



# My Path to Praise

A Private Journey from Hell

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## Introduction

I want to introduce to you the old me. My actions resulted from hurt, pain and out-of-control emotions. But God's

grace is real.

*"I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Psalms 139:14, KJV)*

It's epic, heroic, monumental and narrative. The drama is real and intense. Yet, God's legendary power of healing and deliverance is real only to remember that the *"... that they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Revelations 12:11, KJV)*

Thank you Lord for your grace and mercy upon my life, your mercy does endure forever.

I grew up in a middle-upper-class neighborhood in Philadelphia Pennsylvania. My family consisted of an older brother and younger sister. My mother was and still is a true matriarch. She is the type of woman who demands respect by ruling her home well. She was estranged from my father and later married my first stepfather. Surprisingly enough, that time wasn't so bad because we got along very well. This was largely

due to my biological father's regular visits when he wasn't traveling around the world as a Merchant Marine. It was as if I had two dads at the same time. That was great! Later on, at the age of sixteen, I learned of my father's death; he had a heart attack. From that moment, something happened to me. I felt my heart drop after my mother shared the news. I was speechless for several weeks. I couldn't believe it. My father was gone. How could that be? I felt abandoned, and my life began to change. I felt like the wicked witch in the Wizard of Oz just melting down to nothing. I remembered feeling a tremendous loss. As a result, I was constantly depressed, experiencing low self-esteem, never fitting in anywhere or with anyone. I felt like a lonely girl living in a bubble. I sat in that bubble watching the world pass me by. Everyone around me, including some of my high school and middle school friends, seemed to be so happy. They seem to have it all together. They seem to know what they wanted out of life. I wanted something other than my own life. I just didn't know what it was; I didn't know how to achieve it, and I didn't know how to explain it.

My father acted as my shield of protection. When he was around nothing else seems to matter. We had so many happy moments. My happiest moments with my dad was when I went to restaurants with him as his date for the night. We both loved seafood. I was just like my dad. We had picnics in the park, and we had long talks sitting in his canary yellow Cadillac while he told me all about the birds and the bees and

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the do's and don'ts. I can only remember having two or three close friends, one of whom was my father because I found it difficult to trust anyone, especially other girls in my age group. I just couldn't find trust or integrity among them.

Several years passed before my stepfather died from heart failure; that was another major disenchantment in my life. During my teenage years and early adulthood, my mother and I couldn't seem to get along. I fought with her all the time. That led me from sadness to anger which always ended in confusion. My soul was a cellar full of pain, fear, and anxiety. Every day I watched my friends and their moms hang out together and do special things together. I knew I was missing out on something. But despite all of that, my mom instilled good morals and values in me.

As a result, I managed to put myself through college and acquire several degrees. I was determined to live on campus even though I lived fifteen minutes away from home. It was my great escape! Basically, I needed to get out of my mother's house, live on my own, do my own thing and make my own decisions. I didn't realize that I was trying to find myself. Satan was also seeking whom he could devour and destroy. He got a good head start. Satan made his moves in my life. And since I didn't have God to rely on, I was defenseless and weaponless. I was not prepared for what was to become a suicide mission to hell.

I went through my entire childhood and early adult life not knowing who in the hell I was. I just didn't

know my purpose. Why was I born? What was my mission? Where did I belong? What role was I supposed to play? Who were the characters in my life, and what were their roles? I wondered if I could play *my* part right. To me, life was one big show where the characters all had their roles.

However, the role that was handed to me never seemed to fit. You know, being who everyone wanted me to be, saying all the right things, and definitely looking the part, even though I was always told I was too skinny. Compared to the other girls, they were right. So I bought into the lie that I had to have the big legs and big booty to be accepted, especially by the more popular boys. They ignored me anyway. Could it have been because of this awful rash I used to have on the back of my legs, arms, and neck, not to mention my allergies and hay fever that haunted me like a plague? Every conversation was disrupted by three or four sneezes. I hated it! I felt so imperfect, ugly, and sickly. I was a mess. So I thought.

Boys in college were my temporary fixes. It was easy for me to blame my mother for all my miseries, but it wasn't her fault. My mother did the best she could. She was a hard-working woman who made sure her children had the best of everything. Finally, after a victorious battle with lupus, my mom received Jesus Christ into her life. She managed to lead all her children to Christ and has been on fire for God ever since.

Back then I hated my mother because of the death

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of my fathers. I even hated that I was born. However, to this day I applaud her endurance and long-suffering. I couldn't figure out how she managed to endure the effect of two dead husbands.

