



yourgrowcoach

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A STORYBIRD BOOK

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Chapter One: The day my world crumbled

Alfred Adler, a prominent psychotherapist, believed that an individual's unique way of thinking, feeling and acting is developed by the ages of 4 to 6. He believed that memories of early childhood experiences hugely impact a person's lifestyle and career choices. My first impression was that he must be out of his mind! Now, as I stand back and look at my life, I'm amazed at how right he was!

Some of the most traumatic memories I have stem from early childhood:

Age 0-3: Connected and loved. I learned to trust my environment.

Age 4: Disappointed, hurt, angry...screaming and crying and throwing my toys down the stairs. I remember it like it was yesterday. At the foot of the stairs was the sliding glass door. On the outside stood my father, my hero, the man I deeply loved. He was distraught and in pain. On the inside stood my mother, laughing at his distress. I remember the house was filled with smoke, people and loud music. "Let my daddy in," I cried, over and over again, to no avail. Soon, he was gone. My world crumbled.

Age 5: Waking up to an quiet, empty house was unusual. "Mom", I called, but no one answered. Scared, I slowly

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descended the stairs. I was filled with fear. Why? I don't really know. I hid under the table and disappeared into my imaginary world. I repeated, "It's going to be okay" until I finally fell asleep.

Age 5: Disconnected and abandoned. My home was no longer familiar, and I did not know who to count on.

Yet, there was hope. Kindergarten started.

Chapter Two: Hope when it felt hopeless

My mother was only 15 years old when she delivered me. My dad was 17. Neither were emotionally connected to their families. Two teenagers looking for love, found it in each other, momentarily. They divorced when I was four.

I lived in poverty most of my life, and was often bullied for being poor. During childhood and adolescence, I witnessed things a child should never see, taste, smell, touch or hear! “To all you Jesus Freaks - Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll!” was actually spray-painted, in big black letters, across one of the walls of the many houses we were evicted from. Unfortunately, I was well-versed in each of those things at the young age of 10. The “training” I received in this lifestyle continued through adolescence. I endured various sexual “encounters” from neighborhood boys, and later on from my mother’s boyfriends; and I watched numerous drug exchanges as strangers frequented our home.

My soul was heavy and the feelings of shame and anger stuck to me like dried, caked-on mud. Yet, beneath the darkness glimmered hope. As the oldest of three children, I took on the parental role and became their nurturer and protector. I felt worthy and wanted in this role.

The hope I found in school was also there. I thrived as a student. Even though I attended 14 different schools (because we

were constantly evicted from our homes), school was a familiar place. I felt safe there. I could always get two free meals, and the teachers smiled at me. If I missed a day, they would tell me they missed me and were happy to have me back.

I also loved to learn. I loved learning so much that I remember playing teacher and psychologist with friends during summer breaks. I wrote poems about love and happiness, and I used my imagination to create colorful pictures in mind of what life could be. The outside world accepted me. It covered my shame.

The hope kept on coming. I encountered God.

Chapter 3: My encounter with God

The noise would not stop. My mom and step-dad were screaming all sorts of obscenities at each other, and the air felt dark and dreadful. I just wanted the noise to stop. “God, make it stop!”, I yelled, and suddenly, the room was silent. I felt a peace that I had never experienced in my life. A peace that surpassed all understanding. It was magical...serene. The feeling only lasted a few minutes, but it transformed my soul. I did not understand it. I had not been introduced to God. How did he know me? At that moment, I knew there was something greater than my eyes could see.

What I did not know then, but I know now, is that I am a spirit, who has a soul, and lives in a body.

Chapter 4: Couch Surfer to College Fixture

Adolescence brought independence, and new opportunities for empowerment. My mother and I clashed on so many different levels. In my mind, I was the adult in the house. In her mind, she was still the parent. When I was 16 years old, I could not take it anymore. I packed my bags and stayed with various friends. I had struggled with the idea of leaving my brothers. “You can’t change this situation, but you can create a better life for you and your future family,” I thought to myself, over and over again. It was this internal dialogue, this futuristic thinking, that persuaded me to go.

And still...hope floats. At age 17, I moved in with my boyfriend’s sister and husband. They introduced me to college and encouraged me to apply. I had always wanted to go to college, but did not think I could afford it. I applied to three universities in New York State (where I lived), and was accepted into not one, but two prestigious universities; Syracuse University and St. Lawrence University (SLU). I chose SLU for two reasons: it was the farthest from home, and it was the most beautiful place I had ever seen. My four years at SLU were the longest I had ever resided in one location. Finally, I understood what it was like to have a “home”.

Chapter 5: HEOP...more than a program

I entered college through the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) which is a partnership program that provides economically and educationally disadvantaged residents the possibility a college education. This program opened the doors not only to college, but to various career possibilities. During college, I became an HEOP Summer Counselor, HEOP Academic Tutor, and a Resident Adviser (RA). I participated in various discussion groups, and had the opportunity to present on assorted topics such as systematic oppression and mental well-being. I also remember meeting with an Adviser at the Career Center. I completed a few personality tests and interest inventories and they all pointed to a career in counseling.

Chapter 6: Self-Awareness

I am achievement motivated, driven by the desire to excel in academics and career. I love people and find value in helping them. I love to learn, grow and influence self and others. I am an over-comer who sees challenging situations as opportunities to create positive change.

Based on my experiences, it makes sense that I am an “Enneagram 3.” I feel validation and worth through my attainment of success, and admiration from others. I am a hard-working, competitive and highly focused individual, who has evolved into a socially competent woman. My Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory indicates that I am ENFP. ENFP’s are enthusiastic and energetic people who see the world through the lens of “Big Picture”. I like to swim in the “grey” waters of life, as opposed to the “black and white”. I draw energy from interpersonal and introspective awareness, and I like the freedom to offer idealistic and creative expression.

