**The Terror Within**

**A Fictional Memoir Loosely Based On My Life!**

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**The Prologue…**

The time period was steeped in the 60s through the 80s…the Reagan years! Wood-paneled walls, shag carpeting, cigarette smoke hangs perpetually in the air of homes, offices and public spaces, even airports! Television sets encased in heavy wooden cabinets with three main channels broadcasting. The antennas adjusted for better reception, rotary phones with long tangles cords connected party lines. The cars featured vinyl seats that burned your skin in the summer heat while the windows were cranked and manual locks were standard.  Every corner had a “corner bar” where you could “sneak” in and be served with no questions…if you were in the bar ordering, they assumed you were supposed to be there. Stale beer and tobacco could be smelled for blocks.

The neighborhood was a row of aging brick homes with loud music spilling from open windows and doors during humid summers. While the winters were eerily silent…meanwhile across town at Nana’s house turned speakeasy, is always loud, nights, evenings, winter, spring, summer or fall – and always prosperous.

Nana’s house was a large spooky three story building that smelled of cheap perfume and spilled liquor. The hardwood floors creaked ominously with every step, echoing throughout the entire house. The house was always filled with jarring sounds – muffled arguments, heavy footsteps, slamming doors and stifled sex sounds at all hours.

She comes from a dysfunctional background, carrying forward patterns and behavior that suggest her own unresolved trauma. A regular on the party scene in the 80s, hosting or attending parties which she loves to do, is one of her favorite things. Married at a young age but never taught healthy coping mechanisms or parenting skills.

Jalizza is a woman who takes pride in her public appearance, maintaining a carefully constructed image that masks her inner turmoil. Her movements are sharp and deliberate, reflecting her internal tension.

Her mother is cold and emotionally distant. She maintains a façade of normalcy in public while harboring deep resentment behind closed doors. She prioritizes social activities and personal gratification over maternal instincts and responsibilities.

Shows no capacity for nurturing or emotional attachment, treating maternal duties as burdensome obligations rather than expressions of love.

But, her father, a muscular man with chocolate-colored skin…he carries himself with a boxer’s grace, often shadow boxing for entertainment. His physical strength contrasts with the visible wear of harsh living and alcohol abuse. His beautiful eyes carry a gentle sadness, though they light up a room when he enters it or shares a story about his daughter.

And her son, a remarkably empathetic and resilient child who developed emotional wisdom beyond his years. Despite experiencing the complexities of divorce and custody arrangements, he maintains an optimistic outlook and shows deep concern for others and their happiness. This is especially his mother. He possesses an intuitive understanding of emotional situations and often provides unexpected moments of comfort as a result of his honest observations and feedback.

Born into a troubled marriage and witnessing its dissolution at a young age, he adapted to life between two households. His early experiences taught him to be adaptable and understanding though he craves stability. Despite the challenges in his family, he maintains a strong bond with both his mother and father. He finds strength and motivation in them both.

**Chapter One**

**The Terror Begins**

I was born in winter, in the late 60’s. Winters were colder then, the snow was whiter, and life was cruel.

See, no one wanted me…not really, but for some reason they kept me. It was when the terror began. I was constantly reminded that I was unwanted, and I was made to feel worthless. I eventually learned to accept my fate...I learned to survive. I endured years of emotional abuse, but I never lost hope. I knew that one day I would find my place in the world and be accepted. I was determined not to feel small for the rest of my life.

My earliest memories, which come in flashes are…blood, screams, knives, orange dining room chairs…Yes, I said orange; it was the 70s. Orange dining room chairs are covered with blood...sirens, yelling, casts, and then…nothing. The aftermath of those traumatic events left me feeling numb and detached from reality. For years, I struggled with recurring nightmares and an overwhelming sense of fear that lingered just beneath the surface. Despite the chaos and confusion, I slowly started piecing together a life for myself, determined to rise above the darkness that had once consumed me.

I was somewhere between two or six...I also remember my favorite outfit was an orange dress with white flowers on it. They’d dress me in white knee socks and maroon platform shoes – I remember feeling so pretty. When I eventually become an adult, it's these memories that shaped my resilience and instilled in me a deep empathy for others. They taught me the importance of creating a safe environment for myself and those around me. To find beauty in life's small moments, like the feeling of wearing my favorite childhood dress.

