

MY JOURNEY TO HOPE

By Minister Jackie Williams

A close-up photograph of a golden crucifix, showing the figure of Christ on the cross. The crucifix is set against a dark red, textured background. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the metallic sheen of the gold.

*Life Lessons Offered to
Those Looking for Hope*

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DEDICATION

I thank God for pulling me out of a dark deep pit and bringing me into the life of light.

I dedicate this book to my loving, caring, understanding husband who never stopped believing in me. Thank you Archie.

I dedicate this book to my oldest daughter who felt my pain described in this book. She allowed me to tell her story in hopes of helping someone. Thank you Keesha.

I dedicate this book to my youngest daughter for her positive words and listening ear. Thank you Carmen.

I dedicate this book to a very dear friend Sister Ann. She saw in me what I didn't see. She encouraged me and believed that I could make it through school, job interviews, meeting new people and following my visions and ideas. Thank you my friend.

I dedicate this book to my new friend and mentor. My book would still be on the cabinet collecting dust if you hadn't come into my life. Thank you for the countless hours you have used to help me. Thank you for listening to me and lending me a napkin to cry a moment. You will always be in my prayers. Thank you Colleen.

Last, but not least.

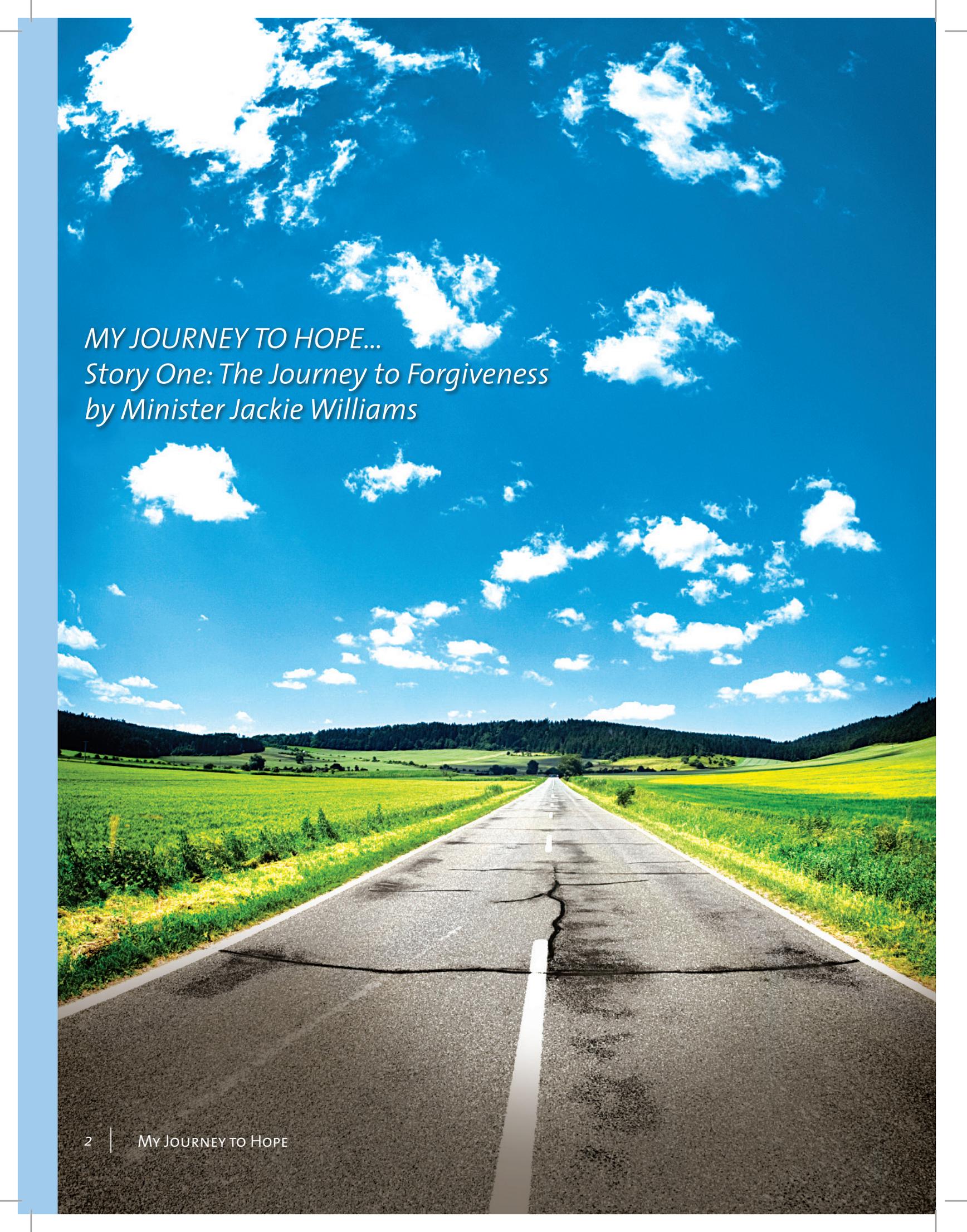
I dedicate this book to the women's hearts that this book reaches. May God bless you to find your true purpose on this earth. As long as you have breath in your body, it's never too late to change.

