

My Life Story

God's Way

Darlene Bieber Elsbree

MY LIFE STORY

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To protect the privacy of those individuals, names have been changed.

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I was four years old ...

CHAPTER ONE

Raping of Innocence

Ephesians 1:11-12

11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. NIV

WHAT DO YOU SEE when you look at this picture? I see a child who is happy and very loved, a child who is well taken care of. I also see a child who doesn't mind posing for the camera. I

appear to be about four years old in this photo, and already I am posing for the camera. Who does that? I have to say that this is my favorite photo of myself. My father had this photo of me. When he passed away, my step-mother came across the photo and gave it to me.

When I first looked at this photo of myself, I immediately cracked up laughing. My head was angled just right (literally) and the way my feet are positioned, I'm thinking that whoever was taking the picture may have told me exactly how to stand. I just love the outfit I was wearing! My mother always did have a flair for clothing, and still does. I'm not sure exactly how old I was when I first realized that I was "different" from other children my own age. All I can say is, I have a story (as each of us does) and I am sharing my story in the hope that someone out there can find the courage and to

be inspired to become the kind of person God has intended them to be, whatever that may be.

Have you ever woken up and said to yourself, "What is my purpose in life?" I can't tell you how many times I have asked God what it is that I am supposed to do in this life. Sometimes I feel like I am just wandering about this earth lost, constantly searching for my purpose in life.

I am forty-five (backward) years young. I've lost count how many jobs I've had. I am convinced that God does have a plan for me. He must have, because, otherwise, none of what you are about to read would make any sense to me. I believe He has a plan for us all.

My mother and father separated when I was too young to have any memories of all of us as a family. They eventually divorced. My father had visitation rights every other weekend. We may not have always attended church growing up, but I do

remember many occasions when Mother would take us kids to church. Mother did not even get her driver's license until she was in her mid-thirties. I remember riding in taxi cabs or on the city's transit buses to go shopping. I do not have any children and can't even begin to imagine how a mother takes four children by herself shopping using city transportation. I guess you do what you must do.

There were times when Mother and we four kids would walk to Philadelphia Sales, a department store located about two miles away from where we were living. You couldn't help but be excited to go to this store, because as soon as you walked into the store, the smell of popcorn was throughout. My mother would always make our outings special ones. You really don't have to have a million dollars to feel like a million bucks! This store had sales that even the best of shoppers could appreciate. I consider Mother to be one of the best of shoppers.

I remember living in Binghamton, New York when I was about four years old, near the hospital. Mother was going out this one evening and had our neighbor sit for us. Her name was "T.P." These initials do not stand for Toilet Paper, although they could. Anyway, it was time for bed and T.P. was putting my siblings, Vicki, Dara, and Todd, to bed before me. She thought having me sleep in my mother's bed would give her the privacy needed for her to molest me, which is exactly what she did; hence the title of this chapter. She made me promise not to say anything to my mother or anyone else. Of course, I promised because...I was four years old and she was the adult in charge at that moment. I knew what she was doing was wrong because my mother taught us, children, to know right from wrong; this is what "good" parents are supposed to do. I also knew that as soon as my mother got home, I was going to tell her. Once T.P.

left and went home (and I felt safe), I immediately told my mother what had happened. The only thing I can remember is my mother running upstairs, pounding on the door and yelling at the neighbor. Can you even imagine what must have been going through my mother's mind at that moment? The fury? How does a parent refrain from doing the unthinkable to someone who abuses their child?

Romans 12:17-19

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. NIV

Where does a four-year-old little girl find the courage to go forward with the truth by telling her mother that the babysitter molested her? I found the courage because Mother saw to it that her children felt safe to talk to her about anything! We kids were taught right from wrong and knew that we were loved by our parents. I knew T.P. was doing a revolting act against a child, a four-year-old child---ME! But, I also knew that I had no other choice but to tell my mother and that my mother would take care of it. That's what a good mother does. It never happened again. I can't imagine how

scared she must have felt in raising us kids on her own and having to confront this person alone. Even though my father saw us every other weekend, his involvement was on a part-time basis. This is what happens when divorce becomes part of the picture; one parent will become less and less involved. It's inevitable. As we Kids grew older, my father's visits would become fewer and fewer due to us having a "me, me, me" attitude; wanting to hang out with our friends...as most teenagers do. However, over time, his involvement did increase the past twenty-four years. I will talk more on this later.