I also remember my dad in the park with all of his muscles and chocolate skin shadow boxing with my favorite uncle, Ray. They always seemed to have so much fun together. Everyone did, everyone except me that is. I felt left out and I didn't really understand why I didn't fit in. I was a bit too shy and I always ended up just watching from a distance.

I always felt anxious and remember doing my best to fade into the background so I wouldn't annoy anyone, mainly my mother, so as not to provoke a beating. How sad it is to be two or six and know you’re not wanted. To know that no matter what you do your mother will never look deep into your eyes with unconditional love. To know that no matter how hard you try, you will never be able to please her. To feel like you're not good enough and will never be good enough. To feel helpless and alone.

A fews years go by, I’m nine now and it’s pretty clear to me that everyone in this family drinks and smokes way too much. It was also clear to me that my parents cared more about drinks and parties more than they cared about my well-being.

I had two brothers, both loved by my parents and neither could do no wrong.  One is a marine, the other an architect. Our maternal and paternal grandparents also loved them. They doted over them like they were kings. I was jealous of the attention they got, and I felt left out. I wanted to do something to feel special, too. So I decided to join the military. But, my parents had to sign for me. I graduated early and at 17, my parents still had to approve your enrollment into any branch of the arm forces. Convincing my parents to sign the papers was no easy task and became my mission. They were skeptical about my decision, questioning my motives and doubting my ability to succeed in such a demanding environment. So, they refused to sign...I would eventually move away.

But oh, how they bragged about how smart and successful their boys were. But back to my parents. Every weekend they would have drunken social gatherings. If there were no sitters, they'd leave me home alone, by myself. I’m sure you can imagine how scary that must have been for a 9-year-old in the 70’s.

If I was lucky, they would leave me at my paternal grandmother’s three-story home which was a speakeasy. Which was equally as scary, with all of the pedophiles, drunks, and drugs – no place for a child. Part of the reason no one liked me is because I’d tell when someone gave me alcohol or tried to touch me.

I later realized that, even when I told everyone about it, no one cared what happened or was done to me. Like the time my 20-year-old cousin had sex in front of me and later tried touching me as well. I was a nine-year-old breastless, shapeless innocent girl. God only knows why a 20-year-old man would want to take the innocents of a little girl, and one that was your blood relative!

I, unfortunately, remember that night very vividly. I was able to escape his grasp and run down the two flights of stairs to find my grandmother, who we were not allowed to call “grandmom” if you called her “grandma”, she’d slap you…we were forced to call her “Nana”, which I hated, and I hated her, for not protecting me. Once I reached her, Nana slapped me for interrupting her sale and a “grown folks” conversation.

Nana was no protector, she never showed affection, she was a tyrant.

A monster.

**Chapter Two**

**“Nana’s” House of Horrors**

Nana, the monster, had 11 children with 5 different men. One who was a married preacher! She randomly chose one of those men and gave all of her children that man’s last name.

Four of her children lived with her, each having at least four children themselves. They all lived in Nana’s huge three-story home. All of my male cousins were as evil as Nana was. They would beat me up when I was too young to defend myself and molested all of my young cousins and tried their best to do the same to me – but I was and still am a fighter. I fought back. I was the only one who had the courage to stand up to them. Nana was furious with me and punished me severely.

Many of my female cousins suffer from bipolar, depression, or schizophrenia which went undiagnosed. Again, this was the 70s and black people didn’t speak to therapists – it was unheard of. Families back then were too afraid to seek help and too ashamed to talk about it mental health. This lack of recognition and understanding has led to generations of suffering. A problem our community still faces today! This has created an atmosphere of isolation and stigma, making it difficult for people to get the help they need. Mental health services need to be made more accessible, and the black community needs to be educated on the importance of seeking treatment.

The neighbors, the teachers, and the preachers labeled my female cousins “fast”, slow, or special needs. No one took the time to simply talk to them, or ask them what was wrong, or if there were problems at home. We were all disposable. We were expected to conform to the expectations of those around us, and we were never given the opportunity to explore our own identities or passions. We were never given the freedom to be ourselves.

A few of them may have had special needs since their parents were related. At nine, it was “my turn” but even in my innocence I had wisdom. I knew what they were doing was wrong, sick even…I knew, it just didn’t “feel” right.

Back to Nana, when I told her what my cousins were trying to do to me, she smacked my face violently. She grabbed my arm roughly and told me to “SHUT UP” and that, “I better not tell my parents or anyone what I just told her”.