Have a Blessed Day, Jackie

“The most beautiful people are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity and an understanding of life that fill them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.”

Elisabeth Kübler Ross

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MY JOURNEY TO HOPE...
Story One: The Journey to Forgiveness
by Minister Jackie Williams

I still get chills up my spine when I hear the words “child abuse.” I was abused as a kid, married at an early age, had children young, abused drugs and alcohol and lived for years filled with anger and hate. I suffered through depression, denial, abuse, addiction and I’m still finding my way back home, to that peaceful place inside. Here’s my story...

I didn’t know who I was or why I even existed. I had lost everything and I felt like I was worth nothing. No one cared. The only one that could get me out of my mess was me. I decided to sit down and for the first time ever, be honest with myself and ask myself “How did I get here?” and “How do I get out?” “How did I have peace at one time in my life and now I have torment?” I had to keep asking myself to look at my life and search for clear answers to these questions. The answers would guide me to knowing what I wanted out of life now.

All this reflection took me back to being a kid. I thought of my house and home in chaos. I worried all the time—about my mother being away, about her boyfriend abusing us, about my sister and brothers not being safe. In the midst of all of this turmoil, I met a lady next door. She was very spirited and encouraged me to come to her church. I did.

When I got there, I realized I didn’t know how to pray and had to wonder if God cared about me at all. I cried out for God. In that moment, He brought me peace.

I could be home, among all the trouble, and still feel peace. I slept well and enjoyed much of life. Some time later, I found out I was pregnant. I felt ashamed and was sure God was ashamed of me. Not only did I feel bad about being pregnant. I believed I was bad and that wrong idea made me lose my connection to God and to the peace in my heart.

What followed was a series of problems. For one, my mom was furious at me. I lost interest in school and then found myself dealing with a baby. There were so many things that kept my mind angry all the time. I wanted my mom to love me and to help, but instead she was with this man who wasn’t good for her. She told me I was driving him away, and I felt driven away by her.

I met a guy and he wanted to marry me. My mom told me he was the best man I would ever find. I was afraid she was right. I was also worried about my



baby daughter being abused and while feeling lost, the one thing I knew for sure was I didn't want her to live in the same turmoil that I had. When I was pregnant, I didn't think about the baby much and didn't really love her—until I saw her. She was beautiful.

I got married at the age of 16. His mother was in a rage toward me. She would say hurtful things like “your mother put you off on my son.” I kept putting this anger toward her and my mother inside of me. And I kept hoping that maybe he'll be my savior, maybe it will all be okay. I didn't go that way.

He wanted to be the father I never had. He didn't know how. He was angry and controlling and he wanted more children. He said he wanted a football team! As things with him got worse, I started to think...if I got away from my mother I can get away from him. I was realizing that the love I always wanted was not here.

One abuse was leading to another and kept growing, with no end in sight. I was drinking more. I felt best when I was full of alcohol and drugs. I had left my husband and met another guy who I truly thought I loved.

Friends introduced us, telling me he was a good guy. They didn't tell me some important things I'd find out later—like he had been in prison for abusing his family.

I thought the world of him and didn't think about taking care of my life. My utilities were cut off and I had not tried to seek help with a budget plan, or anything else. There was so much to handle and I felt very alone. My thinking was clouded by drugs and alcohol and I felt afraid to let people know I needed help. My man would go away and I'd tell myself “don't be afraid, he'll be back.”

