Alyssa Tousant

Chapter 1: In the beginning…

 I remember my life experiences by what state I was living in, the house I was living in, where I went to school, or treatments I have taken. So, to start my story let me set the stage. I was living in California on a lot with five other houses, this lot was gated, and you had to be let in to enter, I felt safe there and I trust everyone there. Little did I know there was danger inside the place I felt safe in. I was molested by a family friend who lived in that gated lot, there were only two encounters that I remember but I lived in that place for a long time. When we first moved in, we lived in the brown house to the left, then ended up moving to the blue house to the right.

 I trusted this man so when he would invite me to his house, I felt like it was ok to be there plus he had a monkey, and I thought that was so cool. Even at that age I knew what was going on was wrong, I felt dirty like I had been rolling in a mud pile, but I never said anything because I was afraid that I would get in trouble, so I never told anyone. These events unlocked a desire inside of me, I liked how I felt so I was curious about sex and wanted to know more. We moved again, this time we moved to another state, my dad was in the military so we would move back and forth from California to Illinois. We were in Illinois in military housing, and I met this girl, I thought she was so cool, and she was older than me, I thought I was cool because she wanted to hang out with me. She was so free, and she loved her life, she made people pay attention to her, every playground we went to she stole the show. I looked up to her and wanted to be like her, she use to wear Mrs. Celie from the color purple plates in her hair, she wore jean knee length shorts and colorful tee shirts. She was cool and I followed her around were ever she went and did whatever she did. She was the one who introduced me to porn, her parents had HBO and she was the only child, and she was allowed to do whatever she wanted. I spent the night over her house, and I was introduced to porn, we watched it all night. I saw people doing things and I decided I wanted to try them, this is when I started to masturbate.

 I was still in grade school and now I had secrets that were weighting heavy on me, it felt as if an elephant was sitting on me, and I was still trying to move forward. I knew what I was doing was wrong, and I didn’t want to get in trouble, so I kept all this guilt, shame, and perversion hidden inside. This is when I began to eat my feelings and where the insomnia began. The only thing that would sooth me after engaging in these sexual acts was to eat, so I would get out of bed walk down the hall my feet pitter patting on a cold tile floor, sneak into the kitchen, take little Debbie oatmeal crème pies, and eat them until I felt satisfied. My mom began to notice that the pies were getting eaten too fast and thought it was my brother. One day she was cleaning my room, and she found all the wrappers behind my bed, I was embarrassed. I never liked being exposed, this caused me to become sneakier so I wouldn’t get caught.

 While in this house my cousins and I would also engage in sexual acts, which led to more eating, more guilt, more shame, and less sleep. The only way I could sleep was if I masturbated but not until I ate my snack. I’ve had sexual encounters with many of my cousins and it was tearing me down, I started to isolate, even in school I was always alone even if there were people who wanted to be my friend. I felt that if anyone was close to me, they would see what I was doing and because I knew I was doing wrong and didn’t want to stop I hid from people and nursed that perversion, at this time we moved back to California.

I grew up Christian and I loved Jesus even at a young age and I gave my life to him. My church home in California was my family. I loved going to church, I loved singing, and really enjoyed the messages even in children’s church. I felt better at church, I didn’t want to do sexual things while I was in church, I felt free at church around the pastor and the other church members. I felt safe and secure there, I felt Holy Spirit there, I never wanted to leave this place. I thought church was the only place I could meet God, so I went with my mom and aunt anytime they were in the building. I’ll never forget my church home, my foundation was built there, I learned about Jesus and how much he loved me. I learned how he died so we could be saved, I learned that Jesus is a healer, our teachers told us all about how he would go all about doing good and healing people. I believe that Jesus is all these things, and he could do all these things and the memory verse that stuck with me my whole life was John 14:12 “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.” Once I left church it seem as though the desires came back like a might wave and would overtake me. I still believe that Jesus was all these things, but I started to believe he couldn’t save me because I had done so much wrong.

