

## Introduction

I know you. You've got a zillion self-help books on your shelves, all hoping and promising you a better life. I understand. I could open a Borders store with all of the books I've bought over the years, but you know what? I don't read them. I can't even get through one of them from start to finish. They are not for me. They don't even have pictures. Amateurs.

Someone forgot to tell me many things about life, but I am here to tell you that secrets keep you sick. They prevent you from starting the recovery process, and from dealing with the fear and pain that make it impossible to move on. Not sure if this book is for you? Here are some things to think about.

This book is for you if you are an adolescent or young adult struggling to look inside. It's for you if you are the parent of a young woman, because sooner than you can imagine your little girl is going to grow up and have to face the real world, and she's going to need your strength and knowledge. It's also for you if you are the parent of a boy, because boys need to know that their actions have reactions. And if you have ever tried to face the demons in your mirror, but looked away, this book is also for you.

If I can help just one person, hopefully you, by sharing my stories, then it's all worth it. And you know what? I just don't care anymore what people think. So, to everyone out there, if you can't take the heat, you'd better grab a fan before you start reading!

A little about me: I am a mom, and I fiercely love my two children. I would and have done everything in my power for them, as you'll see a little later on. I am an educated person with a good job. I even teach weekend Bible study to teenagers, and no, they are not the reason for any of these stories! I'm not someone you'd see in the grocery store and think, "Wow, I

wonder what her story is.” I live in suburbia, but I know its secrets. And, are there secrets! Everyone has a story – you just have to know where to look for them.

The bottom line is, I’ve had enough tears to last a lifetime, and I don’t need you shedding any over me. I’d rather tell you about the moments that happened while I *was* looking – except someone forgot to tell me ahead of time!

For example, you can’t imagine what goes on at treatment centers, with all the hilarity that accompanies the search to get well. Look no further, because I’ve got the firsthand scoop on that. Do you have any lingering guilt from your childhood about God and religion? I’ve got that one covered, too, and then some! (Spoiler alert: Faith saves.) This is serious stuff, no doubt about it, but if there is one thing I can say about myself, it’s that I’ve never lost the ability to laugh. Because life. Is. Funny.

I guarantee that this book has something to offer you about hope in the face of absurd adversity. This is not your mother’s rehab book. This is a book about pain, loss, and sadness. But it’s also about the hilarious moments that happen at the same time. Sit tight; it’s going to be a funny ride!

## Chapter 1

The fish: Did you know swimming is the best form of exercise?

The penguin: Why are there whales then?

The fish: They probably drank too much.

I don't know if you've ever heard that joke, but let me tell you, it's about way more than oceanic life! I hope you don't mind a little comic relief – that's the way I handle most things, and there is plenty to go around. Just keep reading, and you'll see what I mean.

I can't believe I am finally sitting down to write this book after all these years. To give you an idea of how long it's been since I first got the idea to write about my life, I was probably listening to Mötley Crüe or Paula Abdul when I began imagining telling my story, and now I am listening to MercyMe, blasting out of the stereo, talking about how, "Grace tells us another story/Where glory sends hopelessness away." It's amazing how much I've changed, even though some things remain the same.

By all accounts, this book shouldn't have happened. Every day, it seems like I get a new test from God. In the last year and a half since I last left treatment, I feel like I've changed. As is always the case, some of the changes have been easier to adapt to than others. For example, I truly don't care anymore what people think of me – it's hard to focus on self-image in some of the situations I've dealt with recently.

But of course, some changes are not always for the best, at least at the outset, even though in the end God always provides a reason. For example, someone forgot to tell me that if you have to be drunk to get married, it may not work out in the end, but I got my two precious

boys out of the deal. And someone forgot to tell me that when you have your oldest son taken into state custody because he is a danger to himself and others, that he will be handcuffed. Not only that, but someone forgot to tell me how hard it is to explain all of this to family members who just don't understand that sometimes life doesn't give us the choices we want, but that we have to keep going anyway. Oh, well. Maybe next time.

As I sit here surrounded by memories and stories of what sometimes seems like a million lifetimes rolled into one, I think of how it wasn't until I delved into recovery...no wait, let's be honest here. Isn't that what this is all about? If I am going to come clean, I was pushed into recovery. It was a dream that I had, actually, that was so vivid, that made me believe without a doubt that something greater was out there. I felt that I was walking toward Jesus. My son ended up waking me and that's when I knew that there was a higher power with me.

