

Women Telling Our Story

Sample Chapters

Becoming Who I Am to Be

The answer that is given when the proverbial question of “What do you want to be when you grow up?” sometimes is far from one’s actual intent or desire, or is it? For me, the answer of my youth was to become a teacher. To be a teacher required that one complete high school and get a college degree.

My education though extensive thus far had not produced for me a lettered degree. I do have a degree in LIFE, however. My education began as early as five years old or at least that’s the earliest that I can remember. Verbal, mental, physical, emotional, sexual abuse rest at the core of my education. I learned what love is by seeing what it was not. Much of my education was learned in my mother’s home; A single parent, by choice, raising eight children while living on meager fare was no easy feat for her so it cost everyone, both children and parent, an enormous amount of pain throughout our lives.

This pain resulted in two marriages for me and totaling forty-one years collectively. My savings’ grace was my two sons borne out of the first marriage. It was because of them that I survived and the belief that there was something greater than me for which I was being groomed.

Finally, after one more devastating event at age forty-eight, my belief was confirmed. My answer came following a year-long sabbatical for which I sought answers. It was through prayer and meditation that the answer came loud and clear, “Take care of my ladies” those who are broken, imprisoned mentally, physically, spiritually. At this point I had buried the most horrific experiences of my life deeply within and so I questioned the directive stating that I was not qualified. It was as if a segment of “This is Your Life” began to play in my head reminding me of all the lessons that I had completed up to this point.

Help Me Help Me

- The Plea of Surrender and Success

Every one of us will go through a situation in our lifetime when we will voice silently or loudly this plea, “Help me help me!” If we are fortunate and have developed a relationship with a higher power greater than ourselves, help will come and it will be the kind of help that will bring correction, healing, and wholeness.

It takes time to create our issues and so it generally will take time to process the cure. I'd like to introduce you to Janiece.... Janiece was fifteen years old when she decided to take matters into her own hands after being abandoned by her mother. She was a smart girl, pretty, long blond hair, shapely and sported a very confident attitude.

Because of all she seemed to have going for her she was invited into some of the best social circles without question. No one knew her back story and she didn't bother to tell them. She was enjoying the attention and all of the perks that it afforded her. Janiece met a man fifteen years her senior. He was very successful, charming and promised her a good life. She accepted and moved in with him. For the first few months he was very good to her. He bought her new clothes, a car, jewelry, wine and dined her and taught her how to be a lady.

Six months into the relationship things began to change. He no longer sought her company, stopped providing the special treatment and began to request 'special' favors from her. When she refused, his requests became demands. She was being pressed into service as a prostitute and when she could not willingly fulfill her duties, he began to feed her drugs to help her. It wasn't long before Janiece realized that she was in terrible trouble.

Janiece was raised from age 3 to 14 by her grandmother. Her mom and dad, both drug addicts gave her to her grandmother to raise. Her grandmother died when she was 14 and her mom then comes forth to care for her and stays until Janiece's inheritance from her grandmother has been expended. She then leaves Janiece to fend for herself. Janiece's grandmother was a god-fearing woman. She made sure that Janiece knew who God was, that God loved her and that God would never leave her. With one devastation after another occurring in her young life, she forgot for a while about this Source, this Power, Secret Weapon that she possessed.

Janiece got caught up in the freedoms that had become available and plentiful to her. She moved away from the old and familiar community, friends, church.... Now, she finds herself in a

situation that she alone can't fix. Having no one or nowhere to turn she suddenly remembers her grandmother's words,

"you" have Someone who loves you, a Secret Power, God will never leave you. She had learned while going to church to call on God, how to get God's attention and so in her private time she would begin to pray. She would begin by acknowledging the mistakes she had made, apologize for abandoning God the way she, herself had been abandoned. She then began to ask for help. She was specific in her requests - clean me up; renew my mind; give me the strength to walk away from this lifestyle, people, places and things; establish me in new and right surroundings. She ended by thanking God for hearing her and delivering her. She believed that God would do all that she asked and more.

Janiece would repeat this prayer several times each day and would begin to put her new thoughts into action little by little until her circumstances began to change. God heard her plea for help and her answer came with one provision - "Now that I have helped you - go and help someone else."