All of us kids had bicycles. One day they came up missing! Where did they go, and who took them? Allow me to tell you. We had reason to believe that the neighbors had something to do with our missing bikes! Who does that kind of stuff? As if my mother didn't already have enough on her plate in raising four children on her own, trying to provide a

good life for her children! What a world we live in! So far, through the eyes of a four-year-old child, I had witnessed separation between my mother and father, financial struggles, child molestation, fear, and theft. And yet, throughout all of this, my mother was able to instill in me (in all us kids) the love of Christ, the feeling of being safe, and the trust needed to be able to talk to her about anything. Thank you, Mom.

Before moving from this location, I remember attending Kindergarten at Lincoln Elementary School in Binghamton, New York. This building is now housing for the elderly. My first day of school was something I just didn't feel excited about. I remember walking out of class and wanting to quit school so that I could get a job and help Mom with buying food. Needless to say, I wasn't allowed to! I remember looking through cushions of our furniture for nickels and dimes in order to

contribute toward groceries. So many adult concerns for such a young child---you think? Don't get me wrong, we may not have been well off like those more fortunate who came from "the right side of the tracks," but we never went hungry and always had nice clothes to wear.

I'm not sure where we were living when, as a child, I remember going to local parades with Mother, Vicki, Dara, and Todd, (and sometimes with my father). I'm sure other family members went with us; I just can't remember exactly who. But, I can surmise that my Grandmother Fannie (my mother's mother) was one of the people that came with us. I saw little girls my own age twirling batons and wearing costumes with sparkles on them. I was mesmerized by this; I just had to do this, too! I'm not quite sure how old I was then, but I must have told Mom that I wanted to be in a parade and twirl a baton. Before I knew it, my sister Dara was sewing

my costume for me. It was light blue and had red sequins and that dangling fabric stuff outlining my costume. I thought I was something special, for sure! I knew then I just had to be in "showbiz."



I believe I was around nine years old

So, I went ahead and did it. I started thinking (my husband would say, "Uh Oh!"). I started thinking about what I wanted to do or to be in life. Did I want to be a model? An actress? A dancer? or a

professional singer? I decided to become a singer because that way I could have it all and be all. As a singer, you get to wear nice clothes (model), you are sort of acting when you sing, and you have to dance a little bit, too. Back then I used my thumb as my very first microphone and would put on shows for my family and friends.

It was about this time when my mother met a wonderful man. His name was John. There was something about this man that I immediately loved. He made my mother very happy. I noticed that right off. He was good-looking, very charismatic, and he really seemed to love children. John had four children of his own, from his previous marriage: three girls and one boy, just like my mother did. All of us kids were very close in age, and when we got together...talk about "eight is enough," ha, ha!

I remember John laying down on the couch watching TV and me getting down on one knee

while holding onto John's hand explaining to him just how to ask my mother to marry him. Before I knew it, they were married! I was so happy for Mom and for all of us kids. My financial concerns (at the age of nine) became null and void. If I remember correctly, John was in the insurance business. He and Mom decided to buy a cute little house right by the river. I loved this place and I loved the neighborhood. I didn't mind the school district, either. I began meeting new friends.

Many a day after school, all I wanted to do was go either to my room or to the basement so that I could sing along with records, songs like, "Where the Boys Are" by Connie Francis. We lived there for about two years before Mom and John decided to move to Oklahoma. I was eleven years old. My Aunt Nancy, her husband, son, and one other cousin decided to move to Oklahoma, too. The trip out there was awesome.

I am by far in NO way a prejudiced person. In fact, the female babysitter who molested me was African American. I only say this because if anything would have contributed to a person becoming prejudiced, that would. Anyway, we moved from a school district where there were only one or two black students attending my school to a school district where I was the minority (or at least, I thought). Most of the students attending my school were either African American or American Indian. I just couldn't seem to fit in there. I was bullied for money and my peers did not like the fact that I was a "Yankee." Kids can be cruel. I remember telling my mother that I would never take another bath until we moved back to New York. How do you think that went over? Exactly! I believe I took a bath that evening.