Even though I wasn't terribly happy with it at first, it wasn't until I was forced into recovery that I realized we all have problems. It's the people who can take a look at themselves that can start to overcome the selfishness and self-centered behavior that is a big part of addiction. What else would let us hurt our family and friends the way we do? What else would let us disregard the faith that can save us from ourselves? Selfish behavior is the key to all of it. It leads us away from acceptance and serenity that we all need to thrive in this world.

Let me illustrate it with a little story I saw in a recent AA newsletter. Have you ever been at the grocery store and been ready to check out at the express lane, but you have two more items than you're supposed to? Have you gone anyway, figuring, what's the big deal? If so, maybe you've seen the person behind you turn, look, and literally count the number of items in your cart. Then comes the nod of the head, and a, "tsk, tsk," in your ear.

Do you know what is really going on here? Acceptance and serenity in life is about not noticing the little things. Someone who is comfortable within themselves isn't going to notice the extra box of cereal and point it out. But those of us still dealing with pain and agony will look, every time. When was the last time *you* checked out someone's cart?

In the following chapters you are going to learn more about where I come from, and what I've been through. My hope is that you learn something from each one. Someone didn't tell me, but this is how I am going about solving my problems: By honestly looking at myself. Just because I went to work everyday didn't mean I was an alcoholic. Just because I couldn't look in the mirror and see how I really looked...my vision has changed, and so can yours.

Here comes the fun part! Talk amongst yourselves, and try to be honest and reflect: Are you drinking more than you should be? Are you not eating? Are you spending too much money? Are you having sex with people you don't want to have sex with to fill a void? Do you know where your soul is? Do you need a change in your life?

## Chapter 2

A long time ago, someone forgot to tell me what happens when you decide not to eat on a regular basis. This crucial piece of advice, along with so many others, could have made the difference for me. I hope that it may be able to help you.

Thinking back, it all truly began with several incidents that seemed totally unrelated at the time. Isn't that always the way? So, now it's time for the million dollar question. What really changed my whole life?

Sometimes we wish for things to be simple. Life rarely is, but in this case, a series of devastating events took their toll on me. Not just because of the acts themselves, but because I never told anyone. That's right, I never told a soul. Why not, you ask? I didn't know I could.

But *you've* got to know, because someone forgot to tell me what happens when you let pain eat up everything inside of you. You've got to know, because that is my mission; to save someone, anyone, who has gone through these things.

The simple fact (although it's anything but simple), is that I was raped not once but twice before the time I was a high school graduate. The first time may well have included an E-vite (it was four boys), and the second was another serious breach of trust (my hairdresser of all people; talk about misrepresentation!). I never told anyone.

Some people have said to me that it couldn't have just been those incidents that started to change me, but I don't know what else it could have been. I've been asked so many times about my family, but I am not going to go into family issues, because you know what? What is the point? Whether or not I came from a dysfunctional family is not something that I need to or want to reveal in this book. I don't want to go there and destroy them like that.

Now that I look back, I think right after those experiences is when I started not eating lunch at school. Now I know what you're thinking... if someone had told me that not eating lunch is a bad thing, I would have eaten lunch one day. And you're completely right. I just didn't know what would eventually happen.

I could have never known that all the hurt I built up inside would come pouring out later in other ways. That kind of focus was not possible then, and I would have never put together those horrific moments with what happened to me later on.

One thing I do know for sure is that the gentlemen who did this did not know the damage they were about to cause me with their words and actions. One way or another, however, I hope boys and men like these, who grow up to be fathers and husbands, can be taught to understand the impact of their actions. But that's for another book, because someone forgot to tell them and me how physical pain goes away, but emotional pain lingers.

But back to the whole food thing. Who doesn't have a relationship with food? Some of us can't get enough, but for others, it's a complete chore to eat. For some of us, we stay away, our garlic necklace and homemade crucifix aimed at every grocery aisle and restaurant in town. I remember it well.

As a child, I can't remember any strong reaction to food. I had favorite meals, like tuna fish, mashed potatoes and steak. Pure comfort food, most people would say, but then how did those comforts turn into something so different? It definitely happened one day at a time.

