

Hello, I would like to share my testimony with you about how God has changed my life and how he has been so faithful, true, and forgiving. His grace is sufficient for me. 2 corinthians12:9

MY TESTIMONY

My first brush of death was when I was 2 years old. One day I grabbed a hot dog from the table and started eating it. I got choked on it and the hot dog became lodged in my throat, completely blocking my airway. I started gasping for air but nothing came. I started turning blue. My parents grabbed me and tried everything they could think of to try and get the hot dog to dislodge and come out but nothing was working. They knew if they waited for the ambulance to arrive, that I would die before they got there. They knew they had to do something so they decided to try and take me to the hospital themselves. They put me in the backseat of my Uncle's car and was about ready to take off when God spared my life and the hot dog shot out of my mouth and I immediately started breathing again and my color returned to normal. I thank God to this day, that he saved my life and so does my family and friends.

When I turned five, I started kindergarten. After I got used to my surroundings, I liked it. I got along with all of the kids. The problems didn't start until I entered first grade. I was sick a lot that year and missed a lot of school. The teacher I had was mean to me and at the end of the school year, she flunked me and so I had to take first grade all over again and the kids that were in my class tortured and bullied me. By second grade things got even worse and continued throughout my grades school days. Every school day was a challenge for me and I lived for those weekends, holidays and summer vacations. I cried a lot, felt worthless and had no self-esteem. I hated P.E. because almost every time I would be the last one picked on a team. No one wanted me because I was always too slow or not good at playing the games. However, there were a few good friends that I had and I was truly thankful for that. My best friend Jessica always stood up for me and made me feel important and still does to this day.

My second brush of death occurred when I was around seven or eight years old. I was waiting for the bus to stop, so I could cross the road and get on, when a reckless driver decided he didn't want to stop for a stopped school bus. He started flying past the bus just as I was crossing the road and the front of his car, touched the edge of my raincoat. Again, God was watching over me and spared my life a second time.

When I entered high school, I still had people picking on me and taking advantage of me. Things got increasingly worse through my four years there. I felt like a nobody and an outcast. Things got even worse when I got my first boyfriend. He treated me like dirt and abused me. By my Senior year things were a little better for me. I started getting more friends and when we played volleyball in P.E., they called me their star server. Still, I felt trapped and just couldn't wait for graduation. That day finally arrived, and when they called my name, I walked across the stage, grabbed my diploma, and at that very moment

I felt like I had been released from prison. After graduation was over while some of my classmates were standing there crying, I didn't waste any time running out of the gym, returning my gown to the classroom and running home. I hadn't felt that much joy in a long time.

About a year after graduation, I met this wonderful Christian guy. We hit it off right away and started going out. I thought he wouldn't hurt me but he ended up being everything he said he wasn't. We broke it off and I continued to search for someone to treat me with respect. I continued to meet guys who all proclaimed to know Christ and I thought they were decent, so I went out with them and quickly found out they were just like the rest. I started getting used to being mistreated and felt it was what I deserved. Guys knew how to play me because I was so nice to everyone, I wouldn't stand up for myself, and couldn't fight back, so they took that to their advantage.

Years later, I started going to a church in a nearby town. There, I met two men who I thought were decent. They both went to the same church. Once again, I found myself in the same situation I had been in with all the others. At this point, I truly hated myself and was just lonely and tired of being mistreated. All I wanted was for someone to truly love me, respect me, and accept me for who I was.

The worst mistake I ever made was when I met the guy I would marry later. He also went to the same church. I went to his house one night to talk with him. He was really nice and introduced me to his pregnant girlfriend. He claimed that he came to Christ and was baptized after he got her pregnant. I took him at his word and really thought that he had had a change of heart. I hung out with them for awhile and headed for home. A couple of days later, I went back to his house and to my surprise he wanted to be with me instead. I asked about the baby, and he said he would provide. I wanted to believe so badly that he was telling me the truth. After all, I was being honest with him and expected him to be honest with me. Taking him again at his word, I said I would go out with him and I thought things were great but I was wrong. It wasn't how I thought it would be. I pictured in my head that Chris would not only supply for the child but that all three of us could be friends. I had no idea how wrong I was and how jealous his baby's mom was of me. He had brainwashed me from the very beginning, and by October 9th we were married. Three days after the baby was born. It wasn't long and things started going down hill from there. He started leaving me alone for hours at a time. His excuse was that he wanted to see the baby but my heart knew what was really going on. I made the biggest mistake of my life and I was trapped. Over the next six months Chris was unfaithful to me with two mistresses he had and I was physically, emotionally, and in other ways severely abused. I was afraid to leave because I was afraid that he would hunt me down. He took all my money, blew up my engine in the car, got us fired from work, destroyed my self-esteem and any confidence I may have had in myself and I went from 108 pounds to 86 pounds. Instead of turning to God, I turned to the bottle. It was the only way I knew how to half way deal with everything. It worked for awhile but then the happy feelings started to fade and eventually made things worse than better. One day I knew I

