

First let me say that I am very glad to be a follower of God... A God Servant. My testimony is not meant to be a bigger, badder, story than anybody else's it's just my story.

I was born in Memphis, Tennessee. My father and I were very close. At age 4, I woke up one morning and he was gone. What happened to him? When was he coming back? I was told not to mention his name again; not to talk about him or to ask any more questions. He was gone and that was that. I had a maid, Mattie May. She was so cool and she just loved me. Then, one day, she was gone, too. That's how my early years began, losing my father then Mattie May.

Many things during these years are pretty blurry. I know that my mom met someone before I was 10 years old. I remember a judge asking me if I wanted Bill to adopt me. Yes!!! That was my last semblance of normal. We moved every few months, sometimes in the middle of the night. If I ever had friends they were lost in the shuffle of our moves.

In 6<sup>th</sup> grade my life went from bad to worse. My step-dad threw us out (me, my mom, sister and brother)!! My mom decided she hated me! What a strong word... she very strongly disliked me and decided to take her frustrations out on me. My mom started beating me every time I opened my mouth and even times I didn't. Wooden shoes, belts, sticks and hangers... it didn't matter. My mom tried to kill me that same year, but I got away from her. I didn't know what I had done, but it had to stop. My mom and stepdad got back together and he took us back.

There wasn't a God in our house, but there were books. There were books on black magick, astrology, witchcraft (my mom thought they were conversation pieces). I learned, practiced and studied my new found religion. I remember at one point with my practice things got so intense, I got scared and tried to burn the books but they wouldn't burn. Talk about power! I wanted more. The beatings continued, I would eat in my room with the door locked and go back in afterward. I found comfort in Wicca and black magick. I started drinking and drugging in 9<sup>th</sup> grade to escape. I went to school with welts and bruises and one of the girls basketball coaches would hold me and let me cry. She was definitely a gift from God. The beatings didn't stop until I was 18 when I decided I wasn't going to cry anymore. This, however, made the beatings more intense. I was raped in high school, who do you tell? No one!

I went to college and my family moved again leaving me in Texas. I went to Texas A&M for 1 ½ years then joined the Navy. I had some things to figure out and thought The Navy was a good place to do it. What a mistake! I got heavier into drinking and drugs. One of the petty officers above me asked me out to get drinks and to get high... my pleas to stop and no's didn't matter. I was raped again and this time got pregnant. I called my grandmother and told her I got pregnant she said to have an abortion because it would kill my mom if I were pregnant and not married. I did! Then I called my grandmother and told her it was a mistake I wasn't pregnant after all. Why should she feel the guilt and shame I was feeling. After I got out of the service I went back to

college and then dropped out with ½ semester left. I went through years of suicide attempts all around the same time each year (the time of my baby's abortion). Thanks to good counselors I worked through this.

I met up with a dealer to get my drugs for free and remember watching him beat people's faces until they weren't recognizable. I escaped that and when the money ran out I quit drugs very easily. I was looking at this point outside of Wicca to other things, primarily Science of the Mind and New Thought religions. I went back to Wicca. I still needed something where I was in control.

I met and married Charlie. He was into other things and not a Christian. We moved around a lot so he could experience places he had never been. We were married for 4 years. In the divorce I gave him Tennessee and I took Georgia (I was used to moving). I moved here in October of 1996. I had a good friend die of a heart attack with me there. I had only known of one person that was close to me died prior to this, my grandfather, and he was old. All the power, everything that I knew I couldn't save her.

I moved to Gwinnett County and joined a coven... more power in numbers. I made the mistake of letting some people know I was Wiccan. Coworkers and friends told me they were praying for me. I didn't want people praying for me. I didn't want to be a Christian! When you are a follower of Satan; people praying for you can really mess you up. I told them to stop, they didn't. I was told that not just friends and coworkers, but churches were praying for me. A couple of my friends mentioned they went to 12Stone Church. I need this prayer to stop!!

I called 12Stone just to get information and got transferred to Pastor Donna Whitten. I remember she told me she had just gone to lunch and could she call me back. I felt relieved because I didn't have to talk with her, but it meant giving her my phone number. Oh well... what did it matter... she wouldn't call anyway. I didn't want to talk. I just wanted information so I could tell everyone this God thing wasn't a good fit so they could stop praying. Pastor Donna called back and for someone who didn't want to talk I talked, we talked and she listened! After about 1 ½ - 2 hours she invited me to church. I canceled... I had a class with my coven and couldn't miss. I shared with them about the prayers. They agreed they had to stop. I had a ritual the next weekend, so after about 2 weeks I called Donna back and told her I wanted to do both Wicca and God. She said, "No"! I tried to tell her I wasn't going to leave something I was good at to go to something I didn't know would work for me. She said she would teach me and we met that night, June 11, 2008. I think we spent about 5 hours talking that night and she bought me a Bible. That night I walked away from the coven and most of the people I knew.

Donna and I met that Sunday at church and started meeting weekly. Donna listened and taught me about life and Christ. We decided to start studying the Bible. Donna wanted to read *John*, but "no way"... I didn't want to be a Christian and I knew about *John 3:16*. She asked me where I wanted to start, I said *Mark*... nobody ever talks about *Mark*. *Mark* was so Awesome. God started really moving in my heart and I could

feel Donna's love and care for me... I had never had that. God added people to my life... I now have friends, other people that love me. I wanted what Donna had, but I didn't know about being a Christian. God was really tugging at my heart, there were a couple of times I almost...well...no...not ready yet.

Donna had told me about our bridge at church being a symbol of Jesus bridging the gap from Sin and God. On July 11, 2008 I sat on the bridge and started talking to God and looked in the back of my Bible on Salvation. I had to do it right if I was going to do it. In the back of my Bible under salvation was a verse talking about a door. That's when I went to *Luke 13:24-25*,<sup>24</sup> *"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."*<sup>25</sup> *Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' 'But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'*

I didn't want to drive off the parking lot and be killed and be separated forever from God. That night I asked Jesus Christ to be my Lord and my Savior. Donna told me I needed to be baptized right away, like... July 27, 2008. Donna baptized me that day... (side note she told me before the baptism something about leaving me under the water). Donna, over the years, has become more than a mentor and teacher; she has become a good friend. With her help God went to work quickly growing me up. I became a member of my church and I have tried to participate in every area God would guide me to serve. In October 2008 I started tithing (when I knew I couldn't) and he blessed me. He started removing desires and guilt and shame and healed me in many areas of my life.

December 2008 God told me that He wanted me to be a missionary. I didn't tell anyone, except Donna, until January 2009. God had to be wrong... didn't he know who I was? Where I came from? I jumped into serving and trying to follow God's leading in my life. I went on a mission trip to Bolivia the summer of 2009 and fell in love with the country, the people and the culture. I shared Christ for the first time in Bolivia and as a result, a woman accepted Him. Although, I had to leave, Bolivia had my heart. I came back from Bolivia and lost my job... laid off. It took a while to find the right job. God continued to bless me. I had a broken foot and was blessed through that. I went to China in 2010 for a month, but Bolivia was where God called me to serve Him. I found a mission organization that fits and loves God as much as I do. I'm going to serve in Bolivia full-time starting in the spring of 2012.

My journey as a Christian has only just barely begun...! What I've learned is that God had his arms wrapped around me my whole life. When I threw Him in the mud, slapped Him in the face and turned my back on Him, he never let go. He, even through my sin, found a way to shine a light so I could find and follow Him. I only want to give back what I was so freely given and be a light for all people that they might find their way to God.