It all started with me skipping lunch. I would come home from high school and eat dinner, feeling better somehow because I was making up for what I didn't eat that day. Then, in college, I basically didn't eat, except for oatmeal raisin cookies. It's like your favorite sweater – I kept unraveling one day at a time until I was feeling so good about the fact that I hadn't gained

the freshmen “15” that I was hooked. I was enjoying the feeling of being one of the few people I knew not dieting. Tell me – wouldn’t you like that feeling, too? Exactly, except someone forgot to tell me that these little things add up to one hell of a big issue.

Reflection for this chapter: What do you hide from others?

## Chapter 3

Q: If you say you have willpower, what happens when you have diarrhea?

As I said before, someone forgot to tell me what happens when you decide not to eat most of your daily meals. As time went on, what happened was that I began to fill my stomach with any pill or drink that would take the place of what should have been there. The best part for me was knowing that while I was getting drunk or high, I knew in the back of my mind that my looks weren't suffering for it. Pot was out as a drug of choice, obviously, because I couldn't handle the hunger that came with using. Anything that didn't have such a side effect, however, was fair game.

The most interesting thing was that when I saw my college friends, they would compliment me on my willpower, and how I was so good at controlling myself around food. If only they knew that wasn't the case. Most days I would get drunk, eat something, and then take a laxative. Oh, the wicked web we weave...but someone forgot to tell me that not eating was becoming a cycle involving more and more deceptive behavior.

Time out! If you are like me and have adult ADHD this book is what you are looking for. Case in point, I'm taking you on a journey back in time. Before I started living off of oatmeal raisin cookies, and even before the eventful moments that led to that. I want to switch subjects and talk about the reason why I can still smile and laugh at myself. I want to talk about God.

A lot of people are uncomfortable with the subject of religion and God. I can understand that to a point, but that's got to change if you ever want to find your faith. I'm not here to preach

and tell you that the life you're living is wrong and you're going to pay for it. Not at all. Look at me – if I were that kind of person it would be just a tad hypocritical, don't you think? Exactly.

So what about God, then? This may come as a shock to you, but since I can remember religion has been a part of my life. There was not one day when I didn't think about God. The thing was, though, that I thought I wasn't good enough for Him. That's the truth of the matter, and I bet that you have felt that way at some point, too. I thought about God every day, but the relationship was about power – the power that I assumed God had, and that I couldn't be a part of. Thinking that way wasn't going to get me anywhere, but it's taken decades to figure that out.

Growing up, my first communion picture was out in the living room and I saw it every day. I always felt at home in the Catholic Church, even though I didn't always understand its rules and regulations. If someone would have told me back then that you can take and use the homily, I would have listened closer. I missed out on so much. No one sat down and said that the stories can actually be used in everyday life.

God has always been with me in some shape or form, whether I responded or not. When I was pregnant for the first time, I felt it was not supposed to happen and that God did not want me to be pregnant. I justified my actions in terminating the pregnancy. Someone forgot to tell me that it would have such a devastating effect on my life. Later on, I began teaching religious education classes, I think to try to atone and answer the call from God that always seemed just out of reach. Of course, I would go coked up, and try to help middle school students find the faith, hope, and love of God. In my mind, I was doing what I could. It's not every day you find someone using who also teaches morality. But that's me.

Anyway, back to the story. Are you keeping up? I want to tie in my drinking so you can see how these two paths – one of not eating, and the other of drinking, were so crucial to me for so long, and how they got that way.

Ah yes, my first drink. I was in the eighth grade. I went to a party at a country club that my parents belonged to, and I was with my brother. The drink of choice that night was Miller Lite. I remember drinking it and making out with some guy with a blond afro and a mustache. This is how my life would go. I can still see his face on different guys throughout the following years. That's how it went for me...different locations, different clothes, but always the same actions.

By the time I go to college it was mostly a typical scene, but it slowly spiraled more and more out of control. I had a boyfriend and he dumped me because of my eating disorder the night of my brother's rehearsal dinner. I still wonder where he is, because I didn't see him again after that. He called me on the phone and said he wasn't coming, and you know, after everything I had put him through, I had the nerve to be irate with him. How dare he humiliate me like that, with my entire family wondering what had happened. That night, and for so many other nights and situations, I was always a victim. To this day, I still respond to situations in a defensive manner, but the difference is that now I am able to stop and ask myself, what is my role in all of this? What have I done to contribute to this situation? What can I do now?