The whole summer was a nightmare. I kept trying to get more alcohol and marijuana. I'd walk blocks during the night to get it. One night I left the house with the man and my two daughters, ages 7 and 5, at home. I was walking to the corner to get some drugs and left the door open, knowing I'd be right back. When I returned, the doors were locked. I was terrified, I didn't know why. When I got in I knew that he was abusing my daughters. I took them out of the house and called the police for help.

I thought of my mother and her man. And now I was in the same situation. I understood what a man can do to your mind. I decided not to trust anyone and from then on, I was always watching.

The police turned my case against him over to the courts. Time went on and I was using more alcohol, felt more rage, had no mother and asked nobody for help. It was at this point I had a nervous breakdown and didn't even know it. The DA was getting ready to put him back in prison. The abusing man would say he didn't do it—someone else in the house did. Everything was confusing to me and overwhelming.

I then remembered that the only time I had peace was when I went to the house of God.

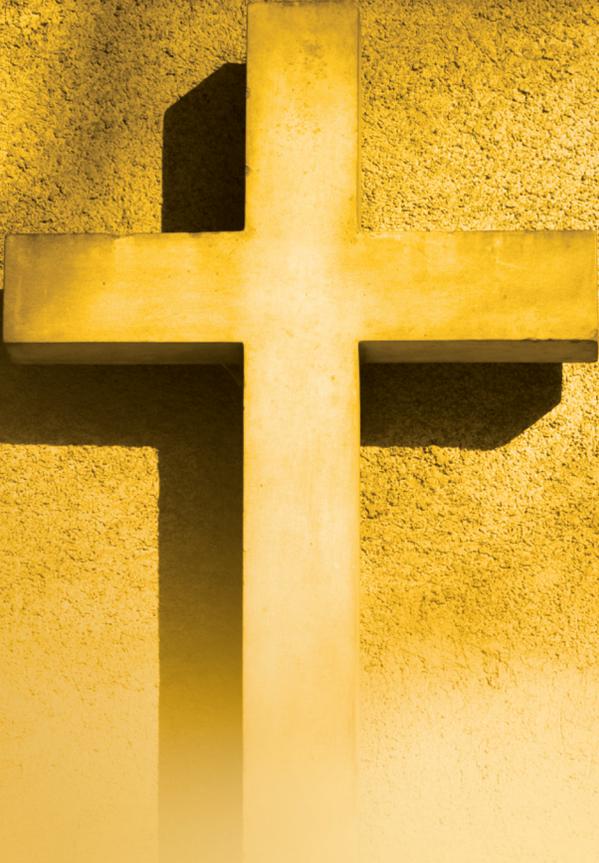
I walked down the street on a Friday night, trying to find a church that was open. I looked a mess and was a mess, but I kept going. I had to find a church. I just wanted to sit in the peace and think. I found a church door that was open.

God's peace was in that place. My mind flipped out. I was crying and screaming, yelling out loud, yelling at God “Did he do this to my girls? Is he guilty or not?” In the midst of my crying out, all of a sudden I heard God say “Yes, he did do this to your baby. And yes, I, God, will handle it.” I knew this was the truth. I cried and called out...” Why are all these bad things happening in my life?” God told me to stop hating my mother and her boyfriend. In that moment, my mind got peace. That was the first time I heard God speak to me. More times would follow.

Good things started to happen. I just happened to pick up a newspaper and found a place for rent. The kind lady who owned the house let me have the place with no deposit. The police let me go because I had found a house and was trying to do the right things. I was waking up to the fact that some of my friends weren't friends at all and that my mother was troubled in her own way and she probably did love me. I also realized I could help myself—with God's help. I learned how to ask for help too.

It took me years to go through this cycle of peace, pain, and finally peace again. I'm still learning about how to live a happy life and want to help others find peace as well.





GROUP DISCUSSION

Story One:

THE JOURNEY TO FORGIVENESS

Please take a few minutes to share some of your story with us.

- 1. Is there a time when you felt afraid, hopeless and lost?*
- 2. What helped you get through it?*
- 3. What have you learned?*
- 4. How are you using some of the lessons life has taught you?*

WISDOM from SCRIPTURE to Help You:

Personal Reflection:

Forgiveness is not an easy thing to do, but it must be done by each of us.