She made me sit down next to her while she sold drugs and liquor to men in our neighborhood, including police officers, neighbors, preachers, and even a mayor. Many of them really enjoyed looking at little girls, even touching them if they were allowed to.

Tattle tellers were forced to “serve” these disgusting men, and I was made to be nice to these perverts as they stared at my tiny body in the most inappropriate way. I’d cry and get beaten for crying because I was being given “something to cry about”. I’d have to endure this Friday through Sunday evening every weekend until Nana told my parents my crying was too distracting to her business, and she was no longer willing to “watch” me.

I was causing too much trouble, running in the house, from my cousins and crying when the neighborhood perverts stared or tried to touch me. I’d cry until I didn’t, the beatings didn’t stop…I just stuffed the terror down…the terror within.

**Chapter Three**

**A Glimmer of Hope**

I'd cause such a ruckus that Nana yelled at my father and said, “Don’t bring this little bitch back”. When my parents got me home, I told my mom what was going on and she called me a liar and I got beat yet again for “lying”.

How dare I mess up their Friday night parties…so guess what, I was shipped to my other grandmother, my maternal grandmother. She wasn’t mean, but she was a fall-down, sloppy drunk. And to a young girl, that was scary! I was scared...I was always scared!

I just can’t win….

Grandmom, I was allowed to at least call her grandmom, didn’t beat me or try to pimp me out and I knew she loved me, in her own way. But she couldn't care for me, not really. She would blackout several times, she’d fall downstairs, break her toes, legs, and arms, urinate on herself and have men over to "entertain" and only God knows what else. Oh, and forget to feed me.

When Grandmom wasn’t drunk or drinking, she was actually sweet. Although I do believe she loved me, boy did she love her grandsons much more than she ever did me. Children know. It’s just the way it was back in those days. Women were supposed to look, be seen but not heard, marry have children, smile deal with infidelity, continue smiling, and never complain but I was just built differently. I talked, I told, I complained someone would hear me, listen to me.

I was not willing to be quiet when someone tried to molest me, I was not going to not work, and I wasn’t intending to simply marry just to marry…I knew this at ten. It didn’t matter if no one cared about me.

Being someone no one cared about I found myself playing in an alley, again, with no adult supervision…ever. I was running around, kicking cans and rocks because what else does a child no one wants or cares about do...when a man pulled a gun on me. I have no idea why anyone would do that to a child, but the ’70s was a curious time. Someone walked by and the gun holder ran away, and my life was saved again.

But who should I thank and why? Why spare the life of someone no one cares about? A question I’d ask myself several times throughout my life. But we’ll discuss that later.

Nana refused to tell any of her children who their fathers were, which as you can imagine leaves something missing in a child’s life. My father being one of those children, never felt complete and was always searching for that missing piece of him.

One day Dad took his car to his favorite mechanic for service, his cousin Greg. Dad let me tag along on this day…I was so happy to not be at home with my mom, grandmom, or Nana. Dad wasn’t perfect, but I always felt loved when I was with him. Dad and Greg were talking, and Greg noticed that Dad was feeling a bit down. When he asked him why, he said, he wanted to know who his real father was…something Greg knew.

Greg called his mother, great Aunt Mary and she told him, and he told Dad. Aunt Mary had his number, and they passed it along to Daddy. Dad couldn’t wait to get home and share this information with his wife, my mom.

Mom encouraged him to call, which he did and my grandfather, Isaac English, cried. He had heard rumors about a boy that looked just like him, but Nana never told him that daddy was his.

They made plans to meet, Dad packed us up and we drove to Denmark, South Carolina. Grandpa had a beautiful home with a pool and it was so nice. He loved us, he loved me even though he didn’t really know us. I never understood why or how someone so kind could ever get involved with someone so evil and ugly. Nana wasn’t a beautiful woman. She was short, barely 5 feet tall, and had horrible huge moles on her face – she reminded me of a brown version of Spiegel of Lord of the Rings…again, a monster.

Grandpop Issac spent years looking for the boy turned-man that “may” be his son but Nana changed his last name and gave Daddy another man’s last name. They hugged and cried and promised to build a relationship. I could see the change in Daddy, the confidence of knowing who he was, and where he came from…which was good stock!

Grandpop loved us unconditionally, without motive, not wanting anything in return but our love. He listened to me, I mean really listened, and when he laughed, it was from his belly.

He was a man of faith and only God knows what happened to make him interested in Spiegel, I mean Nana…but I am thankful because I wouldn’t be here without their union. Sadly, soon after we found Grandpop Issac, he passed away. Dad fell into a deep depression and began drinking even more heavily than before.

