

On The Perils of Youth and a
God Who Restores

1 – The Philippines

*The salvation of the righteous comes from
the Lord; He is their stronghold in times of trouble.*

*The Lord helps them and delivers them; He
delivers them from the wicked and saves them,
because they take REFUGE in Him (Psalms 37).*

This island refuge is a long way from where I began, both literally and figuratively. How does one measure the distance between a missionary child born in the Philippines to a “New Waver” in Colorado in the 80s, or from a deputy sheriff’s wife and unemployed college student in Kentucky to Army retiree’s wife and schoolteacher in Alaska? Along this path I have encountered God many times and sadly, have walked away from Him almost as often. Is it ironic that I should finally surrender to Him, once and for all, in North Pole, home of the *other* big guy?

I find myself seated at a kitchen table on a rainy day in Kodiak, Alaska. Whale Island, specifically. In May of 2016, my husband and I signed ownership papers (sight-unseen) on 4 acres of remote land occupied by 3 cabins, only one of which was completed. I was worshipping with Hillsong on iTunes this morning and reading Psalm 37 as the Lord impressed on me the idea to begin to write about my journey.

* * * * *

I was born on May 3, 1966 in Tondo, a slummy district of Manila, to Everett Robert and Alma Faith Boyce who were serving there as missionaries. My mother suffered two miscarriages in the 9 years between my brother and I, so she and my dad went to the hospital where their baby doctor was on call when she went into preterm labor. Turns out I was a placenta previa (the placenta was born first), so it was a pretty risky labor. I always get a kick out of telling Filipinos that I was born in Tondo. They always raise their eyebrows and smile politely... I had a salty Filipino Army Sergeant-Major (retired) ask me once if I was born with a butterfly knife in my hands, and then he laughingly pantomimed the hand movements for opening the knife while making the swishing sounds with his mouth.

My parents taught at the largest fully accredited missionary school in Asia and first commuted from Manila to the campus in Taytay, and then later moved to a subdivision closer to the school. For a time, my father even served as the school's administrator and my mom taught special education. While still living in Manila, I attended a Filipino kindergarten. I can still remember seeing my brother Bryan's eyes peeping between the wooden slats of the classroom window when he came to pick me up. Because I was the only American child at the school, I received special attention. One time, when our class put on the play, "The Wizard of Oz," I got to be Dorothy and my dog was Toto. His name was Albert D. Dog and he was a corgi mix. Albert went on to win the dog show/competition following the play, even though he was a mutt. His prize was a copy of the book. I placed it on the front porch for him where he slept and turned one page every night so he could read it.

Also, while we were in that wonderful huge, terra-cotta shingled, Spanish-style home (with sliding capiz window shades that were still painted black from the WWII era), we endured

a category 5 typhoon named Yoling. I remember dad moving all of the mattresses downstairs into the center of the house (to protect them from rain if we lost our roof) and then placing me on top of them - the roof over my sister's room did fly off. That 1970 typhoon devastated the island of Luzon and our school, Faith Academy. The cement block wall of the gym collapsed onto the hardwood floor and the roof over the library was destroyed - all of the books were soaked. I have seen an aerial photo showing all the sidewalks around campus covered with books that were set out in the sun to dry. For years, our library used those same crunchy, water-damaged books.

Faith Academy sat on the top of a hill inside a subdivision called Golf Range near the villages of Antipolo and TayTay. By the time we left in 1979, the main campus consisted of a high school building with a library and administrative offices, an elementary school building, a middle school building with a woodshop and a workout room, a huge Quonset-style gym/auditorium, a store and covered lunch area, tennis courts, a dormitory with three sections/apartments, an auto-center, a huge covered playground, another house/dorm, a circular driveway inside the campus with a garden inside it, and a large soccer field. There was a massive boulder in the garden area that students would climb when they wanted a quiet place to do homework or read.

I spent the first 14 years of my life in the Philippines and attended classes with other missionary kids, most of whose parents served in the "boondocks" and who sent their children to the dormitories on Faith Academy's campus. My parents also served as dorm parents a couple of times. I only have one memory of the first time, but I have seen a picture of myself sitting on a large butcher block island in the kitchen. In the picture, I am surrounded by

wonderful Filipino cooks who used to pinch my cheeks mercilessly and say, “Bery cute!” (*that* I remember). The second time my parents were dorm parents was for 20-something first through seventh grade boys; I was in the first grade at that time too. I have very clear memories of the little pass-through window from our apartment into the dorm’s common area, so mom could make an evening snack; of all of the children seated on the wooden floor in the large living room, gathered together in the evening, to listen to my dad read *The Jungle Book*, *Doctor Doolittle*, or *Gunga Din*; of the long hallway full of doors leading to rooms with bunkbeds; and of the huge dining room where all three dorms would have their combined meals. One had to learn to eat very fast if one wanted seconds under those circumstances. I once heard dad say that we were exposed to all kinds of regional meal traditions there, like eating peanut butter on French toast or pancakes. Life-long friendships were born on that hilltop for me and my siblings. There is a certain connection between missionary kids (MKs), especially those of us who attended Faith Academy.

When we were 12 or 13, my best friend Sharon and I used to ride public transportation - a motorcycle sidecar called a tricycle – to the “pool dorm” in the summers. All the students and staff would be gone, so we could have the pool to ourselves. We ate dill pickles with rock salt, drank the juice, and jumped from the roof of the bathrooms into the swimming pool. She and I lived one 6-foot cement block wall and a small neighborhood apart, so we spent every available minute together. We ran around the neighborhoods barefooted, played capture the flag with her brothers, shot off fireworks, swam on rain-flooded streets, ate pounds of champoys (sour dried fruit), sompolocs (like sugar-coated figs), and corn nuts from local Sari-sari stores, and climbed trees like monkeys. We pretended that we were the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew and

solved cases all day long. Everything was a clue. This slipper? Candy wrapper? Discarded fruit rind? We combined all of the clues to create the story of who-done-it. Our lives were as full as our imaginations and we loved being together.

I will mention here that Sharon and I had our difficulties, too. Mention it, because I will come back to this story later. Each year our middle school took a week out of school to go do some outdoor education. One year we went to Taal - a volcanic crater lake. We did different activities every day in groups: hiking the crater island; spending the night on the island, killing and preparing our own food; spending the day at camp doing crafts; or, going to the beach. And, every evening we had Bible study and worship as a large group. One night, Sharon rejected me and I ended up in my bunk, crying. That arrow stayed buried in my heart for many years. We quickly mended fences and remain friends to this day, but that little hurt plays a part in who I am today.