The scriptures below deal with the forgiveness that God wants to give us, his people. God has the power

to forgive all sin, no matter how bad it may appear to us. He said his forgiveness is to remove it from us as far as the east is from the west. God is a gracious and merciful God. God loves us so much that he sent his only begotten son to suffer a horrible death. Jesus had to be able to forgive all of the Roman soldiers who mistreated him. Luke 23, 24. No matter how many times they tried to kill Jesus, he knew his appointed time to die. He didn't let the bad treatment he endured keep him from loving others, from healing the sick and for doing the will of his father.

Forgiveness teaches us how to restrain our anger toward others, so we don't hate and want to get even. That's being wise in the power of God.

FORGIVENESS

Matthew 6; 14-15 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 18; 21-22 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus sayeth unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times:

Psalm 103; 12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Psalm 145; 8-9 The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.

The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.

Proverbs 10; 12 Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.

Proverbs 19; 11 (Life Recovery Bible) A wise man restrains his anger and overlooks insults. This is to his credit.

Isaiah 44; 22-23 I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: shout ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.

Joel 2; 12-13 Therefore also now, sayeth the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping and with mourning:

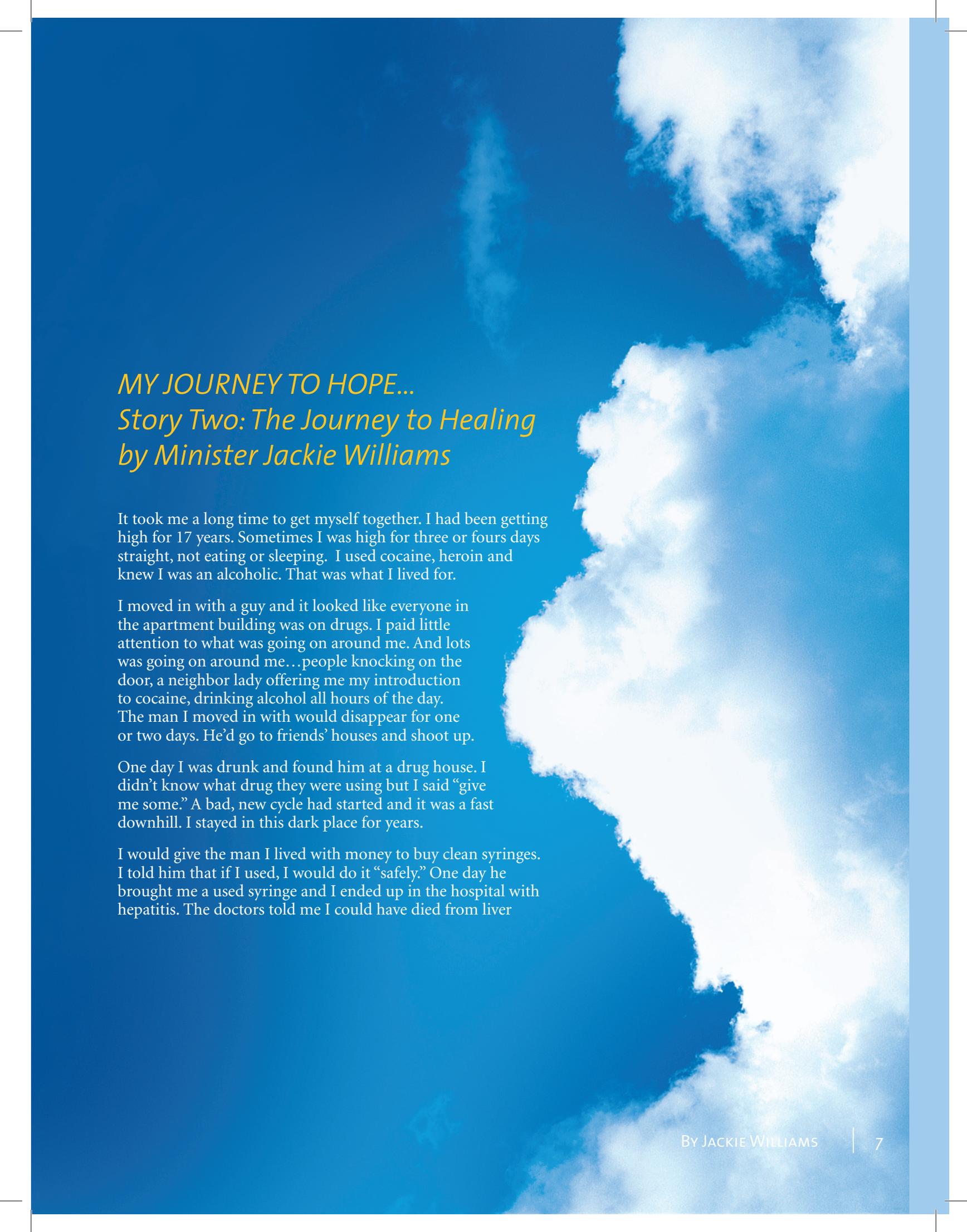
And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness and repenteth him of the evil.