had had enough and told him I was leaving. He trapped me in the kitchen and slammed his fist against the cabinet door. He finally talked me into sitting with him in my broken down car to talk. I told him that I knew about his girlfriends. He denied everything and started getting irate again. He told me if I left him he would kill himself. He finally opened the door and said "Fine, goodbye forever!" It wasn't two minutes later and he came back with a knife. He started taking off his watch and told me if I was going to leave, I was going to have to watch him kill himself. I told him he was sick and needed help. His temper went out of control, he told me goodbye one more time and slammed the door so hard I thought the windows would shatter. I waited for a couple of minutes to see if he would come back but he didn't. I decided if I didn't make my move soon, he would catch me trying to leave again. When I knew it was clear, I jumped out of my car and started running as fast as I could down the sidewalk. I thought if I could just make it to the church I would be alright or at least make it around the corner where he couldn't see which way I went. I got as far as the Laundromat and he caught me on my bike. He talked me into sitting down and talking to him but all along I knew he wasn't going to change my mind about staying this time. We were only talking for a few minutes when one of his girlfriends came in and told me exactly what had happened between the two of them from the very beginning of my relationship with Chris.. I just looked at him and told him he blew it and I was leaving for good. He started yelling at her. While he was yelling at her, I ran out the door and started to tell this guy from the Breeze Courier to call the police when he caught me and pushed me back into the Laundromat. I tried a second time to run out and tell the guy to call the police and this time I was successful. He knew what I wanted and told me he could have a cop there in about five minutes. I ran back inside and Chris left. I thought I had it made. Instead of running I stood there trying to figure out which way to go, not thinking he would return. Before I had a chance to decide, he came back. He told me to follow him to the bathroom. I took two steps toward him and his girlfriend yelled at me and told me to stop. It was then that I saw the knife in his hand. I have a feeling I knew what he had in mind for me. About that time a lady from across the street in her van who was watching the whole time, pulled into the parking lot of the Laundromat and I ran outside. She told me to get in and so I did and then I was free. The look in Chris's eyes was like that of a killer. His chest was heaving in and out. I have never seen someone so full of rage in my life. I could have been 6 feet under but thank God He saved my life again. I thank God for Laura (my angel) and what she did for me. She took me to her house and had someone come and pick me up and take me to the police station. There I filed a complaint and called my brother-in-law Scott to have him come pick me up. My sister came along too and after a two hour wait, they came and took me home. I was on the verge of a nervous break down and my stomach hurt so bad I thought I would pass out. The next day we went back to Taylorville to the courthouse where I signed formal papers at the State's Attorney's office for disorderly conduct. Then I had to go before the judge and get a temporary order of protection. The Sate's Attorney told me he would call if he decided to make it a case. It wasn't long and the next day or so he called me and told me that they arrested Chris and was making it a case. We had to make 3 more trips to Taylorville before the judge granted me a longer order of protection. I was granted a divorce on August 28th of 2002. The final time we went was for Chris's sentencing trial on October 23rd of 2002. I was so scared having to get up there on that stand alone but I knew it had to be done and I knew

God was right there with me. Giving me the courage I needed to get through it. It was very hard to deal with Chris's public defender. He made me feel about 2 inches tall but I got through it. In the end, Chris spent 6 days in jail and 6 days in prison, got two years probation, had to pay the probation fee of \$10.00 a month, court costs of \$159.00, counseling by the probation office for mental health and anger management, and have no contact with me for two years. When I got settled in back home, I started getting counseling but wanted to also find a support group to go to. It wasn't until the following year that I found out about S.A.F.E. I started going to their support group and it helped me tremendously. It felt good to be with people who knew what I was going through. Although the counseling helped and the support group, I still struggled a lot with anger against my ex-husband and I hated him. I didn't have any desire to forgive him for what he did until the day mom and I went to the movies and seen the Passion of the Christ. That movie touched my heart and moved my spirit. All I could do was try and keep the tears from coming and I realized just how much God loved me. That He sent His Son not only to die in my place and Chris's but to die for the whole world. I started to realize how forgiving and merciful He is. No matter how many mistakes I have made and how many times I have failed, He continues to forgive me and love me. I knew at that moment He loved Chris just the same. That there wasn't anything Chris had done that Christ couldn't forgive. That night I started praying for Chris, that he would get his life straightened out. I no longer wanted him to be miserable. I wanted him to be happy and enjoy life. I kept praying for him but still hadn't forgiven him for all the horrible things he did to me until one night I was at church and felt God stirring my spirit and I knelt down by the pew and surrendered. That night I forgave Chris and his mistresses for all they had done to me. When I was done praying, I felt like there was a big boulder that had been removed from my body. I felt as light as a feather and felt happiness I hadn't experienced in a long time. I thank God for his mercy, his forgiveness, and I can't thank Him enough for giving me yet another chance at life. I really feel with all my heart that He has something very special for me to do and He isn't going to let me go until the mission He has for me is complete. I feel part of my mission in life is to help others. It is my passion to help in any way that I can or to just bring a smile to someone's face. To this day, I still struggle with self-hate, low self-esteem, and low confidence but with God's help, I believe that I can one day feel good about myself and love myself the way that He intended me to in the first place. I am still learning and still hanging on to God's unchanging hand. Together we will make it through.