Reflection for this chapter: Are you always the victim, or do you just play one in your own story?

## Chapter 4

One of the things that I really want everyone to know is that alcoholics don't want to get sick. A friend of mine once said to me, "Do you think anyone actually wants to wake up with a hangover?" Of course not! But, it's those of us who can't drink without getting drunk that invariably end up with those hangovers way too much.

I think there are a lot of misconceptions out there about people who have drinking issues. Hopefully, as time goes on, some of them can be diminished, although I don't think they will ever go away. It is those stereotypes that make others feel better about themselves. I'd like to take this chapter and share some of them with you.

Misconception #1: Alcoholics basically go through their day with a dripping IV of booze

I know how it is. If we go by the movies, all alcoholics are falling down drunk every hour of every day. For breakfast, it's a mimosa, followed by vodka straight from the bottle, right? And it's all made to seem that way so that the rest of us can look at the characters on the screen and feel better because we're not *that* bad.

For example, if someone can say, "I never drink at breakfast," that must mean he's OK, right? Well, guess again, because I hardly ever drank in the mornings. I didn't even drink every single day. Can you believe it? It's true! Where I got into trouble was not being able to stop at a reasonable amount of alcohol. It was as if I could never, ever bring a drink to my lips without craving more. And all those times I was out, it started with one, and ended with an awful hangover. It wasn't all day; I always worked, and was busy. But when I *was* out with my friends, or hanging at home, I would never quit before I was trashed.

Misconception #2: Alcoholics don't care that they are abusing their bodies

This always makes me laugh, but I guess it makes sense if you already believe that Misconception #1 is also true. So many people that I know would be shocked to learn that all the while I was abusing alcohol, I was also desperate to keep myself well. I know that it sounds like a paradox, but in all honesty, I was constantly thinking of ways to cleanse myself, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

I remember that during my first inpatient treatment, when I was just 24 years old, my liver was scanned, and it was already showing signs of alcohol abuse. I couldn't stop thinking about that; it was like my body was already beginning to decline, and I hadn't even lived a quarter century yet. So when I could I bought a product that was supposed to cleanse my liver. I even went so far as to inquire about hypnotist tapes that promised they'd stop my drinking. Of course I didn't want anyone to know what I was doing, so I considered getting a Post Office box to stay incognito. You'd be amazed how much thinking I did about my health and how I was hurting myself. I bet that so many other people just like me feel the same way. That's the problem though. How do you stop unless you get some help?

Misconception #3:

Misconception #4:

Misconception #5:

As you can see, this is something that I have thought a lot about. I think about a lot of things you know...not just fighting the urge to get a drink! As I sit here today, I think about my

experiences with treatment. They are as varied as you can imagine, and then some. I think we're ready now, so let me take you on a tour of my life as an inpatient.

Reflection for this chapter: Do you put down or put off others to make yourself feel better?

## Chapter 5

Q: Do vegetarians eat animal crackers?

As I continued on my path of not eating, drinking too much, and upping my use of drugs, it became clear to both others and to me (eventually) that something needed to be done. I had moved to Washington, DC after college with a good friend, and we decided to room together. It wasn't long, though, before she moved out. She was tired of my late nights, and tired of me bringing strangers home at all hours to party. So she left. And then, wonder of wonders, my parents came down for a visit. Or so I thought.

My parents had become concerned about me [I WOULD LIKE TO EXPAND ON THIS] and went to my boss [WHERE DID YOU WORK?], of all people, to let him know that I would be leaving for a little while to enter treatment in Chicago. I couldn't believe it; I was naturally humiliated by this. What mattered most to me then, though, was the timing of it all. New Years Eve was coming up, and I had a huge stash of cocaine I had been saving for the occasion. I asked my parents to wait until after the New Year, and they said yes. Away we go!

Now, remember I was only 24 years old when I entered inpatient treatment for the first time. It was almost like college all over again, except without the drinking or drugs, of course. I did learn a lot though, including how to increase my behavior [NEEDS MORE EXPLANATION HERE]. And wouldn't you know it, I actually left early to go to the Bahamas with my future ex-

husband (then boyfriend). I deserved it, right for all my hard work? But you know, after a month away from treatment, I actually went back again [NEEDS MORE EXPLANATION].

