yes, being the person he is, he said "Can't get a ride like that at Disney HeH?" It worked, everyone laughed and when the officer arrived he called off the ambulance.

The reason this story is spiritually based is simply because, those boys were going to make the choice to go racing that day no matter who was driving. God Always Knows! HAD I been driving there would have been a huge pile up of cars and trucks, because traffic was bumper to bumper and I would have swerved to miss them and crashed into the truck next to me. Chris was calm, did what he had to do to safely get the truck stopped, and we were the only two vehicles involved. God is So Good.

The last incident was toward the end of our driving career We were driving for a fly by night kind of company, that didn't know they were supposed to service their trucks, or just didn't care. We were in Kansas City, Mo and Chris was Driving. We were on an interstate and there was construction with only one lane open. We were not even going 35mph when the truck in front of us (A Kenny Burnstein Car Hauler) hit his breaks. Chris never followed close so when he hit his brakes and nothing happened, he had time to react and went to the right into the construction lane. He stood on the brakes until the truck finally came to a stop, and he heard on the radio something like 'What the hell' He answered back and said 'At least I didn't hit him.' and laughed. He never even hit one of the Orange construction cones dividing the lanes.

We managed with the trolley brakes and going really slow to get to a truck repair

just up the road and called the company. They did not want to hear that the brakes had over cammed and were frozen. They didn't want to hear the price tag attached to the repair. And they wanted us to bring the truck someplace they wanted it. I was not going to try to drive the truck the way it was, and the mechanic told me, don't worry you won't. He told the company that there was no way he could release an unsafe truck out onto the road. It was against the law for him to do so. In the end we ended up unloading the truck, renting a car and going home. Again, Kenny Burnstein probably doesn't even realize that God had worked for him that day too. If I had been driving, that truck would have been destroyed.

As for me, God was always in the drivers seat, I was just the co-pilot. Sometimes he had a sense of humor. I would need to stop (usually to pee) and he would not always tell me NOT to take a road, I always thought he was giggling after I got into a pickle. I usually learned something from it, but I think he was just playing with me. What ever the situation, Chris always had to wake up and fix it.

I had to learn things like, there are no left hand turns of any major road in New Jersey. AND you better know if your big truck is going to make it down the side road you are trying to loop on.

I also learned that in Texas just because there is an exit off an interstate, does not mean there is an entrance back on.

And I learned that it is very hard to make a wide u-turn on a hill.

Even though you know that tankers deliver fuel to a gas station, doesn't mean that you can turn around in one even when there is nothing else there.

Yes I do believe Our Holy Father has a sense of humor. It took Chris to teach me to see it.

A couple short stories that I can not leave out when 'invisible people' talked to me/us.

We had some time on a run and we were going pretty close to where Vicki lived in Texas. I gave her a call and asked if she would mind some company, she was really excited and told us how to get to her house. We couldn't stay long, but it was nice to visit with her and meet her new family. She had a nice home way off the beaten path, in what I grew up calling the boondocks.

Vicki had told us an easier way to go to get back to highway, and there was a truck stop there. We had relaxed and were not in a hurry so we stayed until way after dark. I was tired so I hit the bunk and Chris took the wheel. It was raining really hard, he could barely see the little two lane road he was on. Chris doesn't get lost, but he was sure out of sorts with where he was that night. He could see the 'big' road, but could not find a way to get up to it, he had not seen a car in a very long time, and the CB had been totally quiet all night, to the point he forgot that it was even on.

He really wasn't sure where he was at when all of a sudden he heard a voice clear as day coming out of the CB and the voice said 'Hey Coggins'. The name on the side of the truck was LCT and very few people new that stood for Lester Coggins Trucking. This voice knew that we all used to be called Coggins. Chris looked around, there was not another truck in site, there was no traffic at all.

The voice said 'The road you are looking for is about 2 and half miles up the road, make a right, and the truck stop is about a mile down the road.' Chris picked up the mic and said thank you, but the radio had gone silent again. He was not sure what had just happened, and he didn't know if he should tell me about it or not. He didn't want to sound crazy. When he did tell me I just said Thank you Father, in my head and went on.