Besides Taal, there are many interesting places to visit in the Philippines, of which I only got to visit a few. One of our favorite destinations was a beach called Matabunkay. Little rental nipa huts (bamboo shacks on stilts with thatched roofs) lined the water. My father and others drove slowly down the lane behind the huts while the owners yelled out their prices and bartered with the potential renters. I can still remember our favorite hut; it had a huge open-air "living room" with benches all along the front and side rails. We placed our sleeping bags on the split bamboo floors, hung mosquito nets, and tucked them in under the bedding. At night, the tide brought the waves right up under the floor of the hut. I loved that. I also remember laying on a bamboo raft with a snorkeling mask on my face, watching the coral reefs beneath us. The raft floated about 2 feet above the reef and one could see all the beautiful tropical fish

swimming about. Every now and then, the ocean floor suddenly dropped into a sandy hole in the middle of the reef. It was so beautiful. We stopped going to Matabunkay near the end of our time in the Philippines, because my parents and some friends bought a nipa hut together in Iba, north of Subic Bay in Olongapo. Although I missed it, it was nice to be able to leave our snorkeling and camping gear locked in the hut and return to the same place every time we went to the beach.

Thinking of Subic Bay... There was a Christian organization there that was run by some friends of my parents; it was called The Christian Serviceman's Center. It was a really neat home/building that had a small chapel, game-room, library, kitchen, dining room, and several bedrooms (all two stories enclosing a tropical courtyard with a large tree in the middle). American servicemen could come there and just hang out. I thought that was pretty neat. I also loved to watch the monkey that was kept on a chain on the big tree in the courtyard. Dad said he watched him untangle his chain once and that it was quite a wonder. The chain looked hopelessly knotted up, but the monkey sat and stared at it for a while. A few minutes later, he reached out and jiggled a link, after which the tangles in the chain fell apart freely.

Another favorite place to visit was Baguio. Baguio is a mountain town (I guess you could call it a resort town). The road to get there is a curvy road called the Zigzag, and legend has it that a very famous overweight American rode there on a very small horse. Because the weather in Baguio was always cool by Filipino standards, we often went there at Christmastime so we could feel like we were in the states during winter. We built fires in the cabins we rented and wore sweaters. There was so much to do: the open-air market was a fun place to do Christmas shopping; I loved visiting the Easter-Weaving school to watch women work the

looms; there were ponies one could rent to ride; and then there was Camp John Hay. Camp John Hay was an American military recreational base. We were permitted to use it, even though we were not military. They had an 18-hole golf course, putt-putt golf, and a wonderful restaurant called the 19th Tee overlooking the green. I have many pleasant memories of Baguio. One time, we even went to visit some missionaries at a very remote village near there. We parked our car on the road near a path and walked in. I can remember feeling vertigo because of the steep drop off by the side of the path and dad, tying his belt around my waist so he could safely lead me. The village sat on the very tippy-top of a green mountain, the kind of place where an airstrip just fell off the cliff into a valley. It was so beautiful.

There was a gigantic fresh water lake called Laguna de Bay that we could see from atop the FA hill. I heard a story that the largest crocodile ever found was caught in that lake. He was supposedly 5-feet long from his nose to his eyes and that the remains of a cow and a child were found inside him. I have been told that his bones are at the Smithsonian Museum.

My folks spent 20 years in the Philippines, I was there for the first 14-years of my life. We returned to America to stay in November of 1979, half-way through my 8th-grade year. Those years of my life are precious, as are all of the friends we made there. I am still in touch with not only my own friends, but also my parents' and my siblings' friends. Isn't Facebook a wonderful thing?

2 - Florida

Twice we returned to the states briefly for furlough. Missionaries often revisit the churches that agreed to support them financially to report on their progress on the mission field. After her graduation in 1974, my parents chose to begin their furlough by accompanying my sister Mary's choral group, the Madrigals and Guys on a tour of Europe and the Eastern Seaboard as chaperones. Besides getting the German measles in Germany, one event stands out in my memories. I was seven and enamored of all the beautiful people I got to tour with, but somehow, I lost sight of them in Heidelberg Castle. We were all wearing matching red jackets, but I got distracted by watching a wedding just as the group walked down into the wine cellar of the castle to look at the huge vats. That was pretty scary, let me tell you!

While stateside in the mid-70s, my parents finished their advanced degrees at UT and I attended my first public school in Knoxville. That was a nightmare for someone as innocent as myself; I was chased home from school every day by someone who wanted to kick my butt for being so naïve. I remember asking my mom about several words I had no idea could be used inappropriately. The next time we came back to Tennessee for a short furlough, I went to a Christian school.

Each time we returned to the states from the mission field, we would stop by Florida to visit my dad's dad. We also landed in Florida when we left the Philippines for good. I'm not sure exactly why we left or why it had to be in the middle of a school year, but I've heard it described as a rough patch for my parents. In November of 1979, we took up residence at D &

D Missionary Homes in St. Petersburg, Florida and I attended school at the Suncoast Cathedral. That meant that we were just across the Skyway Bridge from my granddaddy and gram, my aunts Ginny and Marie, their families, and their horses. Their 10-acre farm was situated in the orange groves and consisted of 3 houses, a barn, a chicken coop filled with chickens, 3 pastures, and 5 horses.

I loved my stern old grandfather, Harold Ervin Boyce, though I didn't get to spend much time with him throughout my life. He was from Buffalo, New York and served as a cavalry officer in the Army before WWII (before it was mechanized). Not only was his horse beautifully trained, but was his dog as well. Once I sat on the floor of his living room, just in front of his Lazy-Boy chair while he directed his old, white German Shepherd, Penny, to "wait." I loved to watch them do this trick. He placed food on the floor in front of her and told her there was a wall. She never took the food until he gave her the go-ahead. She sat politely, watching him until he freed her to eat.

His favorite thing to do to me was to place his large, strong hand on the top of my head and squeeze. "Do you know what this is?" grandad would ask. Then, he answered his own question, "A brainsucker. Do you know what it is doing? Starving to death..." He was a bit of an enigma to me; he was funny and relaxed, but also stern and strict. Though I was careful to mind my manners around him, I loved to spend time with him and listen to his stories. He had a train set that filled an old sunroom at the back of the house. I studied all the details he added to the towns, streets, and countryside surrounding his track. His imagination, however, was limited by his age. My cousins and mine were not.

Their names are Kipp and Kari. We spent hours together inventing new languages, recording goofy cassettes full of flatulence, and playing amazing games of make-believe. Kipp and I played on the haystack in the barn. Every day this massive stage became a sunken submarine or a World War II battlefield. We often fought over who would be the hero – the one who would “get” to die and tumble dramatically down from the top of the stack. I remember wondering what my grandad’s horse, Cloudy, thought about our noisy games.

You see, Cloudy was an albino quarter horse who could not be outside in the hot Florida sunshine during the day. She was just one of many horses who lived in that barn. I can still remember all of their names: Cloudy’s daughter was a paint named Smokey; my Aunt Marie had Comanche, a brown horse with a close-cropped mane; Aunt Ginny had a mean palomino named Pie-wicket who would bite the pudding out of you; and then, there was Dusty. She was the tame, old mare who could be trusted to carry an inexperienced rider like myself. Riding a horse with a distinction like that was both comforting and embarrassing – comforting because she was safe and embarrassing, because she was safe... Once I made the mistake of riding with my cousin on Smokey, *mistake* because Smokey was a bit of a klutz. A car came down the sandy road in front of us and it spooked the horse. She sat right down on her haunches like a dog. Vickie and I tumbled off onto the road before Smokey decided to stand up again.