I remember going to my very first dance. I remember the dress I wore; it was a light green

gown and very pretty. I remember being taller than my "date." I mean, do you really consider it a date when two eleven-year-olds go to a dance? The only thing I can remember from that night is that I received a pretty wrist corsage and his parents drove us to and from. Oh, I'm sure he was a nice boy too, otherwise, I would not have been allowed to go.

One of the places we lived in (temporarily until we bought a house) had a spotlight on the ceiling overlooking the fireplace. This could not have been a better stage for someone just starting out in "the business." It was awesome. I must have been around twelve years old at that time. It could have been that Christmas when I was asking for the "Big Mouth." Walmart sold this eight-track karaoke player with a microphone and I just had to have it. So, Christmas rolled around and all the presents under the tree were opened but one. My name was

not on that present. John's name was on the last present. It was then I realized I didn't get my Big Mouth for Christmas. I was devastated. When my mother went to pass this gift to my step-father, she said to John that she was sorry and that this gift was not his; that it really belonged to me. I about died. I felt bad for him and overly excited for me. I opened the gift and there it was...I got the Big Mouth!! Wow! My singing career took on a whole new perspective. I was going to be a star (I mean singer). Connie Francis look out. Every now and then my sister, Dara and some friends would want to be included in the performances and we would also choreograph some dance step moves. We stood on the platform in front of the fireplace (because of the spotlight) and performed for the family. Fun, fun, fun! For those of you who do not know what "Karaoke" is...It's pre-recorded music

without vocals allowing a singer to be the "STAR."
It's a whole band without vocalists.

We lived in Oklahoma for eighteen months before my family (minus one) decided to move back to New York; back into the same house we moved from (by the river). My Aunt Nancy's family decided to move back with us. Again, the trip back "home" was awesome. My oldest sister, Vicki, met a man, fell in love, and got married!! She was seventeen years old and he was twenty-two. My mother wasn't too happy about it, at first, but she didn't have much choice in the matter. They married young out there back then. My mother wanted to be supportive no matter how difficult it was for her to "leave" her firstborn child in Oklahoma. Thirty-four years later, they are still married and living a beautiful Christian life. I was the flower girl.

***American Society for the Positive Care of Children
states that:***

What is Sexual Abuse?

*Sexual child abuse is a type of maltreatment, violation, and exploitation that refers to the involvement of the child in sexual activity to provide sexual gratification or financial benefit to the perpetrator. It includes contact for sexual purposes, molestation, statutory rape, prostitution, pornography, exposure, incest, or other sexually exploitative activities. What happens to kids during childhood shapes who they become as adults. Children living through abuse and violence, unnecessarily suffer the ill effects of this trauma for the rest of their lives. **#ITS TIME FOR CHANGE***

Sexual Abuse Statistics

- *1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old.*³

- *Over 58,000 children were sexually abused last year. ¹*
- *8.3% of reported child abuse cases were sexual abuse. ¹*
- *34% of people who sexually abuse a child are family members. ⁴*
- *12.3% of girls were age 10 or younger at the time of their first rape/victimization, and 30% of girls were between the ages of 11 and 17. ²*
- *27.8% of boys were age 10 or younger at the time of their first rape/victimization. ²*
- *96% of people who sexually abuse children are male, and 76.8% of people who sexually abuse children are adults. ⁴*
- *325,000 children are at risk of becoming victims of commercial child sexual exploitation each year. ⁵*
- *Caregiver alcohol or drug abuse is a child abuse risk factor putting kids at much higher risk for being abused. ¹*

- *The average age at which girls first become victims of prostitution is 12 to 14 years old, and the average age for boys is 11 to 13 years old.*⁵

National Sexual Assault Online Hotline

800.656.HOPE (4673) - To view this information in its entirety, please go to:

www.americanspcc.org/child-sexual-abuse

CHAPTER TWO
Defining Me

Proverbs 3:5-6

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. NIV

GOD REALLY DOES work in a mysterious way. Who would have thought that the purpose of us moving to Oklahoma would be so that my sister Vicki would find God and obey the Gospel? She's been a Christian since she was nineteen years old. In fact, it is because of Vicki's undying faith that,

in turn, has led the rest of her family to Christ. Thank you, Vicki, for being a wonderful example of Christianity, and thank you, Jesus.