I was an angry person because I had no friends and I was petite. I also hated myself for not having the nerve to continue my education and attend law school. I felt as if I had been cheated. I had strong feelings of bitterness, hatred, and unforgiveness dwelling deep down inside of me. With my entire world spinning out of control, my mother decided to remarry again. That husband later died of cancer. I couldn't figure out what was going on in my life, but I knew for sure I would never marry or allow anyone to get close to me. I did not realize God had other plans for me.

Once I completed college in 1982, I experimented with drugs and alcohol. I thought I had finally filled the void in my life. I started with a little alcohol and marijuana, and then I found myself freebasing cocaine. When I graduated to crack cocaine, I started feeling accepted in affluent circles which otherwise would never give me the time of day, including some famous artists whose names I do not care to mention. Now we had something in common; drinking, drugging and a satanic death wish. For many years, I'd managed to fool everyone. I kept my job and always looked good on the outside, yet was dying and broke on the inside. The deception didn't last long. The man I lived with for ten years found me in the bathroom



with an empty bottle of pills next to me. Obviously, my suicide attempt had failed. Getting my stomach pumped was one of the worst feelings in the world. I later woke up in the hospital feeling so disappointed that I'd failed. It wasn't a happy time for me because I had nothing to live for other than depression and misery.

After a few short years, my life started to spiral out of control. I lost everything, and I started to go insane. I'd lost my desire to live, so I attempted suicide a second time. I couldn't seem to do anything right, not even kill myself. I just wouldn't die! I kept waking up to more misery.

By the world's standards, my life consisted of a succession of rehabs and detox centers. I must say that each time I was released, I acquired a little more hope. I really believed I was free from those demons; healed, set free and all better.

I thought I would become a perfect person with a perfect life. Then I met my daughter's father, who made me pregnant only to begin that vicious cycle of drugs again. Now I had a partner in sin. Boy, was I deceived. Not only did we use drugs together, but there was an unborn child at risk. We were recovering addicts, which was an obvious recipe for relapse. We found comfort in each other because we cosigned each other's misery. We deceived ourselves and each other. Our death wish was camouflaged as love. It wasn't love. We were both sick in our addictions! We were confused about life and our purpose for our ex-

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istence. We loved each other through the eyes of an addict. I believe if we would have met under different circumstances the outcome may have been different. But even through all my disappointments, he is still a wonderful father to our daughter.

Thank God for my mother. We both became born-again Christians while Asia, our daughter, was still in my womb. Psalm 51, a psalm of repentance, was our daily devotion. Although I didn't understand what it all meant, I read it anyway. I believe this is why my daughter is alive and well today at 28. The doctors told me she would be physically deformed with many birth defects. They also said her brain would not function properly. In other words, she would not have a chance at being normal. But the doctors didn't realize that I had a praying mother. Even though I used drugs six out of the nine months of my pregnancy, my mom cared for me in my last trimester. I remember her hands feeling warm on my body as she anointed me with oil every night with prayer. As a result, Asia was born normal. There wasn't a trace of drugs in her body or mine. God's grace and mercy were obvious to everyone except me. Even after that miracle, I returned to drugs, leaving my mom to care for my daughter. I was now jobless and living off welfare, which I eventually used to support my habit. When rehab, NA, and AA didn't work, I tried to relocate, somehow thinking it would all go away. But I found out that wherever I went, there I was.

Now I would like to invite you to explore, journey

and reflect back with me to a life of pain and self-destruction. My life was defined as *“the making of a bomb.”*

That’s when personalities within oneself conflict with each other. It’s a constant warfare. It doesn’t take a lot of materials to make a bomb. Just spirits unwilling to submit, surrender, or humble themselves for Christ.

There is ultimate destruction. BOOM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I challenge you to allow God to defuse that time bomb within you as I have done. Are you subject to your own personal ticking bomb?

*“Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Romans 4:7-8, KJV).*

**HIS MERCY ENDURES FOREVER!**



## Wide is the Path to Hell

*“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7: 13-14, NIV).*

I was so excited to receive my first real job after graduating college. I worked with neglected, deprived and abused teenage girls at a residential facility. Not only did my new friends introduce me to themselves, but they also introduced me to freebasing cocaine, another word for crack. It started out so much fun and thrilling. There was a sense of euphoria in my high that it made me feel so powerful. Initially, we started to get high only on the weekends. Later on, we found every excuse to get high, including holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, New Year’s Eve, and any other day we felt like celebrating. Hours turned into days, days turned into months and months turned into years. I finally realized I had developed an addiction. I couldn’t do without it. I was no longer productive in my career, and the few friends I had begun to diminish. I became estranged from my family, and my personality

changed from being selfless to becoming selfish. My mood swings were so erratic that no one wanted to be around me.