I also remember sitting at the counter in my Grammie Peg’s kitchen chatting with her while she cooked, feeling the sand that covered everything, feeding the chickens, exploring my uncle’s print shop, and playing with my aunts’ dogs. Life in Manatee County holds a precious place in my memories, but this time spent in Florida was brief.

I have two more memories to share before I describe the next step in my journey and both have the clear marks of the hand of God on them. Right before we moved again, when I was in the eighth grade, I was hit by a car. Yes, it was every bit that traumatic, but not nearly as fatal as it could have been. I was straddling my bicycle on the corner of a very busy road in St. Pete. I stopped my bike next to the pedestrian walk button and pressed it. Just then, two cars collided in the intersection in front of me. A car that was going straight hit a car that was turning left into my street and pushed it across two lanes and up onto the curb where I was sitting on my bike. Somehow (angels) I was lifted into the air as my bicycle was pinned to the light post by the car and was set down underneath the rear axle of the car. The only injuries I received were a broken collarbone and a long cut on my right hip. When they called my mother, she ran out of the house barefooted and out in front of a car yelling, "My daughter has been hit!" They stopped and drove her up to the corner where I was. That certainly could have been a much more serious incident if not for the Lord's intervention.

Finally -- and this is the big one -- my dad. The enemy placed some serious attention on trying to end my dad's life over the years, but was thwarted many times. In 1980, the Skyway Bridge was hit by a barge and collapsed. My dad passed over that span less than 30 minutes before that accident happened. There were many anxious minutes for my mom and I as we waited for a call from the farm that he had arrived safely. God was our stronghold, and He delivered us. I will describe some of his other close-calls in the coming chapters.

3 - Colorado

The direction the Lord sent us from Florida was west. We settled in Colorado and my dad went to work for International Students Incorporated (ISI), which was headquartered at Star Ranch in Colorado Springs, Colorado. I got braces 4 days before the start of my ninth-grade year and was sent to Colorado Springs Christian School. I found out later that the \$100 a month tuition at CSCS was a hardship for my parents, but I had begged them to send me there. I told them that if they sent me to a public school, that I would be bad. I knew myself well enough to know that as a people pleaser, I was liable to do anything to make friends. Sadly, my past made me a little socially awkward and my parents couldn't afford to dress me in the cool preppy clothes of the early 1980s (Levi's shrink-to-fit 501 jeans, Oxfords or Izod shirts, Bass shoes, and penny loafers), so I didn't make many friends anyway. The braces didn't help.

I was still very much a good kid at that point. My neighbor was a very cute, worldly guy, and I fantasized about dating him, but I safely reached my sweet sixteen (never-been-kissed). I went to my junior prom in a pretty forest-green "Jessica of Gunnysax" dress, with puffy lace sleeves and imitation pearl buttons at the wrist. I finagled a later curfew from my dad, but wished I hadn't later when my date was impolite to the point of assertiveness with me. I made him take me home. I went to my senior prom alone in a strapless purple satin Gunnysax with grey stilettos (mom had to sew a sequined elastic border on the top of the gown to help me hold it up) and I had much more fun. Besides, I was 5'9¾ at that time and the stilettos made me too tall for any boy in our class, even if I wasn't a pariah that no one wanted to date.

I knew I wasn't hideously ugly by my senior year, but I found out much later that the enemy has repeatedly attacked me in the same tender place in my heart: my self-esteem. On one particular occasion, quite by accident I found myself at an arcade with a boy from my school that we will call John. We played games together for a while and then we had a little make-out session in my dad's car. He then made me promise never to tell anyone. I was so flattered that he gave me the time of day, that I wasn't hurt by his statement until quite a while later. This event, in concert with the one I described earlier with Sharon and many others to come, created the mantra I played over and over in my head. This "message of the arrows" (Eldredge) tells me that nobody chooses me and that I have no value. I say "tells" instead of "told" because I still struggle with this fight today.

It was around this time that my dad had another close call. He was on a flight from Israel back to the US when the plane stopped in Istanbul to refuel and take on new passengers. One lady refused to board for some inexplicable reason, so they had to go into the plane's cargo hold to retrieve her suitcase. While there, they found a bomb. It was set to go off somewhere around the same part of the world as that bomb that detonated in a plane over Lockerby, Scotland. They removed all of the passengers from the plane and herded them into a waiting room for observation. They caught one terrorist and were watching the passengers to see if another would reveal himself. Dad said it was pretty unpleasant, because they had no idea what was going on; they were not permitted to eat, drink, or use the restroom for many hours. I say, "Much better than the alternative!" I am so thankful that the Lord kept my daddy and the others on that plane safe that day. That lady must have been an angel!

My junior year, I worked as a kennel manager (I cleaned cages) at a veterinarian's office. My senior year, I was a cashier at Bon's Pharmacy in the Springs. I attempted sports at CSCS, but I was cut after basketball tryouts and soccer didn't go much better. They didn't cut anyone, but I only played when we were losing by so much we couldn't possibly win or winning by so much we couldn't possibly lose. All I got out of the experience was shin-splints, so I worked from then on.

I made it out of high school in 1984, still a good kid, my innocence intact, still professing faith as a Christian. Here's a good example of who I was: my best friend Jill and I used to get crazy on the weekends - we drove down to the main strip through Colorado Springs, Nevada Ave, and cruised! There was a top-40s song that year called "Electric Ave" that was rewritten in Colorado Springs. The new words said, "We're going to rock down to Nevada Avenue, and then we'll take our clothes off...". However, our version of cruising was much more G-rated than that. We kept our doors locked, our windows more than ½ way up, and we *never* pulled off the road to talk to people we chatted with at the stoplights. We just laughed a lot and innocently flirted. While I was still a good girl, I hadn't owned my own love relationship with Jesus for at least two or three years by the time I graduated. I found out in the years to come that a child's faith and the faith of their parents are very different things. That would cause some problems for me in the not-too-distant future.

I saved up enough money working after school to purchase airline tickets to Europe for a graduation trip and my parents gave me a Eurail Pass. My brother was stationed with the Army in Fulda, Germany and my plan was to stay with my brother until he PCS'd (permanent change of duty); I would then activate my 30-day train ticket and travel all of Europe. I envisioned

myself sleeping on the trains instead of hotel rooms, buying long French rolls that I would carry under my arm, and see all I could as cheaply as possible. I would put my suitcase in a locker in Frankfurt, take only my backpack, travel through Italy to Greece, back through Italy to Spain, and then arrive in France around the end of my 30-day window. From France, I would purchase a ticket on the ferry to Great Britain, where I would hitchhike all over. I would eventually make my way back to Frankfurt to retrieve my suitcase and fly home. As you may have probably already guessed, none of that happened. By the time I got home, my mom and dad were on the verge of lunacy with worry and were five minutes away from purchasing tickets to come and get me.