Vicki and I weren't as close to each other then as we are now and have been for many years. We are four years apart in age. I was just a little sister who wanted to be like big sis and tag along with her and her friends. She wanted nothing to do with me!! I still love you, Sis. Who calls whom for advice now? Yeah, that's right... we both do. Ha, ha!

One day when we were living near downtown Binghamton, Dara and I were out riding our bike. Dara was "driving," and I was sitting on the back of the bike, riding. I had an important job, though. It was raining outside and apparently, we did not plan to let that hinder us from going for a ride.

I held an umbrella over the two of us and somehow our picture ended up in the local newspaper. They called us, "The Chinese Touch."

My family is and always has been a very close family. Many times, my sister Dara and I would go for walks around the block. When we were living in the house by the river, Dara and I would take many walks together around the neighborhood; one of my fondest memories.

My brother Todd...well, he's another story! He and I were the two youngest, but he was the only boy in the family, and, well...he got special attention. I remember times when Todd and I would bicker back and forth like a brother and sister do from time to time. But, now? Todd and I have grown up and he realizes now just what he has in a sister like me. Just teasing, Todd.



My sister Dara and me

I love you and thank God every day for you. Todd has always been "Mr. Dare Devil." I don't like that name because of the word devil in it, but this is the only way I can describe my brother, Todd.

He would jump off cliffs into the creek, skateboard dangerously, and other things that I

don't even know about. He was a boy doing boy things, I guess.

A few years later, Mom and John bought another house located on Savitch Road, not too far from the house by the river. I absolutely loved that place. It had a built-in swimming pool. I never even knew how to swim.

If Dara and I weren't going for neighborhood walks or watching soap operas, Dara would spend her time drawing. She loved to draw trees...the kind of trees in the fall with no leaves on them. They really are pretty like that, especially when the sun or moon is shining through.

In fact, it wasn't too long ago that Mother, Dara, and I were talking about the "old school days" and what we used to do when we got home from school. We would make our own classic French fries and watch General Hospital on television. When I think about that now, I can't help but smile.

Mom asked us where she was at the time. We told her that she and John were at work.

That neighborhood was great and there were a lot of girls my age that lived just up the street. We got to know each other and became friends. We would go disco dancing every Sunday. Boy, did I love to dance or what? All of us did. We would all dress up like we were "somebody." I remember dancing with a boy who was known as "Disco King." He was African American. He and I would dance a lot together. I somehow earned the name, "Disco Queen." Great times, for sure.

It wasn't too long after that, that Mom and John decided to divorce. I was sixteen. I can't tell you why they divorced because I don't know the reason. I remember the day we left John. It was such a sad day for me...as I'm sure it was for everyone! My heart was breaking for John. I could not bear the thought of him being alone. I truly believe that their

love for one another never died. In fact, years later, John came over to where Mother was living at the time and you just knew their love and attraction for each other was still very much alive. John has since passed away. I will always love you John and will forever miss you. You were a wonderful step-father.

Mother found a beautiful home near the college for us to live in. The neighborhood was really nice. I remember turning seventeen. Mother allowed me to have some friends over. That was probably the most memorable birthday for me. Why? Mother bought me my very first professional microphone and stand (which I still have and use the stand to this day). I had no words. My mother would tell me about a band she went and listened to every now and then with my Aunt Nancy and Aunt Phyllis. They all just loved to dance. So, the night I graduated from high school, Mother decided to

take me and some friends out to the place where her favorite band was playing. This place was considered more of a restaurant than it was a bar and was known for its great food. I couldn't believe it! The band members came over to say hello to my mother because they recognized her. If I do say so myself, my mother was and still is a very beautiful woman. She has been said to resemble Jackie O. or Natalie Wood.