There was a time when the directions that the company had sent us to make a delivery was so far off, I don't know how anyone ever found it. We made a wrong turn onto a road, trying to follow their directions, and the road was a very narrow dirt road, with no where

to turn around. We had gone about a quarter mile and was really getting worried when around the curve was a great big dump truck lot. We got turned around and back on the road.

Dannielle had gotten to know Frank's family, his sister, Mother, etc. She had become pretty good friends with her grandmother and she visited with her often. I was coming up on Phoenix Arizona about 3 am when out of nowhere I had the strongest feeling, and actually said out loud that Dannielle had to go see her Grandmother, she is going to die. I finished driving then turned the wheel over to Chris and went to bed. I did not give it a second thought.

When I woke up that afternoon, Chris said, 'Oh Dannielle call, Loraine died' I was dumbstruck. I think I said something like Oh my God, when. They found her around 4 am that morning, apparently she fell and hit her head. I don't know why that came to me, but since then, if I get a feeling, I act on it, I don't wait. If I had called Dannielle at 3 am and told her to go to Loraine right now, she would have thought I was nuts. Could she have found her sooner? Could she have helped? I always wondered if It would have made a difference.

And to end the Chapter I will talk about the thing that eventually led us away from truck driving. We were in a brand new auto shift freight liner It only had 45,000 miles on it and was do for it's first service. We had a dedicated run from Miami, Fl to Carlsbad, Ca then up to LA and back to Tampa. We left on Saturday and got back home on Thursday. It was coming up on Mothers Day, a busy time in the flower business. We made our regular run and were headed back to the terminal to have the truck serviced.

There was an issue with the brakes, they didn't feel right, and the abs light kept coming on and going off. We let the company know to set us up for shop time, and they sent us back that they needed us to re-power a load back out to Carlsbad from Mobile, Al. We argued with them all day about it, but they said there was no one else to do it, and the CEO

was telling us to take it.

We picked up the load and Chris started driving and went from Mobile to Jackson Ms. I started driving in Jackson. It was raining and the roads were really wet, so I wasn't getting in any hurry. I had stopped to get a cup of really good community coffee, a place I often stopped at when I was driving in this spot. I was coming close to Shreveport, La at around 7:30 in the morning. Traffic was low, and again, I was in no hurry.

I see the exit sign for Exit 7 to Shreveport and it said 7 miles. I don't ever remember having seen that sign before. I had the thought that I should stop at that truck stop and go to the bathroom. 'No No, I can wait until we get into Texas where we always fuel.' 'NO you really really need to stop at the truck stop.' For 7 miles I argued WITH MYSELF about stopping at that truck stop. Finally I felt a very real slap on the back of my head the loud voice saying 'STOP AT THIS EXIT!' 'Okay okay already. I'll stop.' So if you are familiar with I 20 exit 7 into Shreveport is one of the longest exit lanes I have ever been on. Again, I was in no hurry , it had been raining so I wasn't even driving the speed limit. I got onto the exit, and it took me a few seconds to realize that I wasn't slowing down. I put more pressure on the peddle, but nothing was happening. I was coming up fast on a 15 mph curve doing 45 miles an hour. I had a choice, make a slight left where I might not stop and go flying into a low lot where there was an RV sales lot, or make the hard right 15mph curve and risk rolling the trailer.. 'God Please don't let me roll the trailer', 'God, I don't know what to do.' The wheel whipped out of my hands turning to the right and the next thing I know I am nose in the ditch, dead still.

I had screamed at Chris that I could not stop the truck. He was sound asleep in the bunk. He had not really heard what I had said but woke up nearly upside down in the bunk with stuff falling off the shelves on top of him. I tried to open the drivers door and realized it was stuck on the fuel tank. That wasn't good. I called 911 and made sure they new I

was the only vehicle involved and there were no injuries. I got out of the truck to assess the damage, and the first thing I saw, the trailer was perfectly straight on the road. The truck was destroyed, but the trailer, and the load was fine.

The first thing the company asked was "How's the Load?" Chris said "The load is fine. So are we, thanks for asking". The company we were to deliver too, said they didn't care so much about the load, as long as WE WERE OKAY. We left that company because of the way we were treated. We moved around to a few different jobs with lots more stories, but I am to just say after leaving truck driving we had to face Life after Wealth!