What did happen was this – when the Army movers packed up my brother’s household goods my Eurail pass was in his desk. Yep. So, he loaned me \$300 to buy a new one. On the day he left, I left my cash and travelers checks in my suitcase in his apartment. Some American neighbors from a smaller apartment downstairs were moving up into his, so I thought it would be safe to leave my stuff there. Not so much... One of their friends liberated my \$300 dollars, and all I was left with were my travelers checks and a departure date for 45 days off in the future. I sent \$15 of my very precious dollars to try to change my ticket, but it got lost in the mail. Thus, my budget only allowed me only \$3 a day to eat.

Now, it wasn’t as bad as it seems. I had loads of fun. I hung out at the Schwimmbad (pool), in the discothèque, and at the food court where many American soldiers ate. I got a few free meals from my new young friends, but still managed to lose 18 pounds before I went home. I was still a good girl at this time. My innocence even survived a short-term romance with a cute Turkish boy, but there were some dicey moments. He couldn’t comprehend my

value system. Not only was there a language barrier (my 2-years of high school German was insufficient for explaining religious morality), but there were serious cultural differences as well.

Now, to tie up the dreadful scenario from my poor parents' point-of-view. I lost one of my contacts sometime during the summer and I didn't have any glasses for some reason – my eyesight, uncorrected, is pretty poor. The night before I was scheduled to fly home, I went to the disco (bad decision). When I went back to the place I was staying and took out my remaining contact, I scratched my eye with it. Fast forward 12 hours or so... I got off the plane, blind, with a huge patch on one eye and 18-pounds lighter than I was when I left. I can only imagine their distress! Was the Lord looking out for me? Absolutely. Only He knows what my being stranded in Fulda saved me from.

My Colorado chapters don't stop here, but my childhood does. When I got back from my trip I went to work at the soda fountain in the back of the pharmacy of the Broadmoor Hotel. I enrolled in a couple of courses at Pikes Peak Community College, participated in a beauty pageant, and then went to work at Contempo Casuals in the mall. My new friend, Bridget, was loads of fun and *very* spontaneous. This stage of my journey contains more than a couple of incidents that I am embarrassed about and that I am certain would have ended differently had God not been watching out for me. At this point, I think He was just keeping me alive because He loves me and had a plan for me, because I wasn't doing anything to earn His favor (not that we need to...). I wasn't a good girl anymore.

4 – Colorado, still

The downward spiral of bad decisions began right before I met my ex-husband. Bridget and I often hung out at the Odyssey. In Colorado in the 80s, there were such things as 3.2 beer and the bars that served it. This watered-down beer was legal for 18-21-year olds until it was phased out the year I turned 19; a grandfather clause allowed us to continue to drink and the bars to stay open until the last of us turned 21. We used to say, “The Odyssey on Saturday night. Somebody scream!” The theme for Monday and Tuesday nights was “New Wave,” an 80s fashion for music and clothing which I embraced whole-heartedly. The DJ on those nights was Tim, but we called him “God.” He worked at Independent Records at the Citadel Mall during the week and not only did he know everything about alternative music, but he was the epitome of New Wave cool. I stopped in to see him one day and asked him to set me up with some music you couldn’t hear on the radio. He gave me OMD (Orchestral Maneuvers in the Dark) and Yaz. My induction into the New Wave world was almost complete.

My next stop was the beauty salon for a shave, a mullet, and a dye-job. Now, mind you, it was 1985 and mullets were not redneck yet. The underside of my hair was shaved about halfway up, and then dyed fire-engine red; the right side above my ear was also dyed. I wore my mullet teased and spiked on the top with AquaNet hairspray. My New Wave makeover also included clothes shopping at the mall, Goodwill, and a good raiding of my dad’s closet. Decked out in leggings, scrunched up socks, my red leather wrestling boots, one of my dad’s cardigans,

earrings in all three of my piercings on each ear, and rubber bracelets all the way up my arms, I was ready to go party at the Odyssey. My mom wrung her hands. My dad chuckled.

That is what Bridget and I looked like the night we met Robert and Greg. We stopped into Safeway to pick up something, and when we were leaving the store we were stopped by a carful of people (a couple and two single men) who were going to Denver and wanted us to go with them. Well, why not, right? Bad decision number ...? 2-3? If you count the mullet? Bridget and Greg, Robert and I got together that night. What followed were many other bad decisions. God did not factor into any of my thinking by this point. I am debating how much to tell about those days. I type and delete. Type and delete. But, it feels like God is sanctioning the retelling of this episode in my life because it is a testimony of His grace.

On our 1-month dating anniversary, Robert gave me a hit of acid. Bad decisions 4-23. I remember one night in particular. Robert was having a bad trip and was really bumming me out, so I drove from N. Nevada Ave to Fort Carson to drop him off and back (20-30 miles). It was pretty much a straight trip and I can remember zeroing in on the brake lights in front of me. If they stopped, I stopped. If they changed lanes, I changed lanes. At one point, I glanced up and noticed that I was just passing the house where I was hanging out, so I turned right in and parked. I cringe when I think of the selfishness and carelessness I exemplified back then.

It was a few years later, when I was telling someone this story, that the Lord truly convicted me. It was like He said, "Stop telling this story for its comic effect or shock value, like how cool you were for doing drugs... Instead, realize that at any point you could have taken a hit of acid from which your brain might never have recovered. Who made up this synthetic

drug you took? What recipe did they use? Couldn't they have had a bad day and messed up the formula? You are only alive and *sane* today because of My Grace."

That period of my life was short, just a few months. Years later I tried to become a cop in Colorado Springs. During the lie detector test they asked, "Have you ever tried...?" (fill in the blank). The answers were yes, yes, and yes. "When?" "1985." The officer laughed and said, "You don't remember much about 1985, do you?" My *only* standard was that I would not try something that was addictive. I had a friend who tried cocaine one time and loved it so much it terrified me. Thank you, Lord, for watching out for me.

I have lost count of which bad decision we are on. After 4 ½ months, my mom and dad found out that Robert and I moved in together. Actually, I admitted it to them. My mother accused me of being a "kept-woman" because I told her that Robert was only paying my rent - not living there. For some reason that offence overcame my fear of admitting to her that we were indeed living in sin. My dad had 40 acres in Walsenburg, CO that he had purchased as a place to go de-stress (he was having chest pains), but they were willing to sell that property. They wanted to send me to Austria for a year to be a nanny for a missionary family so that Robert and I could get some distance. We didn't see any point in that, so we got married by a judge on January 21, 1986. Just like that. Period.