When I moved back to California this time I had gained a lot of weight, and I always wanted to eat, I don’t remember anyone ever telling me don’t eat that or I was eating to much. I grew up in a family of cooks, no matter what occasion we were eating, none of the food was considered healthy but it sure tasted good. My mom was the cook in California and my momma could throw down in the kitchen, it wasn’t anything she ever cooked that I didn’t like. Coming home from school and smelling the nutmeg, butter, sugar combination, I knew we were having sweet potatoes that night and you can’t have sweet potatoes without mac and cheese. My mom would barbecued ribs, chicken, steaks, brats, hotlinks, hotdogs, and hamburgers. The sides would be potato salad, spaghetti, baked beans, mac and cheese, and whatever else she could think of. There was always dessert, and I ate it right after eating my meal no matter how full I was. Overeating was easy for me because I couldn’t see it was happening, I would get a hot dog or hamburger because they were always done first. This was considered a snack, then I was tasting everything while the main meats were getting cooked. This goes on until everything is done and then I would sit down and eat a whole meal and dessert with a can of pop or two. I was eating the shame and guilt away, I wanted to feel better because I felt so depressed and low because if what I had become and that I was bring innocent people, my family members into this. I was mad at the man who molested me because he opened the door to perversion in my life and now, I was opening the same door to others. My desire for sex became stronger and stronger, I was involving my cousins and that really bothered me.

I remember one day I was so thirsty all day and I was drinking and drinking anything I saw but I remained thirsty. On top of that I was urinating a lot, I didn’t know what was going on, but I remember one night I went to the bathroom 24 times. I didn’t tell my parents because I thought it was because I had drank a lot. Then I got a boil, and it was painful, and the location was in a weird place so their was no relief. The pain became unbearable, and I went to my mom and told her. I told her then that night it burst, I thought everything was ok and life would go back to normal, but this would be the moment when my life would change forever. My mom took me to the hospital and military hospital were so old and they had a smell like something was rotten, walking in the building I already knew I didn’t want to be here. I remember sitting in a hallway all these people were passing by with their brown military getups on and I felt uneasy, I was anxious and wanted to leave. A lady came out and she had me drink this drink; it was so sweet even to me I didn’t like it but she said to drink it. I don’t remember much after that but what I do remember was that I was admitted into the hospital that day. That was scary, especially when my mom had to leave, my baby sister was home, and she needed to go home to her. She said she would be back in the morning, and I said ok, I watched her walk until I couldn’t see her anymore and then I cried.

The next day was when someone explained to me why I was in the hospital, they told me I had diabetes, I didn’t know what that meant and the doctors tried to explain it to me, but I didn’t understand. All I knew was that they had me locked in a room, I couldn’t go home, and they were feeding me food that had no seasoning and tasted like cardboard. Hospitals always have chicken breasts that is hard and dry, I needed a whole gallon of water just to swallow it. One of my favorite doctors was Dr. Bailey, she came to my room with a smile and made me feel comfortable with her. She was very patient and kind with me and I trusted her.

I don’t remember how long I stayed in the hospital but when I finally left, I thought I’ll never be back in this place again, little did I know this would be the start of many hospitals stays. I couldn’t wait to get home, I had been starved and I was ready to eat, my mom was cooking that night, so I knew it was going to be something good. When I got my plate that night, I had baked chicken and salad with Italian dressing, I thought this is a joke right? I felt betrayed because my mom was feeding me like the hospital did except her chicken wasn’t dry and it had flavor, so I ate it. She gave me diet peach tea to drink, and I hated it, it had an after taste, I didn’t understand what was happening and I was mad because I wanted to eat like everyone else. While I was eating prison food everyone else got the fried chicken, spaghetti, sweet potatoes, mac and cheese, cakes, cookies, and candy.

My mom would always ask me had I taken my sugar, and I would sadly walk and get my machine, take my sugar, and my numbers were always high. To take my sugar, I had to use this pen looking tool that had a needle in it, it would stab my finger, blood would come out, then I would put it on a strip that was inserted into the machine, and ten seconds later my blood sugar would appear on the screen. I didn’t like taking my sugar because I didn’t want my numbers to be high and I didn’t want my mom to know I was sneaking food. My mom didn’t understand why my sugars were high, but she didn’t know that after she would feed me, and everyone went to sleep, I was up in the kitchen eating and drinking pop. The insomnia had gotten worst, the overeating had reached new heights, and incest and masturbation seemed like it consumed me.