The second time I was in treatment, something happened that never would happen today. You've got to remember that back in the [DECADE HERE], things were different. Today, the medical field recognizes the illness that is dependency in all its forms. Back then, you were only given so many options. Case in point: After being in treatment for a little while, again in Chicago, I got a day pass to leave and immediately went to find the first bar I could locate. I ended up at a Chinese restaurant with a bar and had so much to drink that I was cut off.

I remember heading back to the hospital, and lying, saying that I hadn't been drinking. Of course it all came out in the end, but what happened next stayed with me, too. Everyone got mad at me; the other patients, the nurses, even the doctors. They basically gave up on me. Today, things would be handled differently, I am sure, but back then I was just a patient who had screwed up one too many times.

After that [ NEED INFO HERE ]

[This section will deal with what happened when you got married, Megan, etc.]

Reflection for this chapter: Who have you given up on?

Chapter 6

Avoid fruit and nuts. You are what you eat. ~Jim Davis

As the years rolled on, I ended up married, with two boys, but of course things couldn't be that simple. Before I knew it, I had been in treatment [NUMBER HERE] different times, and with each experience there came stories and hilarity galore. There also were scary times, and really humiliating moments, but I think one has to go with the other sometimes, don't you?

It's been awhile now, but someone forgot to tell me what it's like to almost miss your sons' birthdays because you're 2,000 miles away at a treatment center. The funny thing is that the reason I went into treatment the last time was because of a dream that involved my son. In my dream I was walking toward Jesus and my son was trying to wake me up. It was so vivid – I knew when I woke up that my drinking and lack of nourishment wasn't working.

As you can imagine, a life of trading rice for rum and cokes just isn't going to work in the long run. Someone forgot to tell me, though, how hard it is to calm the voice inside that says, "It's OK. One cup of granola at night will get us by." Hunger wasn't involved because I was too wrapped up in my lifestyle. Until, that is, I went to treatment. And then someone forgot to tell me what *that* would be like, so in turn, I feel a responsibility to tell you because like anything else on God's great earth, there is humor to be found here.

We all know that treatment for eating disorders is designed to, well, get people eating again. But do they have to make food so undesirable in the process? I mean it. There could be a separate Olympic games for people in treatment for eating disorders. Here are just a few events I know I could medal in:

Quick Change Artist – To make sure that we didn't take our cereal and dump it (don't forget the milk!) in our pockets, we'd be searched after breakfast. At least we worked off some of the calories we'd eaten with all of that movement!

Going for the Gold – Cheering on your friends to eat all their food became commonplace. The penalty if anything was left? A dreaded Ensure shake, which is only topped by something called Breeze. But more on that later.

Sweating up a Storm – Going to sleep at night was big excitement for me, because I could wake up soaking wet from sweating so much. Maybe then, I thought, my jeans, which I worked really hard to get into, wouldn't be so tight.

The Numbers Game – A lot of my time in treatment was spent rationalizing the amount of water I could drink in a day. It's pretty tough when Metamucil is the best thing out there. No soda, no juice, just water. Like I needed the fiber!

It was really an exhausting experience. I had to rationalize how much water I could drink in a day, because there were times I thought I was literally going to float away. Not to mention that it's no place Richard Simmons would ever like – we weren't allowed to exercise. We did find times to get rid of a calorie or two though: Getting up off the couch in the middle of an 8-10 hour sit-fest, and walking the five feet to get more water was always a treat, never mind eating every single hour! I thought eating disorders were like sleeping disorders and that you can't make it all up, but apparently I was wrong!

Remember folks, we're talking about real, live adults here. It's just that someone forgot to tell us we needed to be treated this way, or we'd never make it. Someone once asked me if I

think there is such a thing as a “cure” for dependencies. I can’t say for sure, but first you’d have to cure what it was that got you going in the first place.

I do know that without a solid, permanent treatment plan, I won’t make it. I need to know that I’ve got commitments to people and appointments – scheduled meetings and other goings on. I will not be forgotten, but I’ve got to keep getting out there. Bad days, stress, it’s all waiting to get me again, but when things like this happen, I try to think back on some of the stories that keep me smiling.