A couple of months into our marriage, we had a party during which we both were using acid. Come to think of it, I think that was the last time. We started to have a horrible fight and I told Robert I was going to leave him. That was absolutely the wrong thing to say at that moment. We made a sort of pact in our early passionate days of dating: I would never leave him and he would never hit me. In his drug-addled brain he thought, "She's leaving me!" So, he

hit me. He pushed me back onto our waterbed, straddled my hips, and punched me hard in my right eye. I was black and blue for almost three weeks. Needless to say, I did not tell my parents, yet. I called out of work (and ended up getting fired for it) and decided not to leave him. Instead, I told myself that once could be an accident. Twice? That would mean it would become a habit.

We continued to fight on a regular basis and I quickly tired of that. He was very possessive of me and would not often allow me out of his sight. Here comes that cringy, selfish, careless me again... I decided that I needed to *get* him to hit me again so I could tell my parents about that and the first time. Then, they would support me leaving him. Ugh. I'm so sorry I was such a horrible person. I picked him up at work one day and told him I was going to hang with a friend. I was going to go to her house and get out so he could have the car. I didn't give him any say in the matter (I knew he wouldn't like that). Just before I jumped out of the car, he reached across the seat and slapped me; his finger-tips barely touched my face. Oh! That was it! My dad helped me move out of our house the same day and Robert moved back to the barracks. Broken lease, by the way... More bad decisions.

After few weeks of living in my parents' basement, I started to miss my husband. I started looking for reasons to call him up. He was enjoying his rediscovered bachelorhood and was still hurting, so he didn't let me come around much. I told him that I thought I might be pregnant, but he didn't really react to that at the time. When I found out that I was indeed pregnant, I decided not to tell him unless he asked, and he did.

"Did you ever find out if you are pregnant?"

To which I replied, "Yes. I am going to have a baby in February."

“No.” He said. “**We** are going to have a baby in February.”

He moved in with me at my parents’ house and we waited for Gregory Robert to make his appearance on February 21st, 1988. He was 5 days early and ended up having to stay at the hospital for a few days with jaundice. Robert had to work, so I drove myself back and forth to the hospital, but I was sore and tired. One day after Greg was released, I was again sitting in a hospital waiting room before another check-up. I had the baby in my arms because I couldn’t afford one of those nifty little beds they carry babies around in these days, and I had to pee. I just sat there and cried. After a few minutes, a lady came up to me and said, “What’s wrong sweetie?” She ended up holding the baby for me so I could use the restroom. That was probably the beginning of the independence I adopted as a military spouse. That identity ended up damaging my relationship with my husband, because he wanted someone who needed him. He didn’t realize that it was him and his job that forced that needy person out of me.

In March of that year, we received military orders to move to Berlin, Germany and Robert went ahead of me. When I arrived at the airport, luggage and newborn in hand, Robert did not meet me. I don’t remember why, but I do remember the struggle of heavy suitcases, broken German, disappointment, and a cab ride to the Army post. The need for independence nurtured...

4 - Germany

Berlin was fun and we partied a bit after we got there, but I think that our wild oats were just about sown out. There's one really crazy party story, but honestly, I can't think of a reason to tell it other than to make my husband look bad, and that isn't why I am writing this. It's one thing to tell about shared experiences we had if the point is to highlight bad decisions I made and the protection God gave me through it. It is another thing completely to focus in on another's weakness just because it makes a good story.

There were other cool reasons to be in West Berlin besides the partying. One day, Robert and I were exploring the city and we decided to head to the Reichstag (the Parliament building that Hitler burned to conceal his war crimes). We were riding an S-Bahn (elevated rail) and from a glance at the train map we *thought* we were supposed to get off at the last stop. We did think it was strange when we stopped at the second to the last stop and the train car nearly emptied, but we rode on. A few moments later, the train was sliding over a very tall and very thick wall. Then, we saw East German and Soviet soldiers walking with some very purposeful looking dogs around trenches and constantina wire. Sliding over a second wall, the train came to a stop inside an imposing train station – in Communist East Berlin. It was July and I cannot stress how hot it was – in more ways than one.

In the station, we could see both East German and Soviet soldiers walking around. I don't know exactly how it worked, but I guess people had to show identification and gain approval to use the trains before coming onto the loading platforms. We didn't know what

would happen. Would the train go back the direction it came from? Was its service concluded for the day? If we were discovered, it wouldn't have been catastrophic, but it would have been very unpleasant. East German soldiers would have probably arrested and hassled us for a while before turning us over to the Soviets, who would have taken their turn at the same. Eventually, they would have turned us over to the Americans, who would have also hassled us, busted Robert's rank, and then taken some pay from us for being so stupid.

So, we just sat there and sweated. And sweated. And tried to keep our English-speaking mouths very closed. It seemed like hours, but after about 30-minutes people started loading onto the train. Then, the doors slid shut, the wheels began to move, and we rolled right back over the first wall, the no-man's land, the second wall, and right into the first stop of free West Berlin. Robert and I could not get off the train fast enough! After almost hyperventilating for a few minutes, we were finally able to laugh! Good grief!

I can't remember what happened that turned my eyes heavenward again, but His calling was finally heard. I began to read my Bible every morning and have continued to this day with only a few exceptions. I attended PWOC (Protestant Women of the Chapel) and I led worship there. There were a lot of neat things that happened with that restoration, but the bottom line is that my faith was finally my own.

I really enjoyed Berlin. We lived on the 4th floor of an elevator-less building in an American community off-post. We had 3 bedrooms and Army-loaned furniture, so things were looking pretty good for our little family. We made friends who were couples who also had babies and we did family stuff together. We were permitted to ride all public transportation for free just by showing our military IDs, so we were able to save money by selling our car. We

were often out and about. One of our favorite places to go was the Wannsee – a beautiful lake with sailboats, beaches, and life-sized chess boards. However, Robert’s job required him to spend a lot of time “in the field,” so he was often gone. I became more independent as I managed a baby, grocery shopping, public transportation, and living on the 4th floor with no elevator.

That time in Berlin was a very precious time and one of great growth. We were there from April of 1988 until November of 1991. Yep, you guessed it. The fall of the Berlin Wall. I’ll tell about that in a few minutes. Right after I rededicated my life to the Lord, Robert and I decided that I needed to help the family finances by going to work. I found a job with the Department of Defense, working in a supply office. It was a good fit because the flex-time they offered allowed me to continue meeting with my PWOC group. I finished reading through the Bible for the first time ever and I even highlighted and color-coded my Bible in the process. I used yellow to point out words to the wise, red for evil, blue for encouragement, and orange for prayers. I even capitalized all personal pronouns where God or Jesus was the antecedent because I believe that all Bibles should do that.

I found myself at Burger King one morning before Bible study and I noticed a very harried, very tired looking man sitting across from me. I went to him and we began to speak. When I left him to go to work, he had my Bible. I grieved the loss of that Bible for days. Finally, I felt like the Lord asked me to release it so He could use it, which I did. A few days later, without any prompting from me, Robert’s first sergeant gave me his leather-bound NIV Study Bible. That was the beginning of a Bible ministry that would last several years. For every Bible I gave away, people would randomly gift me a few more.