**Chapter Four**

**Surviving Adolescence**

I learned to drive at 12, and not in the traditional way…I mean is it traditional for any 12-year-old to drive? It was the 80s. But come on…should a 12-year-old drive?  But it was safer than my blackout drunk dad driving so it was either let him drive and potentially kill us or I drive.

I’d drive on highways, 45 minutes or more from bars, office parties, family gatherings, and more to ensure we got home safely.

It was around this time that my dad started allowing me into bars with him and allowing me to drink!  Isn’t there a law against this? But no one, not one person questioned my presence. By 14, I’d developed my own drinking habit.

I was left alone so much, at home, in the bar, anywhere they decided to leave me. No one (seemed to) care if I ate, had shoes, or showered. Once my shoes literally fell off my feet and I had to go into the shoe store barefoot. I’ll never forget the look of disgust the salesperson had on her face when she had to measure my dirty feet.

School as you can imagine wasn’t fun, in fact, it was rough for someone whose shoes disintegrated on their feet and whose mom sent them outside topless until they were in middle school – I was made fun of, I was asked, “if I was a girl”, and when I said yes, they would say, “why are you outside with no top like a boy?" And I didn’t have an answer…I just didn’t know why my mom would force me to go outside like that and when I asked, she said, you don’t have any breasts so it’s okay.

None of the girls wanted to play with me, so I always hung out with the boy. And when the boys peed outside, so did I…I had such penis envy. The neighbors started to complain that I was outside running around topless and peeing outside it was only then did my mom put an undershirt on me, not a cute girl top, but something like a wifebeater. But at least I was covered! Even my brothers asked my mom if I was a girl.

It’s part of the reason I’ve developed a shopping habit now. I never want to run out and I want many options. It’s part of my healing the little girl in me.

I was extremely shy at school, especially when I found out other kids' parents and grandparents didn’t treat them the way my parents and grandparents treated me. I developed a complex, anxiety and insecurity.  I didn’t feel wanted, like I belonged, or like anyone would like me for me…but how was I anyway?

I was a true latchkey kid, and not because my parents worked hard, it was because they were parting, drunk, hungover, or traveling with friends. I was an inconvenience they couldn’t be bothered with.

Being left alone at such a young age is not just scary, it’s very lonely. I learned very early that I was disposable. The people that were supposed to care about me cared about me the least. I’ve never felt safe then or now and have a very difficult time trusting anyone.

When your mother never has a kind word to say about you or to you, how do you learn to trust? The smallest lie triggers me, so potential friends don’t stand a chance.

Running has become my safe place. The moment I feel unsafe, I run, from jobs, friends, relationships, and confrontations. Anything that “feels” unsafe.

How do you live a normal life when you can’t trust anyone? How can you trust anyone to love you when your mother didn’t love you? When your grandmother says, “Take this little bitch home” …beats you, doesn’t protect you…how do you trust? Can you trust? Can you ever feel safe?

You don’t, you can’t…You do your best. You try, you cry, you drink, you fail, you try, you cry, you drink…you fail.

You go through life sad, depressed, and lonely…and then, you meet a guy.

**Chapter Five**

**First Love and Heartbreak**

He’s dressed well, he’s tall…I mean really tall! And, he looks familiar, and then I remember, it’s the handsome guy I always see downtown. He asks for my phone number and even though I’m nervous, I give it to him…I’m 17.

By the time I was 21, we were married and living together…we eloped. Being the rebel that I was becoming, I didn’t want anyone telling me how to organize my wedding, or tell me who was going to be in it, what colors to wear, etc. So, to avoid arguments with his family, we eloped and announced it at our “engagement” dinner.

I’ll never forget how my dad cried; I believe he knew I was making a “mistake”. But was it? Because without that “mistake”, my greatest gift would have never been born! My son is so special and the love I feel for him is the love I needed in my life…I believe God knew!

The first year, maybe in the first two years of our relationship, I remember being so happy. It was before the infidelity started; it was something he never tried to hide either. The disrespect was so blatant and hurtful that I truly didn’t know what to do. This was my first relationship. I had always had a ton of male friends, but that was all they were, friends.