## ***19 Life after Wealth***

When we were driving we were doing really well. The money was great, the life was great and it was a very good time.

We had bought a nice place to live, so that we could bring Chris' brother, sister in law and their two kids to live. They didn't have the means to live in decent housing so we wanted to help. We were gone most of the time and this gave them some security.

We bought a car for them to use, so that she was not driving a car that was having issues. Chris had a dream that he was driving in the car with my grandson and had a bad car accident, so after that he didn't want any kids riding in that car.

We made plenty of money that we could pay all the bills and still have some left over. Chris' brother worked and always had a job. His wife tried to work, but we discussed the fact that she was only working to pay a baby sitter. I told her I would pay her to take care of the finances while we were driving, so that would be one less thing on my plate. She agreed, and I had to force her to take out her payments.

It worked out really good for about 2 years, until we quit driving. I had to ask them to make the car payment until I could get a job to keep the money coming in. Chris' brother thought they had always made the payments. He thought they were paying everything but the house payment. So they moved out, and we ended up having to sell the house. Then we lost the car which was fine, we still had Chris' car.

I went to work for Wal-Mart as an overnight stock crew. The rest of the crew totally ignored me. That was okay, I was used to being invisible. I did my job. Chris had gone to work for a local route driving job hauling yard trash. The truck wasn't the best, and he ended up leaving there because the guy didn't want to fix the equipment. He tried to get a job with another company that hauled the same thing or farm grain. The guy that was training him told the boss, he would never get it. Which was laughable, since he had plenty of experience. The he tried for a job hauling flowers but they never called him back, so he didn't have a job.

We had moved in with Debbie and her family until we could get something, and I told him if we ever wanted to get out of there then I needed him to get a job. Wal-mart was still hiring, and he could come there. He did. He hated it, but he went to work.

He wasn't sure he believed me about how the others were treating me, until he saw it for himself. They were all over him, wanting to be friendly and all, and when we went to lunch they told him he could come sit with them, he said 'No thanks I would rather sit with my wife.'

A few weeks later, one of the women in the group came to me and said 'You know I could take him away from you if I wanted to!' I said 'Go for it. I am NOT worried.' and she never spoke to me again.

We started working in the dairy department, and he was pulling a pallet of cheese to the floor and he twisted his foot and something inside Popped. His foot felt warm

like his shoe was fling up with blood. I wasn't but it felt that way.

When he was 10 he had dropped a railroad tie on his foot and crushed every bone. It had healed but he walk with a limp, sometimes more noticeable than others. The sent him for an x-ray, but with all the damage, they couldn't see anything really wrong. He was off work for a month, and they had replaced him in the department. When he did come back, walking with a cane, they wanted him to work an area that required him to climb a ladder. He told them there was no way he could do that, so we quit.

We moved into an addition room that Dannielle had in her house. Her sons father had moved out, and she needed help with her son and we needed someplace to live. Couple of things happened about here. I started cleaning businesses and houses, and was making pretty good money. I was working 7 days a week, but I was always done in time to pick up my grandson from school and to make sure he was fed, bathed and his home work was done.

I also discovered website coding. Well it started out as style sheets that changed the way a game I was playing looked. I started talking to a 17 year old guy, SiGiS, that was learning to code as well. We got together and he taught me to actually code websites. The early days were really cheesy, but I really enjoyed doing it. I started trying to do websites for other people, and I didn't charge much because I was self trained. I had a few jobs, but they were never supposed to be much more than information site, and most of them just let it go.

Chris never recovered from the foot injury. He applied for Social Security Disability and 5 years later was finally approved. We used his back check to buy a small trailer.

During our time at Dannielles she got tired of seeing our Car in the Drive and not running so she talked him into selling it. She provided me with a car to take her son to and from school, and when one would break down she would buy another. Finally she bought me a van. We used part of the back pay money to do some engine work that needed to be done, and to fix a few things that needed fixing. It cost us right around \$600. After we moved out I

tried to work as long as I could, but Chris had gotten where it was hard for him to do much of anything. It also got really hard for me to climb stairs and do a lot of heavy lifting. I realized I was getting older.