My boyfriend, whom I lived with for ten years, and I began to get high together. The only difference between him and me was that he was able to control himself. He could stop whenever he wanted to, and that made me so angry with him. He tried to warn me that my demise was soon to come, but I didn't believe him. I had become a different person. After many nights of hanging out all night long, missing days of work, and isolating myself, that relationship eventually dissolved. My sense of self-worth dissolved as well. He couldn't help me, Lord knows he tried. My life was a mess. Even in the midst of my psychosis, the Lord continued to take me from danger. There were many instances in which, by all rights, I should be dead. Knives were placed at my throat, guns put to my head, and I was raped several times and left for dead. By His Mercy, I always escaped death. My addiction left me homeless and physically unable to hold any jobs. I and several others lived under a bridge in Florida.

This is where my drug addiction took me.

We had our own little community right off Sistrunk, a main highway in Florida. It was scary at times, but I had no other recourse. So, to survive, I developed a 'sticky fingers' habit. I had to find a way to provide privacy for myself while living under that awful bridge. So, I found several thrift stores to steal from.

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The items I stole were very essential to me, essential to my life; therefore, I felt the sin of stealing them was justified. Those items were curtains, which I hung from one tree branch to the other to separate my area from everyone else's, blankets, socks, pants, shirts, and shoes. Only the necessities for survival. I even stole a knife which I kept for protection against undesirables, including a certain police officer who would later arrest me for solicitation. Little did I know he was protecting me from myself; from my pain; from my heart ache. At least while incarcerated I found rest, food, and shelter.

Even though we were homeless and seeking out our next victim to finance our addiction, we looked out for each other. We protected each other. We shared what we had with each other. No one went without food, drink, or drugs. I thought that would be my lifestyle and my destination forever; I thought I would die there. I couldn't see any way out. I hated myself, but they seemed to love me. We had so much in common--- sin! God knows I tried to tame my sin, that monster, that demon, but I was unsuccessful. There were many times when I even thought that Satan was out of my life, but I allowed him back in as soon as one of my unresolved issues resurface. I didn't realize at the time that I was in spiritual warfare. Although I didn't have a relationship with God Almighty, I somehow knew I was dealing with the devil. He is a liar! He gave me false hope in people who were just like me. They were just as lost as I was with no hope of a

real life. I was so deceived. Each moment that I stayed in my addiction resulted in horrific consequences.

At this point, I had lost all hope. Fortunately, the Lord would always touch someone's heart and feed me. However, the crack houses I found myself living in had no running water and no electricity. I used candles for light (Now I am the light of the world!!) Even the rats didn't come nigh my dwelling; they seem to just scurry on by. While I was still living in Philadelphia, my mother would pick me up, drive me home, bathe me, feed me then return me to the crack house I called home. I believed I was meant to live this way. I was so blind. I became accustomed to my own stench; it was no longer offensive to me. I patched the holes in the bottoms of my shoes with pieces of my lost and found clothing. I sometimes wore the same clothing for weeks at a time. I hoped no one I knew would see me because I did not want to embarrass my mother. Her knees were probably already worn out from petitioning God for his mercy upon my life. I think there were times when she prayed that God would take me out of my misery. And I didn't blame her.

There were two things I feared the most: dying in my addiction, and my friend Carrie. I believe she had her watchdogs out on a mission to track me down. She was relentless. She just kept showing up in my life at the most inopportune times. And one day she said, "I'm your friend, that's what friends do." But I couldn't receive it because I was focused on my next high, and there wasn't a chance of manipulating her.

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She saw right through my schemes, which led her on a search for rehabilitation centers for me. Sometimes her own home became a place of refuge. Now that's a friend. That's mercy!

I'll never forget the night I was walking down the street on a mission from hell about 3 AM in Florida. A group of men and women whom I know to be missionaries jumped out of their car, surrounded me in a circle and begin praying in what they called the Spirit. When they finished, they jumped back in their cars and left. Just like that! They said God sent them on a mission to pray for me. My feet were stuck; it felt like 30 minutes had gone by before I could move. God's prayer warriors were on a mission that night. Mission accomplished!

Once again, God's grace was with me because I was facing five years at Florida State prison for possession of cocaine and soliciting my body for the cause of my addiction. A few moments before my sentence was to be announced, something happened. Judge Fogel decided to place me in a three-month drug program located within the city jail, away from the general population. By the way, Judge Fogel was a Christian. How about that for grace! It was there that I developed my gift for writing. I begin to write all my feelings down on paper. Of course, I was eventually appointed editor of the jail's newspaper. Believe it or not, I began to realize that God had his hand on my life. I didn't really know what it meant, but I knew He was there. Still, after I was released, I continued in my sin. It's



true that when God says he will never leave you nor forsake you, He means it. The Lord had his unique ways of drawing me close to him.