Throughout high school I was all of the guys' “buddy”…it wasn’t because I was unattractive, it was because I had had a reputation for not putting out. After my traumatic upbringing, the last thing I was thinking about was having sex with anyone. In fact, my prom date, the guy I had fallen for in 9th grade, the one who had a steady girlfriend all throughout high school and had finally asked me to the senior prom broke up with me his first semester of college because, “the girls in college are doing things you’re not doing”.  All I wanted to know was, “What things”?

Once he shared with me what they were doing…I liked him so much that I was willing to try. But when he came home for spring break and told me that I was supposed to take “all of my clothes off”, I couldn’t understand why he needed or wanted to see my entire body to “do those things”.

Yes, your girl was that naïve, I had no clue, but once I met that tall stranger, things changed. I had my first heartbreak with "Prom Boy"…now I understand that you had to get completely naked for boys to like you. And I had found love…again, or for the first time, I didn’t care. I knew I was willing to do “those things” to keep him happy.

I was so excited to be his wife, a wife…I was excited to have my own home and was looking forward to having a family with him and making our home beautiful. I cooked, a skill I believe I inadvertently picked up from my dad’s side of the family. I cleaned, and as children we had to clean our rooms and the bathroom, so I grew up knowing how to keep a tidy home. And I baked something I specially picked up from my dad. I made sure his dinner was ready when he came home, I invited friends over for game nights, and I cooked for his friends and mine…I decorated our house, I had cards made to mail to all of our friends and family with our new address and telephone number…I’ve always been creative, it’s been an outlet my entire life, so whether creative in the kitchen or with designing our home I loved doing all of that.

But…it was never enough for him, he didn’t like my cooking, although, all of my friends and his, said they loved my meals and cakes and pies…he didn’t. I was too “fat” although I was a size 3…even after giving birth.

He started coming home later and later…and then one day after hanging up his clothes a paper fell out of his jacket. It was a phone number with a kiss print on it. I called the number just to ask, do you know that Karl is my husband…the woman on the other end of the phone said…and I’ll never forget this, “Karl is my boyfriend..."

Talk about a gut punch! All I could do was cry…when he got home, I didn’t yell or scream, I just asked… ” What do you need me to do? I’ll do it”….”I just want you, us to be happy”. His answer was even more devastating than his girlfriend’s response.

He said to me, “It’s nothing that you can do. I need to change my women like I do my underwear” ...I threw up!

**Chapter Six**

**False Starts and Fresh Wounds**

I was pregnant! A time in a woman’s life that should be one of the most joyous was unfortunately very sad for me. As my belly grew, so did his boredom with me and our marriage. My husband, a cheater, married or not, wife pregnant or not, was going out to have his multiple girlfriends, nothing would ruin his fun.

I struggled through labor alone and lonely. The loneliness was such a familiar feeling that I was starting to believe I was destined to be lonely for the rest of my life. I thought to myself, why be with someone and feel lonely?

When I mentioned divorcing and leaving, he asked if I would consider moving and starting over with him. Excited about a fresh start I agreed and chose a state I loved, South Carolina. Beautiful weather, beautiful cities, and my job was willing to transfer me with no hesitation. I was fighting for my family, for my happiness!

So, we moved…without telling any of our family members, we moved and mailed them new housewarming invitations…some of them thought it was a joke, and others, like my dad, were so sad and just cried…it was such a sense of loss for my father because not only would I be moving but his grandchild would be 9 hours away.

But…I was trying to save my family and do what was best for us! The first thing we did was join a church. I was so excited, and I couldn’t believe that one of the sisters was so interested in our “spiritual growth” that she would come to our home and study with us.

I’d later find out that my sister's “spiritual growth" was helping a lot more than his “spirit” growth! Especially when I was working, and he was home “trying to find a job”.

I worked my ass off that first year, breastfeeding, pumping, rushing home to cook, paying for childcare, our car, our car insurance, and our rent all while he was “looking for work”. But whenever I came home, he was online, but he wasn’t looking for work, he was searching porn sites. When I confronted him, he simply stated, “I said I’d move for a fresh start…I never said I’d work”! This man was stretching me in ways I never knew anyone could be stretched. I felt like I would explode so many times…from anger, from fear, from sadness...I questioned if I’d made the right decision.

That also explained why he had lost his interest in intimacy with me.  When he wasn’t out “growing spiritually”, he was searching for "work” on porn sites and telling me I was “too fat” to have sex with.

This for me was the last straw. I’d dealt with his constant infidelity, because I loved him, I’d dealt with his explosive temper, him punching holes in walls and yelling, because I loved him, but I had chosen divorce because I loved me!