Faith without works is dead (James 2:26 KJV) the lack of works reveals an unchanged life or a spiritually dead heart. Faith requires that we demonstrate our belief in a power (God) greater than ourselves. We put that belief into practice when we live our lives based upon an invisible power source who empowers us to work in other's lives to bring about unmet needs without regard to our own sustenance.

It's Midnight

The time that I'm writing this really is midnight but this title came to me as I was thinking about some of the ladies that we talk with. They describe their lives as a kind of midnight, a very dark period of time that seems to last for an eternity.

They're asking, "How did this happen? I was doing so well and all of a sudden, I took a wrong turn; was in the wrong place; allowed my temper to get the best of me; I thought I was strong enough to visit my friends, I wasn't; I didn't think they would see me; I was trying to defend myself; and the list goes on...

The number of women who are incarcerated has more than doubled in the past 3 years (2004) alone, races are reversed, there are now more Caucasian than African American or Hispanic women in our local jail alone. Crime does not discriminate, they are poverty stricken and professionals, ages 19 - 90, in good and bad health. They are women with children and grandchildren. They have sinned and are paying their dues.

Midnight soon turns into day, when everything is seen more clearly. The mission of A Will & Way is to assist some of these women to emerge from their midnight armed to face the Day.

"Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."
Matthew 6: 11-12

My Story

The Hidden Ways He Says “I Love You”

By Tonya Jones

Have you ever been out in the hot sun with no where to turn for shade and the air is so still it's like an oven and you quietly think to yourself, “ I wish the temperature would go down” and suddenly you feel the most refreshing cool breeze sweep across your face? This is really a hidden ‘I love you’ from your Father in Heaven. Your Father loves to use hidden codes to let you know His love is real. It helps Him to put hard to express emotions into words meant for you to understand. His hidden codes let Him be private with you in public, so He keeps His ‘I love you(s)’ that are meant for only you from being one size fits all.

By doing small things for us that only we notice can strengthen your love and faith in him. He knows exactly what to do to make sharing and talking with Him less scary, because let's face it, we don't always know what to say when praying or just talking to Him. Learning to discern His hidden codes or even gifts can help you to bridge the Father-child communication gap.

By doing this you will begin to create your own hidden codes or cues that say, “I love you Lord”, and can get you both fired up!

This is My Life

By: Lisa Louann Cosby

I am 36 years old, this is my fourth time in jail I have had county and state sentences and on my way to prison now. I am single and have four children, two of them live with their dad and two live with their grandmother. I have a 7th grade education. My addictions are crack cocaine and trying to make everybody else happy. My work experience includes customer service and retail.

I was born on January 23, 1972 in St. Louis Missouri. I was a month old when my birth mom left me in a car wash with my father who beat me down mentally and physically abused me. He knocked out my teeth, broke my jaws, knees.... I left when I was 16 cause he shaved my head. I started Christian school, I got pregnant, when my first daughter was born I got married so I would not have to go back to my father's house. Then my husband started beating me so I left my daughter with Lynn, the school teacher, got on a bus for a whole new life then Greyhound left me in Illinois. I lived there for 18 years. Lynn ran off with my daughter, I couldn't find her I did look for her everywhere, they moved a lot, everywhere, every time ?I'd come close she'd move again.

I had my oldest son on Labor Day of 1990, then had my youngest daughter on Labor Day 1991, my son was born on the 5th, 1990 then me and their father separated after 7 years because of his drug abuse. Then I started drinking and smoking pot. He took me to court, he had a lawyer and I didn't so he won custody of the children. That broke my heart, I started smoking crack cocaine, I was in prison within 6 months of starting to use. I only did 6 months. I got out and stayed clean for 14 years but meanwhile I was trying everyday to stay clean. I got pregnant with my youngest son , he also was born on Labor Day 1999. Our house burned down, my sister in law lived here in Pensacola, she sent me a ticket, I came here. After 6 months of being here the state of Illinois told me to come get my daughter and son because their dad was sexually abusing them. So I went and got them, brought them back here. Here I was doing good then Hurricane Ivan hit. I meet this lady with a lot of money, I started using again and can't stop. I lost my children all over again. Now I am here, can I ever be forgiven?

My goal is to become greater in God; get a good job, more self respect; lose 50 lbs; get me a new set of teeth and feel good about me. Imagine me loving me again.