My beautiful mother



My beautiful mother

Mother was telling them about how much I wanted to become a singer. They invited me up to sing a song! WHAT? My knees started shaking and my heart was pounding. I knew that if I was ever going to sing professionally, I would have to allow myself to make a mistake (like forgetting the lyrics) and just GO FOR IT. So, I did. I made my debut the night of my high school graduation. I sang, "Torn Between Two Lovers" by Mary Macgregor. Seeing people on the dance floor just made it even more special. Thanks, Mom.

I decided to go to college at seventeen because I just didn't know what else to do with my life at that point. I wasn't sure how to get started in the music industry, so I

chose to take up music in college. I did not like it at all. I hated the theory of music. Just give me my microphone, my lights, and a band and let me do my thing, ya know? My mother told me that the female singer in her favorite band (the one I went to see on graduation night) was taking time off for maternity leave and the band was looking for a fill-in until she returned. I have to say that this band was working five nights a week in my area and they were probably the most popular band around. I decided to see if I could audition with this band and, luckily, they said yes. They asked me to meet them at the club for an audition. I GOT THE JOB! I was speechless. My very first professional singing gig was with my mother's favorite

band. It was a three-piece band, a guitar player, bass player, and female vocalist (who at times, played the keyboard). The drums were pre-recorded. Everyone in the band sang, making harmonies beautiful. The members of the band were not originally from the United States. I was the only American in the band. I was still only seventeen. It was time for the female singer to return. I was sad, but I knew it was only a matter of time before I found another group to play with.

To my amazement, they asked me to stay on. I was thrilled to no end. I was blessed to have such a professional group in my area, who was very popular and well-known to learn the "business" from. One night, we

were playing --- mind you, we were playing five nights a week --- I was on break and ran into my music professor on my way to the ladies' room. I stopped and chatted with her. She complimented me on how good I sounded. She told me that she had auditioned with the band but did not get the job. I DID. I felt embarrassed for her, however, I think it took maturity and courage for her to admit that to me.

The leader of the band said that there was somebody he would like to introduce me to. He said that he was a really, nice guy. I thought, *sure, why not?* He was polite, kind, and very nice. He was good-looking, too. It didn't really bother me that he was eight years older than me. Anyway, he seemed

interested in me, as I was in him, so, I decided to see where this could lead. I needed a ride home that evening and so he offered to take me home. I said, "okay." We were out in the parking lot looking for his car. He pretended he didn't know where he parked. Here I am looking for some beater of a vehicle. What kind of a car does he unlock and get into? A very nice-looking sports car. It was light blue and grey or white. I started thinking, *hmm... maybe this guy isn't a deadbeat after all; ha, ha.* I enjoyed our conversation that night and getting to know each other better. He was currently working full time in designing stereo units, speakers, etc. We sat out in my driveway until the following morning. I was living with

my mother, at the time. I had just turned eighteen and he was twenty-six.

It wasn't but a few months later that he and I were seriously dating. We decided to enter the Yagotta Regatta Canoe Raft Race with some of his friends. We were building a raft to take part in the race down the Chenango River. Do you remember earlier when I said that I do not know how to swim? Anyway, I agreed to participate. What could possibly go wrong? The night before the race, many people were parking their canoes and rafts at the Chenango Bridge Country Club, where the race was to begin.

I could tell that my boyfriend had had too much to drink. He and a friend decided to expose themselves - acting like idiots

through the parking lot. I mean, idiots! This behavior was unacceptable to me. How dare he humiliate himself (let alone me) in front of all these people? The people we were with that night decided they wanted to go to this nearby bar where live bands were playing. This bar was about one to one and a half miles down the road. I only had two beers that whole night. There were many people around, hundreds between the country club and bar. At that point, I could tell that my boyfriend was quite drunk and so I decided I had enough. I have always been the kind of person that doesn't put up with too much. Mind you, I was only eighteen at the time. I told him that I hated him and never wanted to see him again as I pushed him away. He

told me to go get -----ed by a -----er. I walked away and went down to the bar by myself before deciding to walk back to the country club area where I knew there was a phone. I was going to call my mother and have her pick me up. We didn't live very far from the club. It was then about midnight.