Colossians 3; 13-14 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. (love—unity)

I Corinthians 10:13 But remember this—the wrong desires that come into your life aren't anything new and different. Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you. And no temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it, for he has promised this and will do what he says. He will show you how to escape temptations power so that you can bear up patiently against it.

Personal Reflection:

In moving from devastation to emotional wholeness, even with the Holy Spirit leading us, the pain of the healing process from emotional wounds can be more traumatic than experiencing physical pain. Because I experienced so much emotional pain, I grew weary of hurting. I was attempting to find healing by following the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Yet I could not understand why the process had to be so painful. The Lord showed me how that each time I went through one of the painful events or situations (being sexually abused at home, being ridiculed at school, being subjected to constant fear) it was like a new doorway of pain. The Lord revealed to me that I had been hiding behind many such “doorways of pain.” I was deep in bondage, taking refuge behind false personalities, pretenses and facades. I began to understand that when people are led out of bondage into freedom, they must pass back through similar doorways of pain to get on the other side of those doors. They pass through not actual experiences such as abuse, but the emotional responses to the experiences. To deliver and heal, the Lord must lead us to face issues, people and truths that we find difficult, if not impossible, to face on our own.



MY JOURNEY TO HOPE...
Story Two: The Journey to Healing
by Minister Jackie Williams

It took me a long time to get myself together. I had been getting high for 17 years. Sometimes I was high for three or four days straight, not eating or sleeping. I used cocaine, heroin and knew I was an alcoholic. That was what I lived for.

I moved in with a guy and it looked like everyone in the apartment building was on drugs. I paid little attention to what was going on around me. And lots was going on around me...people knocking on the door, a neighbor lady offering me my introduction to cocaine, drinking alcohol all hours of the day. The man I moved in with would disappear for one or two days. He'd go to friends' houses and shoot up.

One day I was drunk and found him at a drug house. I didn't know what drug they were using but I said "give me some." A bad, new cycle had started and it was a fast downhill. I stayed in this dark place for years.

I would give the man I lived with money to buy clean syringes. I told him that if I used, I would do it "safely." One day he brought me a used syringe and I ended up in the hospital with hepatitis. The doctors told me I could have died from liver

disease and that I would likely be dead in five years. I was alone, scared and once again felt like I had no one to talk to. Even a man of God came to my hospital room to pray. He seemed to look at me like I was some trash from the street. He offered no guidance and no help.

After four years of addiction, I heard a voice at night that told me I had three choices: one was return to me, another was end up in a mental hospital or the third was possibly dying. I knew this was the voice of God and it was my time to make the right choice. I remembered years earlier, when I lived in a tormented house as a kid, God had told me he could give me peace. I heard Him say: "I can give you peace again."

In order to get my life together, I knew I needed to go back to church for guidance. Even though I was in such bad shape, I knew I had to take this step. Right then I decided that I will have my last drink, my last joint and the cocaine was finished.

It was the middle of January and we'd had a big snowfall. Things looked dark, dirty and depressing. I walked into a church and couldn't wait for the preacher to finish talking. I walked up to the front and I told myself "I want to give myself to God."

It took work, lots of work. I didn't know the physical, emotional and mental stress I would go through during withdrawal. It took God and me working together.