On an early November night in 1989 I was watching CNN on AFN (Armed Forces Network) and heard early whispers of freedom. Robert was away on maneuvers or something, so I was alone with Greg. First thing in the morning, with Greg in an umbrella stroller, I headed to Checkpoint Charlie on the U-Bahn (subway) to see for myself. Checkpoint Charlie was one of the most famous crossing points between East and West Berlin. It was amazing to watch the Trabis – Trabants are little cars manufactured by the Communists - coming through from the East, but almost impossible to move through the crowd with my stroller. Onlookers handed drivers boxes of Marlboro cigarettes and carnations. Because all of the East Germans coming into Berlin were in cars, I couldn't greet anyone individually like I wanted. I was so happy when I finally got to a hug from an older German couple I met in the subway; they were exploring the city together for the first time in 40 years.

Navigating the city streets with a baby in a stroller while 2 million additional people were on them was a bit of a problem. Even with the main road in and out of downtown closed to vehicle traffic, it was very difficult to move around through 2 lanes of pedestrian traffic traveling each way. When I returned to Checkpoint Charlie on the second day, I brought my baby with me in a backpack so we could walk more easily through the congested streets. I stood on a light post to take a picture of the 4 lanes of human traffic at that intersection; years later, I found an almost identical picture in a magazine! It was fun to think that some photographer chose the exact spot I did to take his/her photo.

After the dust cleared a little, Robert and I wondered how to get our own piece of the Wall without having to fight with the crowds around the Reichstag, so we went down by Potsdam. This area of the city was not very well traveled and we figured we could find a piece

there. Besides, the Wall came down very quickly in easily accessible places. In this area, the no-man's land was plowed under and a Humvee of sorts was parked right in the middle of what *was* the space between the two walls. The wall on the East Berlin side was already down. In this vehicle sat two East German soldiers who looked VERY bored; I remember feeling a little tickled about that!

We found a large panel that was fractured in the middle, so we were able to kick a piece out that was as big my two hands put together. What I like about my piece is that in the section where we got our piece, the wall was thin, so I have both the inside and the outside of the wall. The side that was facing the West has no graffiti on it because it was in the woods. The side that was facing the no-man's land of the East was *whitewashed* before the fall, and spray painted on with blue after the fall. I also like the fact that one can see rust where the rebar went through the concrete. I still like to take it to school at least once a year to let my students touch a piece of history.

The cool thing about the whitewashing is this: I got to go to a women's conference in West Germany. That was a crazy experience in and of itself. To exit West Berlin there were certain protocols and procedures. When all permissions were obtained, all i's dotted and t's crossed, paperwork in hand, and the train loaded, we would roll out of West Berlin. Stopping just inside East Germany, some Communist soldiers would double-check all paperwork while others paroled the outside of the train with dogs to make sure no one was trying to sneak through. The train was not permitted to make any stops during its passage through East Germany.

The women's conference was a huge blessing. Evelyn Christianson, who wrote *What Happens When Women Pray* was the main speaker. While there, I met my first charismatic Christian. She asked me, "Where are you from, sweetie?"

"Berlin," I responded.

She gushed, "Oh my goodness! You are so blessed! The Lord told me that the Wall is coming down!"

I thought she was just a little bit crazy, until the Wall came down. Then, I reported the incident to my ladies' group at PWOC. Our leadership in that group was so neat. We had several ladies who were in their 50s (I thought they were so old), and who were the wives of Pan Am pilots who were stationed in Berlin. It was so comforting to me to be around older women. Women my mom's age... One of them, Linda Carson, who was a mentor to me, asked me, "Did she tell you the verse the Lord gave her about the Wall coming down?"

"No."

"It was Ezekiel 13, verse 15. "So I will pour out my wrath against the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash. I will say to you, "The wall is gone and so are those who whitewashed it.""

Yep. Both sections of the Berlin Wall, both the wall that touched W Berlin and the one that faced E Germany and E Berlin were covered with whitewash. Only the interior, free part, was graffitied on. Pretty neat, huh? That's why I love that my piece has whitewash on it. And, when my secular students touch it, they do not know what they do not know about it. Glory to God.

My dad escaped another plot of the enemy's around this time. He was driving a busload of international students into New York City, heading for the World Trade Center when he got caught up in the traffic that followed the explosion in the parking garage. A few minutes earlier and he would have been there.

The rest of our stay in Berlin was pretty normal and crazy-free. I did have a miscarriage in 1991, but I was not very far along (7 weeks) and with God's grace was not very traumatized by it. In November, Berlin's 4th of the 502nd Battalion was deactivated. People with fewer than 18 months to PCS were sent to the states (either to Ft Carson, CO or Ft Ord, CA), and people with more than 18 months went to Kuwait. We were sent to California.

5 - California

While still on leave and before heading to California, Robert and I decided to buy a new car: a sort of reward for 3 years of saving money by using public transportation. We bought a black 1992 Nissan, 240 SX. Our first new car: it was so sweet and sporty! We drove all the way out to Monterey, CA from KY, where Robert is from. We made a poor decision to take the PCH (Pacific Coast Highway) up. Although it is a beautiful trip, we were so exhausted that we would have enjoyed it more some other time; it added about 6 hours to our drive. Within days we decided on an apartment complex in Salinas, which was a commute of about 30 minutes for Robert each day to work. The neighborhood was nicer than the community closer to Ft Ord

(Seaside – also known as Sleezeside), and it had a security gate to offer protection for our new car.

The first thing I wanted to do was find a new church. One day, when we were driving back to Salinas from Monterey, we took a wrong turn and passed in front of a church we hadn't seen before. The sign appeared to me as though it were neon! I knew that was where we were supposed to go. From that church, I joined a cell group called Yielded Vessels Ministry, headed by Kathy Shelton. It was there that the Lord taught me all about charismatic ministries.

The first thing that happened is that Kathy prophesied over me. She said she could see me as a teacher – as if I had crowds of children gathered, seated around me as I taught. I had told her nothing about myself. She also said that God was going to reveal Himself to me as in an instant. Over the coming months, He surely did - I witnessed all of the manifestations of the Spirit and was blessed with a few myself. I saw a woman distort in her facial features as she was delivered from a demon, and I received a word of knowledge for a friend as the Lord revealed to me that she was pregnant and smoking. The Lord also began to teach me about His healing touch.

One night, I was craving fellowship and visited a church in Salinas. As they did the altar call for prayer and healing, I began to experience a pain in my left hand. Almost immediately, I had the thought, "This is what arthritis must feel like." I went forward, received prayer, and was healed. Or, so I thought. When I shared this story as a praise at the next Yielded Vessels meeting, Kathy remarked, "Next time, see if the pain might not be yours." Not mine? What in the world? My hand, my pain, right? A few nights later at our YV fellowship, I began to experience a pain in my head. The pain was followed by the thought, "This is what a sinus

headache must feel like.” I went to Kathy and described it, when she in turn showed me where it was on her head. She said, “Yes, I have it too. Just a minute.” When there was a pause in activity, she signaled for me to say something. I asked if anyone was experiencing such pain. The person responded, we prayed, my hands began to heat up, and that person was instantly healed. Glory to God! Before we moved again, God blessed me with my own healing.