Period! Despite not feeling protected as a child, despite being cheated on by my husband, despite my mother telling me, “No one’s going to want you now with “that” baby”, as if “that” baby wasn’t her grandchild…I loved me! And I loved myself enough to deal with all the judgment from his family and mine.

You try, you cry, you drink, you fail…you try again!

Heading back North!

It’s what I did, with nowhere to stay but…my job the one constant in my life, took me back. I was able to transfer back into my old position and within a few months was even promoted to manager.

I moved in with my big brother, but he wasn’t always nice to me. One time the fire alarm went off, and he accused me of setting it off and bit my head off. He later apologized but to salvage the relationship, I thought it was best to just move out.

So, I moved out, and it was a struggle, paying for a car, rent, and paying for child care…life has not been very kind to me at all.

Two years had slipped by, and I was managing as best I could with the rent, car payments, and childcare expenses but it was not an easy life and I can’t say that I was happy although I was doing my best to keep a positive outlook on life….and then, I met a boy.

One day after a work event my cousin who I hadn’t seen in a few years was up North visiting and called me up, “Yo cuz, let's hang out, I want to introduce you to my new girlfriend”.

Always down to party, I was like bet, where should we meet…he told me about this cool spot that wasn’t too far from where I was staying at the time, although I’d never been there. We were having a good time, catching up, laughing, joking, and sharing old stories and then telling me who they’d met.

And then, he walked in…I couldn’t really tell you what I noticed at first, but I knew he was going to be mine…and after se-ver-ral rounds of drinks, I’d declared to the entire bar that this man would be my husband.

A year later, we were married! This time, I would have an actual wedding, the dress, the reception, and Dad being able to walk me down the aisle. This boy was wild. I went from never having a boyfriend to being married to a serial cheater, to a wild man.

Talking about not knowing how to pick’em…I was batting a thousand! It was exciting and there was a lot of passion in this marriage but outside of wild sex…what did I have? At first, it was enough, because the passion was so intense. This was a man that actually loved my body.  I mistook that for love and if you are reading this, please know that you need more in life, more in marriage – “passion”, pure raw passion is something we all should, need to experience for a fulfilling life but a good marriage, it does not make!

And it certainly didn’t hold me at night when I cried myself to sleep when my grandma died. My mom’s mom was a drunk, but if you remember, someone I still felt love from no matter how dysfunctional. Grandma later sobered up and became the grandmother I needed and always wanted. So, I took her death very hard, she became that source of love and support that I so desperately needed, and she was the only person who had ever told me they were proud of me.

He made financial decisions without me, purchasing cars, spending mortgage money, and buying all his friends drinks at the club to make himself look big. Lending money to his friends and family and not buying groceries when his three children were at our home hungry.

Purchasing Viagra to make him last longer when he was out “working late”.  Which I later found out was code for hooking up with his female co-workers. Can you believe he even invited a few of these whores to our wedding?

Like I said, I sure knew how to pick’em!

The night Grandma died, I asked my hot husband if he would stay at home with me and hold me until I fell asleep. He looked at me with disgust, said, “Stop being so dramatic” and left to go out drinking with his boys.

It was when I decided I would leave…he came home that next morning, I made dinner, set a beautiful table as I love to do, and told him over dinner I was filing for divorce. He laughed and again said, “Stop being so dramatic”.

With my extensive business contacts, it was easy for me to find a divorce attorney, so I started the paperwork and within a few weeks, everything was prepared.  So over a beautiful dinner again, I presented him with the official divorce paperwork. He nearly threw up, he wasn’t laughing this time and neither was I.

He got up and threw my clothes, CDs, and other personal items out with the trash. I didn’t care, I walked away from everything, it was my house, I used all my stock and savings to purchase the house, my dream home, the single home with the pool in the predominantly white neighborhood…I just didn’t want it, anything in it, or him anymore – I wanted my PEACE!

You try, you cry, you drink…you fail – again!

**Chapter Seven**

**Rock Bottom and Rebirth**

I was destined to live my life the way it started, at least so it seemed…alone, scared, trusting no one, depressed, and lonely.

What a life!

I continued to excel at work. What else was there? But then, the ultimate blow…my dad died! And I felt an incredible sense of insecurity because he was after all the only man that had ever shown me any form of love – no matter how dysfunctional.