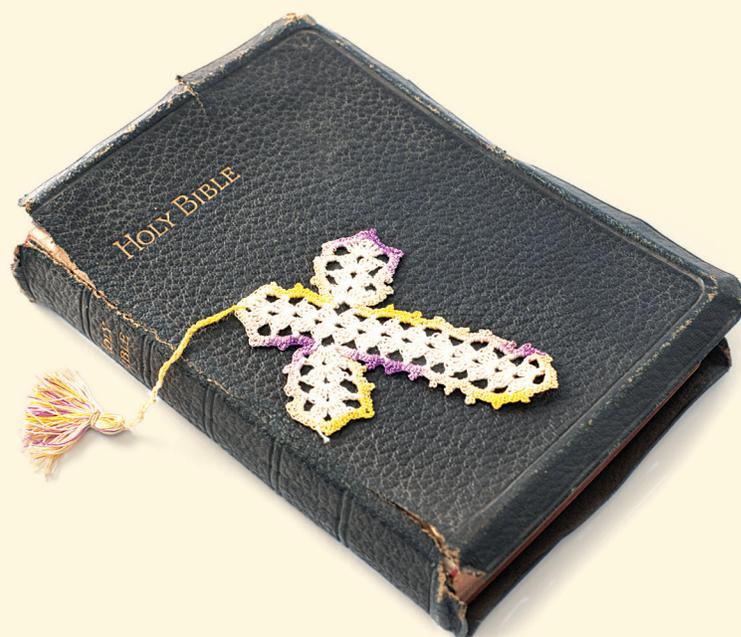
As I hung on to God and my promise to make the right choice I was challenged in so many ways. I found some of the people in church to be phonier than those on the streets. I wasn't sure what to do with my life. I knew I needed to take it a day at a time and trust that only the grace of God would get me through. I decided I wouldn't let family or friends who used drugs or alcohol stay in my house. The man I lived with stopped using and joined me in promising God we would change our lives. We married.

Six months later I heard the voice of God say "Why don't you go back to school?" Soon after I was driving past a school on the south side where little English was spoken, but I stopped and went in anyway. It looked like a good place and I felt it was the right thing to do. The teacher there suggested I go to the Dominican Center. There is where I met Sr. Ann and told her I just wanted to get my GED. From that day on, my life totally changed. I was Sr. Ann's first student and she has been a source of support and inspiration ever since.

We were able to give love and security to the children who lived with us: my two daughters and seven others, including a child with autism. With Sr. Ann's help, we found an upstairs apartment with four bedrooms. She helped me get clothing for the kids. There were many other areas where I needed help as well.

I found out that I had done damage to my mind from all the years of drug abuse. For awhile it seemed like I had lost everything I had had in my mind. Even now, fifteen years later, it's not all back. It takes hard work to learn how to get and keep a job, how to write a check, how to fill out money orders, pay bills and work with teachers at my children's school. I'd get so nervous I would make myself sick before I even got to school or almost anywhere. There were many things we felt we couldn't do, but Sr. Ann showed both of us how. She started groups at her school and asked me if I wanted to help start the class with a scripture reading or prayers.

This new life has been growing for 15 years now.





GROUP DISCUSSION

STORY TWO:

THE JOURNEY TO HEALING

*Please take a few minutes
to share some of your story with us.*

- 1. When have you needed healing?*
- 2. What is the challenge you were facing?*
- 3. What helped you?*
- 4. What have you learned?*
- 5. How are you using some of the lessons life has taught you?*

WISDOM from SCRIPTURE to Help You:

HEALING

Psalm 6; 2-5 O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger
neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.

Have mercy upon me,
O Lord; for my bones are neted, but thou, O Lord,
how long? Return, O lord, deliver my soul: Oh save
me for thy mercies sake. For in death there is no
remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give
thee thanks?

Psalm 41; 4 I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my
soul; for I have sinned against thee.

Psalm 103; 3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies;

Isaiah 53; 4-5 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we healed.

Jonah 1; 1-3 Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of A-mit-tai saying, arise, got to Nine-vah, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tar-shish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tar-shish so he paid the fare there—of and went down into it, to go with them unto Tar-shish from the presence of the Lord.

Jonah 3; 1-3 And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days journey.

James 5; 15-16 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Psalm 119; 1-11 1. Happy are all who perfectly follow the laws of God. 2. Happy are all who search for God and always do his will. 3. Rejecting compromise with evil and walking only in his paths. 4. You have given us your laws to obey. 5. Oh how I want to follow them consistently. 6. Then I will not be disgrace, for I will have a clean record. 7. After you have corrected me, I will thank you by living as I should! 8. I will obey! Oh don't forsake me and let me slip back into sin again. 9. How can a young man stay pure? By reading your word and following it's rules. 10. I have tried my best to find you—don't let me wander off from your instructions. 11. I have thought much about your words and stored them in my heart so that they would hold me back from sin.