For a while, I had been experiencing some pretty intense stomach pains during the dark hours of the night. The hours of suffering left me curled up in a ball, or sitting on the toilet, or trying to make myself vomit. Anything to move my insides. The day after I always felt as if I had been hit by a truck. Finally, I sought medical attention. I had an upper and lower barium GI along with other tests. I was referred to an OB/GYN who decided that it must be endometriosis. He described how the tissue from my uterus could become detached and float elsewhere, and how it could become reattached inside the fallopian tubes where it would swell and cause pain during my monthly cycle. The doctor explained that the only cure was laser surgery to burn out the wayward tissue or pregnancy. I didn’t see how staying pregnant was going to work, so I went to see Kathy Shelton.

She got down on her knees and she spoke into my belly. As she prayed I began to feel heat on my left side, around the area I would guess that one of my fallopian tubes was situated. This heat traveled from the left side to the right side of my body. I could trace the path it was taking with my fingers and could feel the heat radiating off of my torso from 4 inches away. It lasted 2-hours. Robert could still feel it when I got home later that night. However, that wasn’t the end of it. At YV, I learned about a woman who was healed of her migraines. A few weeks after her healing she got a headache, but she said to herself, “I don’t know what this is, but I

know it isn't a migraine." The headache went away and her migraines never returned. You see, it matters what we say. The power of the tongue and its confession is grossly underestimated. So, thus armed, when my stomach pains tried to return a couple of weeks later, I said, "I don't know what this is, but I know it isn't endometriosis." The pain went away and has never returned. Hallelujah!

Physical deliverance is not the only kind of healing Robert and I learned about; we also learned about deliverance through spiritual warfare. The more I read about what Neil Anderson refers to as the excluded middle, "the real world of spiritual forces active on earth" (31), the more the enemy tried to scare and intimidate me away from learning more or standing in authority against him.

Robert was attempting to step into his role as the spiritual head of the family and was making some progress. Little Greg was about 3-years old and was demonstrating some pretty fierce temper-tantrums. Robert took him into our bedroom and closed the door. When they came out, Robert was pale. He told me that as he prayed over Greg, he felt a wind swoosh up (like out of Greg) and heard a sound like a flock of birds taking off.

Another time, Greg was very sick – flu sick. I let him sleep in our room so I could keep an eye on him because Robert was gone. He woke up crying and delirious, so took him in our bathroom to wash his face and calm him down. When I stood in front of Greg, facing the mirror of my bathroom, behind me one could see a hallway, the front door, and the bottom of the stairs descending from Greg's room. As I knelt with a with a wet washcloth to dab Greg's face, he got this horrible look on his face, leaned his body to the right so he could look around me and began to scream hysterically. Don't you know that my heart stopped for a few seconds? Of

course, I could see nothing behind me, but years later I was telling someone this story when Greg said, “Mommy? Did I ever tell you what I saw?”

“No.”

Greg went on, “I could see the Mutant Ninja Turtles walking downstairs from my bedroom with their swords drawn.”

You see, I knew that things could have spiritual attachments. I felt that the Lord had discerned me to avoid certain toys for Greg. I believe that evil can be prayed over something, just as blessings can be, so the Turtles were one of the things I felt uncomfortable about allowing Greg to watch or play with. However, he received a gift of a Turtle toy from a family member that Christmas and I felt weird discarding someone’s gift. I never had a conversation with my 3-year old about the Ninja Turtles being evil. So, where do you think his vision came from? Even *if* he was delirious from his illness...?

I had one more spiritual experience in California, but I will briefly mention that Robert experienced the hand of God too. He told me that as he stood in the shower, entire sermons would be dropped into his mind. He was lying in bed with me one night, having just returned from JRTC (jungle training in Panama), and he was twitching. They were shown about a dozen bugs, frogs, and snakes that can kill you in the jungle – so that made him twitchy for a while. While he jerked, I was awake, and I had the creeps. No joke. I was laying there with the heebee jeebees. I had a thought go through my mind, “Get up and go read Joshua 1, 18, and 23.”

The next thought said, “NO! If you get up, fear will grip you!”

But the last thought said, “Fear has already gripped you. Get up and go read Joshua 1, 18, and 23.”

Joshua 1:3 says, “I will give you every place where you set your foot.”

Joshua 18:3 says, “How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you?”

Joshua 23:12-13 says, “But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you can be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you.”

I was filled with a righteous indignation. This was *my* house, *my* family. My authority in prayer over my family was a gift given to me by God, but I needed to possess it and drive out the enemy. I got some oil and I went through our apartment, anointing everything and praying. The fearful feeling I had went away and the current assault against our family ended.

Our short stay in California had a few other blessings besides what I already mentioned: one of my neighbors became a friend who would contact me years later to tell me that I was a blessing to her; and, the city of Monterey was a blessing because of how beautiful it was – I loved spending time on the coast and at the sea life center. I learned so much during that time about the different ways the Lord can/will/does act. I have to say that over the years since, I have not experienced that kind of thing again. The Lord taught me that it is not about the fire and passion of the season, it is about the long-term faithfulness of the lover through the quiet times as well.

6 – Kentucky

After we moved away from California, we were homeless for a little while. We went to Florida where my parents had moved so dad could be close to his aging father. Newly released from the Army, Robert tried and tried to get a job, but it was a real struggle. He wanted to become a police officer, but couldn't get hired without the police academy and couldn't go to the police academy without being hired. After several months of unemployment, he finally got a job as a security guard at Mote Marina in Sarasota. He hated his solitary night work as, what he called being the "fish police."

I went to work at a daycare in Bradenton because that made sense. I could take Greg with me and his tuition was free. We attended Christian Retreat, a wonderful organization that is still thriving today, and continued to grow spiritually. We volunteered at a coffee shop operated by Christian Retreat, where homeless people could wash their clothes, take a shower, use the phones, and receive mail. All it cost was utilize all of these services was prayer; we got to pray for each of them. I really enjoyed that place and made a quite few friends.

Less than a year after arriving in Florida, we received word that Robert's uncle in Kentucky was terminally ill. His Uncle Robert and Aunt Zelda were like second-parents for him, and he spent a lot of time with them growing up. He decided that he didn't want to just return to Kentucky for a funeral, but wanted to go spend some time with Uncle Robert before he passed. So, we moved again.

In Kentucky, the job hunt was far more successful for Robert. He obtained a position with the Bourbon County's Sheriff's Department and was sent to the police academy in Richmond. A couple of years later he was able to transition to the Paris Police Department and enjoyed that job immensely. I learned that I was pregnant shortly after enrolling at the University of Kentucky to complete my degree in education. Life was fairly routine for a while. We moved to a wonderful rental house out in the country that had 5 acres, a barn, and a huge garden plot. I raised vegetables, canned them, and tended to the huge lawn. I even adopted a racoon! Do you have you any idea how fun (and complicated) life is when you have a pet with hands? The idea was that Robert would use her to train his Rocky Mountain Cur ('coon dog), but they were playmates instead.