Then another blow, I lost my job! And my ex-husband was fighting to keep my baby boy from me. I had no reason to live! I wasn’t sleeping so my doctor prescribed a sleeping pill to help me sleep only 10 milligrams, but they would seriously knock me out. I had a plan, take them all at once, and my pain would be over…I’d sleep…forever.

But, before I could do this, I wanted to say goodbye to my love, my greatest gift, my baby boy. The “baby” was 8 and was always excited to hear from me or see me. I called him with the pills in my hand and said, *“I’m calling to tell you that I love you and you are the greatest part of me and my life…”* instead of him saying, “Okay Mom, I love you too”. He said, *“Mom, you’re scaring me…I love you, are you alright?"*

I knew in that moment that no matter how painful, I needed to live, to live for my baby! I also knew that God had sent him to me…to save me, to be my lifeline…God’s greatest gift! He knew I’d need him…so God blessed me with him.

Picking myself up from my lowest point, from so much loss, the loss of innocents, robbed of a “real” childhood, the loss of my father, my job, and custody of my child…I didn’t have much to fight for, but I was fighting for my child. It was the only thing that kept me going, from completely giving up.

My rebirth...

Would start by reevaluating who I was, wanted to be, and who I wanted in my orbit. If there was going to be a next time…I knew I had to make a much better decision, a decision based on friendship, true love, and not just physical attraction, passion, or finances.

I wanted to be truly in love, I wanted a best friend, I wanted someone who would put me first no matter what. Someone who would love my son as much as I did, and I was not going to rush…because this would be the last time!

10 years would go by, those first couple would be just fun…I had never dated before. I went from never having a boyfriend to meeting and marrying my son’s father. Then divorcing and remarried a few years later.

This time, I was confident, feeling sexy and I wasn’t going to settle! The moment I felt a hint of emotional abandonment, I’d drop them faster than a hot potato! No more heartache for me…if I was not a priority, you’d be dropped, the minute it felt as if you were splitting your loyalty between me and another, you'd be dropped.

No one knew where I lived, they never met my son – everyone was kept at a casual distance.  For both our sakes…as a “single-ish” mother, you never want to bring men around your child that you’re not sure will be there for the long haul. Meeting my son was the highest privilege. There was never going to be, “This is uncle so and so or this is Mommy’s ”friend”, we were never going there”.

One year, when my son was around 12-ish he asked, “mom, do you like girls?"  I explained to him no I didn’t, but I was just taking my time to find someone very special. He went on to say, "you're pretty and I want you to be happy, you should have someone special”. I explained to him that it takes time to find someone that is just for you, that you feel God made for you.

It was around this time that I felt ready to get serious about my search and make a commitment to God and myself. I prayed to God. I didn’t necessarily make a list, but I spoke to God letting him know that I believed in him and that I didn’t want to be alone for the rest of my life, that I wanted a friendship that would blossom into a relationship and lead to marriage.

But what was I willing to give up in order to be blessed with such a gift? I committed to one year of celibacy. And of course, every kind of man came out of the woodworks to do their best to tempt me…but I was serious about my commitment to myself, to God, and my goal, a true friendship that led to marriage.

Literally, one year later I was introduced to the man that I would marry.  Geoffrey!

It took him some time to find out where I lived, to meet my son, to ultimately get the keys to my place, and to get some. See when you are serious about finding true long-lasting love, these aren’t things you rush!

I can remember him asking, when are you going to let me know where you live…when can I meet your son? The answer would always be soon. I have to see how things go.  I did speak with both my son and his father – just to let them both know I’d met someone that I was serious about. My ex-husband said, “*I know if you are introducing him to our son, that he’s pretty special to you*”. Even he knew I didn’t play like that.

It wasn’t a fairy tale beginning but it is a fairy tale ending! We’ve faced losing parents, losing a child, the loss of jobs, and a pandemic and we’ve come out on top. We’ve come out in love; we’ve come out grateful…we’ve come out blessed!

You try, you cry, you drink…you win!

**Chapter Eight**

**Healing and Rediscovery**

Committed to my personal success, growth and healing, I sought out a therapist so that I could move on. At least I tried. Trying to regain my life, confidence, as a woman, a professional, a mother…and ultimately, a wife!

But I couldn’t do that without facing my fears, my past and looking toward my future.  I sought out an African American therapist I thought would “get” me. And not judge me or my past too harshly.