After Chris got medicare, he started seeing Doctors and got his diabetes more regulated and his health was really good. The only issue was the pain in his foot. We got him in to see one of the best neurologists in the state and he began to improve with a medication that was designed to help opioid addicts get off morphine or methadone. The counter indication was pain relief. He started on shots that I would give him. I kept track of how often he had it, I didn't want him to get addicted to it, even though it was not supposed to be addictive. He started feeling like a pin cushion, so he went to a sub-lingual (under the tongue) and when I wasn't around he would always find where I had hidden them. He swears the Cat told him where they were.

He had an injury to his back that he didn't know he had because of the medication. It was completely healed before he realized it. The neurologists had closed his practice here, and moved away. The pain management clinic wanted to do a new patient interview over the phone and I told them that was not legal. When they found about about the medication he was on, they said they could not prescribe it, so they refused to see him. He quit taking it, and that is when he realized he had a back injury.

We started seeing a podiatrist because he needed his toe nails cut, and I didn't feel comfortable doing it, with him being a diabetic. The first time he had his nails clipped the girl had nicked the tip of the toe. A day later the two middle toes on his right foot were purple. We went to the emergency room and they transferred him to a hospital in Port St, Lucie. Doctor put a stint in and he was fine.

He was not real comfortable going back to the podiatrist, but he did anyway. It was about a year later that he had gone in and they did the nails, and reduced calluses He was

in the shower a couple of days later and the callus that he had on the foot that he had crushed lifted completely off. He had a big hole in the side of his foot

At first there was no bleeding, but it didn't close up. Then it started getting really angry looking, red, and fevered. It started seeping a puss that I didn't like. The podiatrist was really confused what to do, it just wasn't like anything he had ever seen. A year later the Doctor said he needed to surgically debris it. When the pathology came back they listed the bacteria in it, which could be treated, and the 'dead bone'. No explanation about the dead bone, just that it was dead bone.

Don't remember exactly when he went to the second vascular surgeon, but he went to Stuart and had a stint put in his left leg. He did all kinds of test that needed to be repeated every 6 months to measure his progress. The blood flow in the left leg was really poor and we knew he would need more stints.

It was a year and a half since the callus came off, and the foot was not getting any better. The podiatrist had done all he knew to do, but thought maybe another stint would get blood flow to the foot to help with healing. We went back to Stuart, and the first Doctor had gone on to another job so we had a different Doctor. He put another stint in and we went home.

That was on a Friday, Monday his foot was black. The whole foot was black. The podiatrist had gone on vacation. His regular Doctor had gone on vacation, so I took him to Traditions Hospital in St Lucie county and found out that the Doctor who had done the stint on Friday had gone on vacation. So we waited for them to find the vascular surgeon on call.

Chris was running a high fever, he wasn't doing well at all. They had him on IV's and were giving him something to bring his fever down. He said his foot felt like it was on fire. (worse than normal) he told me he just wanted it gone. They sent for the tech to do the Doppler to give them idea where he was with the blood flow. Then the Doctor came in and

looked at his foot and turned to me and said well I think we can...I held up my hand and said 'STOP! We have been fighting this for nearly two years, there is dead bone, it won't heal, he wants it gone. He will tell you that if you want to save it, get a box to put it in it after you cut it off, he just does not want it attached to him any longer.' The doctor kinda looked at me, and I think he said that's kind of harsh. And I told him that is what HE would tell him.

The doc looked at the Doppler, looked at his records on the computer then looked at his foot, and then he looked at me, and said, 'I agree!' and scheduled the surgery for Wednesday. Chris stayed in the Emergency room from around 4pm on Monday to around 9am on Wednesday when he lost his leg below the knee.

A year and a half later he lost his right leg below the knee, two days after having a stint put in, and then 10 months later he lost the right knee. This is just to explain the trials we have been through and why I am where I am today.

Many people have told me over the years that their spouses or mates, have left them when they got sick or injured. I have always said, I love him, and My marriage vows say Til Death do us Part!

## ***20 Til Death do us Part***

Through the years, dealing with his condition caused from the injury when he was 10, there was never a question that he was my gift from God. I had been trained my whole life for this very time.

When I was almost 17, I was taking care of my dying father while my mother worked.

I had dealt with all the issues of living with a diabetic with my mother. I had to take care of her when she was dying, or anytime that she needed help. I was in training my whole life.