I see myself as a “facilitator of change”. I also learned early in life that our experiences, good and bad, are just that – experiences. It’s not what happens to us that defines us, it’s how we handle those circumstances. What we pay attention to grows. If I focus on failure, I will get more failure. If I focus on success, I will get more success.

Through passion and perseverance, I have erected a backbone of GRIT. In the midst of difficulties, I chose to find beauty in the ashes. I connect to the resources I have, and I laser-focus on the goals I want to achieve. As I change me, I change not only those around me, but the circumstances I find myself in.

Chapter 7: Facilitator of Change

My career journey has evolved from a fearful little girl with a big heart, to a courageous, faith-based, facilitator of change. While my formal titles are Life Coach and Psychotherapist, it is the informal titles and roles that I value most. I am a wife, mom, and friend. I am a student, a survivor and follower of Christ. Like all of you, I have a story to tell. There's a message in the mess, and a testimony in the test.

I obtained my Bachelor's Degree from SLU in 1992, with a major in psychology and sociology. In 1995, I earned a Master's Degree in Counseling and Human Services from Syracuse University. My first full-time job as a professional was helping pregnant teenage girls obtain health care, and stay in school. How coincidental is that?!? I worked for the same agency that helped my mother when she got pregnant with me at the age of 14.

When I turned 26, after giving birth to my first son (I have three boys), I started my career as a school counselor. My career goal was to help every child learn the value of an education so that they were empowered to live the life they wanted. I would support them, encourage them, counsel them and teach them the skills they needed to excel in life.

Unfortunately, the role of the school counselor has changed in education over the last 20 years. Today's school counselors are

expected to serve as program coordinators and administrative clerks rather than professional counselors. Despite my advocacy attempts, I continue to bang my head on the wall of bureaucracy. A few years ago, in an attempt to earn 2,000 supervision hours needed for mental health licensure, I temporarily left the school system to become a Clinical Counselor at a community mental health agency. During my position as a Clinical Counselor, I experienced a relational trauma that triggered a state of anxiety and depression. I was not able to counsel others. The depression deepened and I was overcome by negative thoughts and emotions. In a state of despair, when playing with the committing suicide, I called my father for help. Over the next few weeks, I allowed family and friends to care for me. I put on the armor of God and spoke light into my darkness. Eventually, the cloud lifted and I was no longer debilitated by fear. Once I had energy, I was able to use a variety of therapeutic interventions to help me heal and, actually grow stronger. I read scripture, prayed, joined life groups, and surrounded myself with positive and caring people. I used emotional freedom tapping and restorative yoga to release negative energy, and I kept a journal to write down my thoughts and feelings. I read inspirational books, listened to encouraging music and replaced my thoughts with God's thoughts.

As I look back on this traumatic event, I realize now that beneath that single event simmered years and years of difficult, unresolved feelings (hurt, disappointment, resentment, anger, shame, pain, guilt and unforgiveness). I had no idea that those

feelings and memories laid dormant in my unconscious. It wasn't until the seal was broken that they flooded in and took over my soul (mind, will and emotions).

The truth is that when I laid my sin at the alter, the battle for my soul began. I had to learn to trust God more than I trusted myself. I had to learn to accept his unfailing love and faithfulness, despite my mistakes. It was a year-long journey of giving up the reigns, trusting God and doing good. I had to learn to forgive myself and forgive others. I did not have the power to do this impossible task in my own strength. Over time, however, I learned that all things are possible with God. Had I not fully submitted my will, I do not think I would be alive to share my story today.

Chapter 8: I love being an Advocate for the “Neuro-Atypical”

It is often our personal experiences that drive our passions, and our focus. I have two children diagnosed with ADHD, and they are completely different in their symptomology. In my pursuit to understand their struggle, and in my pursuit to learn effective parenting strategies, I became somewhat of an “expert” in ADHD. As a school counselor, I love working with this often misunderstood population. I love helping them identify their strengths, and teaching them strategies to excel. I also love educating teachers and parents about executive functioning skills, the brain-based skills required for people to effectively perform tasks and solve problems. I love advocating for people who are “neuro-atypical” and I love teaching them to advocate for themselves. I love this population so much that in 2013, I attended the JST Coaching Institute in Washington, DC and became a Certified ADHD Coach.

Chapter 9: Dream BIG

I have a growth mindset. I believe that with hard work and great passion a person can achieve anything they put their mind to. The sky is the limit for anyone who wishes to reach for it.

I thank God for always having my back! He is the power source that propels me forward. During my twenties, I created a business brochure just for the fun of it! I was preparing a teen presentation on resiliency and I came across a book called, “Teen Spirituality.” For some reason, I began thinking about how I wanted to help people understand that they are complex, holistic beings who have a purpose for living. As I worked on the brochure, I came up with the name, “Body, Mind and Soul Counseling.” It was perfect, so I thought.

While the seed was planted, it was incomplete. As I walk the path that has been set before me, I have learned that the mind is part of the soul, and not separate from the soul. We are triune beings (Spirit, Soul and Body) created by a triune God (Father, Son & Holy Spirit). Our soul is comprised of our mind, will and emotions, and a healthy soul occurs when our head, heart and gut are lined up with the Spirit of God.

I am passionate about people, and if you are reading my story, I want you to know that I am especially passionate about you! I am probably very different than most of the counselors/coaches you have come into contact with. You are

more than a label, and your story matters. Your life, and your story is important. I am eager to hear your story and join you on your journey to wholeness. As our lives intersect, there is another chapter to be written. I wonder what the title will be?

Thank you for taking the time to read my story. I
hope my story is able to add hope to your story.



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