I found Dr. Clara Marshal, PH.D, who had offices in Philadelphia, New Jersey and Delaware. Quite successful and down to earth, she helped me realize that my feelings were and are valid. That it was “normal” to feel sad or unsafe when your primary caregiver did not protect you, listen to you or validate your feelings as a child. She was amazed that the “only” challenges I had were anxiety and trust issues.

She gave me some coping strategies to help me manage my anxiety and trust issues. Having a therapist who understood my background and experiences made all the difference in my healing journey. It was comforting to speak with someone who could relate to my cultural nuances and provide insights that resonated with me on a deeper level. This connection allowed me to open up more honestly and made the therapeutic process more effective and meaningful.

She helped me realized how I could move on with healthy friendships and onto serious a relationship, that if I could not trust, I still had work to do. Trust was the biggest obstacle I had to work on overcoming.

Through therapy, I gained a deeper understanding of myself and learned how to navigate my emotions more effectively. It empowered me to set boundaries and prioritize my well-being, leading to healthier relationships and a renewed sense of self-worth. This transformative experience not only bolstered my confidence but also equipped me with the tools to pursue my goals with resilience and determination.

I had made my commitment to celibacy to God and I was serious about not giving myself to anyone until I KNEW he would be the man I was going to marry.  I had to work through my fear of infidelity, my fear of not being enough, my fear that his love was conditional because of the environment I grew up in - where love was very conditional. Growing up in an environment where love was conditional left me constantly questioning my worth and seeking validation from others. This deep-rooted insecurity made it difficult for me to trust that someone could love me unconditionally. Therapy helped me recognize these patterns and began to cultivate self-love, understanding that I am deserving of love without having to meet certain conditions or expectations.

My mom “loved” me when I showered her with gifts, which I did because I wanted my mother’s love and approval. This experience ingrained in me the belief that love had to be earned through acts of service and gifts rather than being freely given. Consequently, I entered relationships with the assumption that I needed to constantly prove my worth to be deserving of love and affection.

But the next day…she’d treat me like shit again. Throughout my life, I have worked very hard to overcome the horrific cycle of dysfunction that I did not wish to pass on to my own children. I knew that I had to break this cycle and find a way to heal the wounds of the past. I was determined to create a better, healthier future for myself and my family. I was determined to be a better version of myself.

Therapy allowed me to unravel these misconceptions and embrace the idea that love should be unconditional and reciprocal, rather than transactional. I’d later find out that it was never enough. She’d love me the day I gave her a gift, the evening I took her to dinner, and I’d be so happy. And I’d do anything to receive that “love”.

My husband put up with a lot those first few years we were together. God bless him for truly loving me and overlooking and putting up with my insecurities, mood swings and lovingly helping me to see what unconditional love is, what it looks like and how you deal with those you love and those who truly love you. He showed me how to love myself and how to be loved in return. He continues to be my rock and support. We are truly blessed to have found each other.

**Epilogue**

You fall in love, and you find the happiness you've been searching for. You both grow together, and eventually, you find your place in the world. Meeting him was like a beacon of hope piercing through the fog of my past. I felt an unfamiliar warmth and safety in his presence, something I had yearned for all my life. His kindness and patience began to chip away at the walls I'd built, allowing me to slowly trust and open my heart to love. We shared countless late-night conversations where he listened without judgment, and I found comfort in his unwavering support. He celebrated my successes, no matter how small, and stood by me during my darkest times, offering a shoulder to lean on.

Each moment we spent together brought healing, gradually replacing my fears with a newfound sense of belonging and acceptance.

Love transformed my life in ways I never thought possible. It taught me that I am worthy of affection and that it's okay to lean on someone else for support. With love, I discovered the beauty of vulnerability and the strength that comes from letting others into my heart, allowing me to finally envision a future filled with hope and happiness.

Love reshaped my understanding of what relationships could be, teaching me that they are built on mutual respect, trust, and care. It showed me that vulnerability is not a weakness, but a bridge to deeper connections, and that true intimacy requires both giving and receiving support. Through love, I learned that relationships are not about perfection, but about growing together and finding strength in each other's imperfections.

Love taught me to see myself through a gentler lens, helping me recognize my own value and potential. It encouraged me to embrace my flaws and celebrate my strengths, fostering a deeper sense of self-acceptance. Through the nurturing relationship I found with Geoffrey, I realized that I am deserving of happiness and capable of creating a fulfilling life.

This newfound confidence has allowed me to pursue my goals and take risks, ultimately leading to a more fulfilling life. I am now more mindful of my words and actions and strive to make a positive impact on the world.