Right before the end of my first year at UK, I gave birth to my daughter, Jessy, in April of 1994. I then transferred to Eastern Kentucky University, because UK changed their teaching program to a master's program. I began to commute 45-minutes each way to ECU for 2 years, until my graduation.

During that time, Robert's uncle passed away and we moved again. Robert and Zelda Wilson were married 50+ years and were never able to have children. They were hard-working country folk who owned a large farm and raised tobacco. They were each other's world. He is the only person I have been with as they died. We gathered around his bed that day after the hospice nurse told us the end was near. Zelda was holding his hand and I think the rest of us were touching him too... I remember thinking, "Keep touching him while you can, Zelda." The cancer that killed him caused him some pretty horrible pain for the last couple weeks of his life, so I think we were all relieved that it was almost over. Zelda had been reluctant to let the nurse

give him as much morphine as he needed, because she didn't want him to sleep all the time. He was sleeping then, as we watched him together, and Zelda tried to be strong. Then, he opened his eyes, looked *only* at her, and shook his head from side to side. I always thought that he was thinking, "How will she go on, alone?" And then, he went.

I have only been to one funeral where the family was not a religious one. There were no prayers, no sermons, no discussion about life after death or the One who makes that possible. It was a funeral where dead just means dead. That funeral was for a student of mine a couple of years ago and was one of the most miserable and saddest things I have ever attended. Students were sobbing loudly and kept saying, "He is in a better place." Really? How does *that* work? *Is* there a heaven if there is *no* God? And if there is a God, are there no requirements to get there? Just *anyone* can go? What is there if not for the Hope of Glory? Robert Wilson knew Jesus as his Lord and Savior, so our grief was tempered with joy. He was *truly* in a better place, but Zelda was not. Robert and I were confident that if she were left alone, that she would climb into a closet and stop eating. So, we gave up our cute little rental house and moved in with her while Jessy was still a newborn. This marks the reemergence of bad decisions...

I loved Zelda very much and although she has passed, I still think of her with fondness. However, we were not a good mix under the same roof. That living arrangement lasted over a year, but when things came to a head it ended quickly. I took the first house I could find – another bad decision. The house we moved into was a sketchy place in Paris, KY. The owner was a bit of a slum-lord. The condition of this house, our financial distress, and my constant state of schooling were all nails in what would become the coffin of our marriage.

Although I was a full-time student, I did work as much as I could. I worked at a career in Mary Kay cosmetics and I subbed at local high schools. As much as I love Mary Kay and continue to use it today, I was naïve to think that I could make a career of it. The inventory I kept stocked was a financial burden to us and Robert was becoming very disenchanted with me. By the time I graduated from EKU, I was pregnant again. There was no way I could go to work teaching with a December due date, so I remained unemployed even after the long-anticipated college degree was earned.

I thought Robert and I had finally reached this place of agreement. We went from fighting daily to fighting rarely and I thought we had made it through our very rough start. After 12 years of marriage, I wouldn't have described myself as blissfully happy, but I was content (and content with being content). Robert was not.

On Valentine's Day, 1998, we went to Golden Corral with the couples from our church. Instructions were given for us to go around the circle and talk about what about our spouses we were thankful for. Robert was visibly squirming. Later, after we had gotten home and been intimate with each other, I began to cry and asked him, "Who were you making love to just then, because it wasn't me." He had done something to me that he hadn't done before in our 12 years together. That was when he admitted to me that he was having an affair. He thought it would make me feel better to know that it wasn't just a one-night stand, but that just made me feel worse. To top things off, students in the schools where I subbed began to tell me about seeing my husband's patrol car parked next to a girl's car in dark parking lots.

My mom came to visit me from their current home, in Georgia. She wanted to convince me not to leave Robert by sharing some personal information with me, but it was unnecessary.

By then, we had 3-children and I wasn't about to give up on our marriage quite yet. There were some tense and unhappy months that followed. Robert gave me a sort of "list" of things that I could do to improve our marriage, to include cutting my hair (I cut off 18-inches). I filled that list and he made another one, but my parents had an idea.

Mom and dad had a renter in their house in Colorado who would be moving soon, and they hoped we would go stay there so we could get a fresh start. In July, I went to Colorado alone and found a job teaching at a small Christian school. In August, Robert and I packed up all of our stuff and put it into storage. The idea was that Robert would come to Colorado in December when the city of Colorado Springs had their hiring cycle. As he packed our 3-babies into our minivan, he wept uncontrollably. I tried to console him that we would be together soon, but what I didn't know was that he wasn't coming. The week I arrived in Colorado, he called me to tell me he had fallen in love with someone else, a police dispatcher from work, and never intended to come. Just like that at 32, I became the single mother of three.

He did, however, give *me* one more chance. He showed up at Christmas to spend 2-weeks with the kids. He started out by telling me that he missed them so much that he was willing to give me the chance to make him fall in love with me again. He left a letter of resignation in his desk at work, and if I succeeded, he would tell them to open it.

I tried. One day, I was exercising and he made a comment about my weight. At that time, I was 5'9 and about 135 pounds. I dared him to pinch an inch – the divorce diet had done wonders – but he wouldn't. Instead, he said, "She's 5'1, 105 pounds, has perfect hair, perfect nails, and keeps a perfect house. Compete with that."

Then, right before he left he was desperate and fussed at me. He didn't want to leave his kids and was disappointed that I failed to make him fall back in love with me. He shouted about how it was all my fault. Incidentally, one of his complaints with me was that I was too independent; I didn't *need* him. I found myself placing my hands over my ears and sliding down the wall saying, "Blah, blah, blah...". I think I came very close to having a nervous breakdown. I was *so* out of it, that I freaked him out! When he came to pick me up at work the next day, he was very concerned about me and had very red and swollen eyes.

He left at the end of the two-weeks, and I spent a couple of very miserable months feeling sorry for myself. He put me out of my misery in February of 1999, by making three consecutive phone calls to me. He actually just called to ask me a question about the taxes, but he was missing the kids and was angry at me for making him leave me. So, he started to fuss at me and I hung up on him. He called me right back to apologize, but after a few minutes he started fussing at me again, so I hung up on him again. A few minutes later, he called me again to apologize. We spoke civilly for a little bit, but then he started fussing at me again, so I said, "Oh my gosh! Have I thanked you for leaving me yet? Thank you!" That was the exact moment when I got closure. I struggled for years to overcome the damage done to my trust and self-esteem, but I never really missed him after that. My road got a little bumpier with the parental and financial difficulties that single parents face, but I was determined to do it the right way and let God get me the right man, this time.

7 – Colorado, again