I was on a forum for Chris' condition and people asked me why I had stayed,

many of their mates had abandoned them when they got bad. My first words were that I had made a vow, a contract, a promise, and you don't break any of those. My second words were, because I love him.

When he was able, he worked. When he was able I didn't need anything. If I needed a shelf built he built it. If I needed carpet laid, he laid it. Nothing was too great when he was able. He would even have dinner ready for me if I was working and he was home. I always tell people, he is not perfect, he is just perfect for me.

Lately, he has been feeling really down. He says he is not depressed, but sometimes it appears that way. When Covid-19 hit, I realized that I had isolated myself from life. I had closed myself off from the outside world and what I saw everyday was all I really needed to be concerned with. I also realized that I had slowly stopped praying or talking to My Holy Father.

When we moved into this little trailer, 13 and a half years ago, there was never a place for me to hide. Even though we live close to a creek, and I still love the water, there are too many people and too much activity for me to find peace and quiet. I had stopped hiding, to sit quiet and listen.

Dannielle introduced me to one of her friends that is closer to my age. Her friend introduced me to the Bible Study Group. I bought a Bible and started reading and going online. The Bible Study group hooked me up with some really good prophetic sites and I have been growing stronger ever since. I am not completely back where I started as a kid, and a friend recently told me to be careful about thinking 'where' I want to be. So I am gonna listen to the voice asking "Where are you" and my answer will always be "Here, 'I AM', stay with me."

I started building a website for a client, and we were talking about life, and I started telling him some of my stories. He said I should write a book, and I told him I always

felt like I had a book in me. I laughed it off and thought how many times I have tried to start the project, only to let it die away.

I came home from talking to him and in the back of my mind I heard, 'Open your computer and just start typing.' I wrote for about 10 hours a day for 3 days and finished my first draft. It took a few weeks to get this one finished and online. I have enjoyed every moment that I written, knowing I was doing as My Father had instructed.

In closing I will say, Dannielle and I have a wonderful relationship today. Debbie lost Buster suddenly in April 1, 2014. We lost Debbie in April 8, 2017 And my Janie just last year. Debbie made sure I had a car before she passed. He last act of taking care of me. Chris and I having been having more little arguments lately, and I even considered leaving. My client asking me to do this, was the best way for Heavenly Father to remind me, that nothing could make me break my commitment, and I still fall in love with him again almost daily.

My point is, I don't know if this is any good, or if it is going to help anyone, I was just doing what I was instructed to do by a higher power, I was typing.

I turned my back on God, but he never left my side. And to quote Church International, Pastor and Prophet Robin(s) Bullock,

**God is ABSOLUTELY GOOD!**

This is just The End of THIS Story.

Thank you for reading.

## ***Dedications***

Matthew 7:7-8

7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened

unto you:

8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.</span>

\* Thank you Yohavah, Holy Father, for being with me my whole life. For helping me realize our relationship is precious, and for helping me finish this work.

Thank you for the Angels watching and protecting me, and allowing me to talk to them.

Mostly Father, thank you for sending your son, Yeshua, Jesus Christ who gave his own life, that we might all live in his name. AMEN!

\* Next I have to Thank my Beloved Chris for helping me to find a better path, and a better way to live. You completed me in ways I can never express.

\* Thank you to Dannielle for making me a Mom. I was not always the best, but know I did my best for where I was at the time. I love you to the moon and beyond.

\* Thank you Karen Williamson Cook, for always being my friend and believing in me. You are the only person from school, that ever stayed true. I love you for always!

\* To Kim, Mark, Donna, Dave, Terri, Judy, Kat and Levi Our Bible Study group. You give me hope and support every time we have a meeting. Each of you contribute to task of saving souls for Jesus. Each of you will always hold a very special place in my heart.

\* Cris R, for encouraging me to write this in the first place. Heavenly father used you well. Thank you for all your support, but mostly, thank you for being my friend.

\* Prophet Robin D Bullock, You have given me strength when I felt I was falling. Our Father speaks through you and his words are received by many. Thank you for having the faith and courage to deliver those messages.

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**\*\* Most of all, THANK YOU, the reader. It is for those who are seeking that this is written. I pray that you find something hopeful, encouraging, and uplifting. Our Father has never left you. All you need do is seek him, you will find him right by your side.**