Personal Reflection:

The secrets we hide away have enormous power in our life. How many of our addictive/compulsive behaviors have been hidden or covered up? When



we took the step to admit the exact nature of our wrongs to another human being, we were probably amazed at the way the addiction lost power as it was exposed. The power of hidden behaviors and secrets can work for us well as against us. David said, “I have thought much about God’s words and stored them in my heart so that they would hold me back from sin.” (Psalm 51). The word rendered stored can be translated “to hide by covering over” or “to hoard secretly”. If we “hide” God’s word in our heart by memorizing and meditation on it, we will find new power to keep our mind and heart clean. The power of secrets will also work to our advantage in our prayer life. Jesus taught us, “But when you pray, go away by yourself, all-alone, and shut the door behind you and pray to your Father secretly and your Father, who knows your secrets, will reward you” (Matthew 6; 6). When we begin to spend time shut away with the Lord in prayer and meditation, we’ll find that power working for us.

Philippians 4; 11-14 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. 12. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of contentment in every situation, whether it be a full stomach or hunger, plenty or want; 13. For I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power. 14. But even so, you have done right in helping me in my present difficulty.

Personal Reflection:

When Paul wrote these words, he was in a Roman prison waiting to hear if he would be executed. And yet we hear no whining or complaining. Instead, he learned to accept the circumstances he could not change. The process of recovery is a time of learning to find serenity while also accepting life as it is. Life isn't fair. It isn't predictable or controllable. It can be wonderfully rich in some ways and terribly difficult in others. When we become willing to face the hurt in our life and consider how we have reacted to it, then our discomfort can head us to break the destructive cycles. Then we can learn to be content with the things we cannot change.

MORE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF.

*Listen to your heart
for answers.*



- How would you describe the crossroads you're at right now?
- What are other easy ways of looking at your situation?
- What would make your life feel more meaningful?
- What are the possibilities available to you?
- What do you want to be remembered for?
- When you're 95 years old, what will you want to say about your life?
- What is working in your life?
- If you were living more true to your beliefs, what might be different?
- When are you truly happiest?
- What is most important to you now?
- What else could you do to improve things for you?

IDEAS AND ADVICE FROM JACKIE...

Q. What should you do if you want to keep your child safe from abuse?

A. If I could stress it hard enough I would say to the parents, please have an open relationship with your sons and daughters or any child entrusted in your home.



AUTHOR – JACKIE WILLIAMS

Know when your child's behavior or appearance has changed. If your child is acting like they're in a depressed mood it means something. Children are easily frightened.

Parents—it's important to be watchful of sleepovers with other children. Baby-sitters should be watched by camcorders. It may sound like I'm writing about living a life of not trusting others around your children. If being over watchful is a problem to some, who cares as long as your child is protected.

Whether it is physical abuse or sexual abuse, the abuse on a child causes pain in every area of life. It causes several kinds of disorders such as depression, panic disorders, anxiety attacks, overwhelming sense of guilt, and low self-esteem. Some of these illnesses show up later in one's life.

I learned as long as I let it go unreported the abuse only gets worse.

You have the right to keep your body from any unwanted touching. In dealing with this abuse there is a lot of locked up hurt, shame and anger that needs to be released. It's important to seek counseling. It will help your mental state.

But there's another part that needs help and healing. That is your inner heart and soul. I want to give some bible scripture and bible stories that are needful and helpful in receiving inner healing. Much too often we as victims try to get through life without dealing with these issues. I can remember thinking some years ago that because God has come in my heart and changed me from the inside out all past hurts were gone, but that's not the way God gives complete healing. As long as I hide my feelings and didn't talk about it. I thought I was completely healed. But the minute the subject came up some kind of way I was reliving it again and again. As long as we are keeping this hidden, we're not healing and if we're not healing how can we forgive our abusers? We haven't. Let's be honest! We're living in denial. Hidden rage, hate, bitterness are eating away at our inner being. We find ourselves spinning out of control in our daily life. Sometimes it may even feel like a double life we're living. I personally believe that's where multiple personality disorder comes from.

Prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.
AMEN

NOTES:

This book is the author's own story based on personal memories and represents her understanding of life experiences. It is written in the author's own words with the help of a life story coach and is intended to instruct, enrich and inspire. Professional Dimensions and the story coaches assume no responsibility for the contents of the story or the accuracy of the facts and events discussed therein.