There was a man God used to bring me back into the ark of safety. While continuing to live on the streets in Florida, I would make my way down to a little church on the corner every Wednesday and Sunday night. No matter how high I was, I was determined not to miss those nights. I was drawn there because I could hear their praise and worship music miles away. I stood around the corner clapping my hands, praying that God would find it in his heart to give me another chance. I did want to be delivered. I just didn't know how. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know whom to talk to. I was scared and afraid and lonely. I didn't trust anyone anymore.

So, one day, I got up the nerve to sneak in the back of his church when I thought no one was looking. Somehow, they didn't seem to mind that I was looking bad, smelling even worse and definitely singing off-key. Then one day, a very tall, dark man walked up to me near the church and said that God sent him to pray for me. He said he would pray in the Spirit while laying his hands on my shoulders (I kept hearing about this Holy Spirit). The man was very polite, his voice was low, and his demeanor was very friendly. So, we prayed for me right outside the church in broad daylight. I fell to my knees and wept profusely. I wanted so badly to be delivered from that awful, wicked lifestyle, and God used this man to give me

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shelter in his sister's home with groceries and a warm bed to sleep in. It only lasted a little while because the sin in the world called me back out to play. During that time, I lived two blocks from my future husband and never knew it. We'd never met. I later found out, after we married, he had been going through the same addiction in the same neighborhood. I guess it wasn't time for us to meet. How bizarre is that!

Sin can be very embarrassing when laced with shame and self-loathing. I felt that. Every time I sought out my next victim to manipulate money, I felt myself slipping deeper and deeper into a pattern of shame. People would stare, point fingers, and whisper nasty remarks about me behind my back. But I heard them. They were right. It reminded me of small children calling me names and throwing rocks at me. They called me dirty girl, stupid girl and insane girl. Now I know how the woman in the Bible felt who was caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). They wanted to stone her, make her pay for her sin. But by God's authoritative power, they knew they could not judge her. He extended mercy, although her sin was real.

Likewise, Jesus defended me too. He extended His love and promised grace and mercy on my life despite what I had done, what I was doing, or what I was continuing to do. I was given countless opportunities to repent. He's such a loving God. He knew my future, but I didn't. I asked myself why I should repent. I had nothing to look forward to, but I didn't realize the plan God had for my life. *"For I know the*

*plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).*

His plan was set from the very beginning. The Bible says he knows every hair on my head. God says, “... He would never leave thee nor forsake thee” (*Hebrews 13:5, KJV*), and He never did.

I know this now, but back then, I was not reassured about anything, especially not my life or God’s love. I have become a master of manipulation while playing the blame game. I blamed everyone for the choices I’d made. I often convinced myself if my mom didn’t yell so much, I would be okay. If my live-in boyfriend would have been more patient...if I had more friends to talk to...if my fathers had lived a little longer...if I had a better job...if I had gone to law school...if I wasn’t so skinny...if my siblings and I had developed a closer brother and sister relationship...If my mother and I hadn’t fought so much. If this, if that, if, if, if...

The only thing about the ‘blame game’ is that no one was there to play with me. As usual, I was alone even in that deceptive theory; all alone at my own pity party.

Well, maybe not all alone, because Satan was there planting seeds of destruction and deception. He was the only unwanted guest who kept showing up, uninvited, pushing his way into my heart.

I was so confused and lonely. Even attending those NA and AA meetings didn’t help. They only confused me more because of the typical traditional acknowl-

edgment of addiction. They described my obvious short-lived surrender as a 'HALT,' meaning hungry, angry, lonely, and tired. That was the best description I've heard about myself in a long time. While we were called in the "rooms," we sat around in a circle of sharing our pain with one another, which, I guess, was a type of confession. What I couldn't grasp was the confession. I would say "Hi, my name is Rosalind and I'm an addict." But if the Bible says, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here*" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV), then why was I confessing that I was an addict? Something wasn't right. However, at least I had an excuse to justify why I would return to sin. They would understand. After all, I was an addict, right? Or was I? Their entire focus and purpose were to convince me not to pick up another drug. They said, "just don't pick up." Do anything else, 'just don't pick up'; another deceptive lie from Satan. So, I guess sex, manipulation, lying, cheating, stealing was all good. "Just don't pick up"!

HIS MERCY ENDURES FOREVER!