I don’t remember my first doctor’s appointments, but I do remember that each appointment lasted two hours plus, I felt like I was being interrogated. They saw my numbers and they wanted to know what I was doing, how I was eating, and my mom told them she was changing my diet, and she didn’t know why my sugars were elevated either. I was hearing all this, and it made me sad because they were blaming my mom, and I was the one sneaking in the kitchen eating. They did blood work, but I wasn’t sure what the test was for. So, from that day one I lied about my numbers, I would also poke my finger but get water to dilute the blood so when I showed my mom the number it read lower than it was. I thought that this would allow me to eat more of the foods I wanted and get the doctors off my back.

At my next appointment I showed my logbook, and the doctors were asking me what changed to get my sugars regulated like this and my mom said she is still making my food healthier, and I was always outside playing. The doctors were pleased, my mom was happy, and I felt good as well, after the appointment I always went to get blood drawn. I still didn’t know the reason why they were drawing blood but one of the tests they did was for Hemoglobin A1C. This test allows the doctors to see what your average blood sugar has been over the last three months. So, once the results came back and my levels were higher than I said they wanted my parents to get my sugar under control and make sure I was giving then the right numbers. I was in middle school now, I lived in a new part of California, and I thought things were going to get better.

Middle school was fun and terrifying at the same time, I was becoming me, I was making friends, I felt happy for the first time in a while. I still needed to take my blood sugar at school for lunch, I got to leave class 5 mins early so that I could go to the nurse and check my levels. That was cool for me, everyone wanted to know why I got to leave, and it made me feel mysterious and people talked to me more because they wanted to be nosy. My mom and the nurse were like best friends, she made sure he saw me do everything and that my numbers were correct. I like the nurse; I could tell he cared by the way he treated me; he wasn’t harsh like the military doctors. I would leave his office, go to lunch, and eat everything I wasn’t supposed to eat. At school we had a student center where you could buy chips, candy, pop, juice, whatever you wanted, hot Cheetos were my thing back then and I got a bag every day with a Fruitopia. I believed there wasn’t any sugar in chips especially these because they were spicy. I thought it was ok for me to eat junk food because I walked so much. I walked to and from school each day and it had to be about two miles, I didn’t mind it because I was walking with my friends, so it didn’t seem that long. The doctors told me that diet and exercise helps lower your numbers, so I thought walking was the best thing to do.

I didn’t understand anything about cards and how they processed in the body, and hot Cheetos did have sugar in them, but I never looked at the nutritional values on the back nor did I think about serving sizes. My numbers were still high and my mom, the doctors, and the school nurse couldn’t figure out why. I had made a friend in the student center she was considered popular, we hung out at lunch, and I thought I was a cool kid now, one day she comes up to me and says your picture is hanging up in the student center and it says not to serve you. I was so embarrassed, and I lied and said I didn’t know why. Inside I felt like someone had come and gut punched me, I felt sick and nervous, I hated to tell people that I had diabetes. Well, I never told anyone my mom would make sure she let it be known, and once people knew they started acting weird. They randomly asked me if I took my medication and that would make me so mad because none of my friends knew and they would say “what medication?” I hated everything that came with diabetes, the food restrictions, people asking me did I take my medication, and the constant stares when I would eat or drink. I was a heavy kid so being heavy on top of having diabetes made me feel like I was an alien from another planet. I just wanted it to go away but it wouldn’t, so I started to become sneaky, I would ask other people to buy things for me. I wanted my hot Cheetos, and no one was going to stop me.

I was getting stressed out about my numbers, eating, and my friends knowing I had diabetes. So, I did what I always did when I was stressed, masturbation was a routine now I made room for it. I hated the fact that I had brought other people into this perverted world so I vowed that I would never invite anyone else into that world and I thought that I wasn’t hurting anyone by just doing it alone. My family decided to get a new cable service Time Warner, and we had all the channels, one day I was scrolling through all the channels, and I saw that there was a playboy channel. I thought “I know my parents didn’t get this channel” but I clicked on it anyway and I was shocked to find out that we had the channel. I spent hours in the room watching move after movie and seeing all this perversion and it was like I studied it. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn’t stop it was like I was drawn to it. This caused me to be depressed and eat more, and more, and more. I had all these secrets built up in me, I was overeating, I was masturbating, and I was lying to everyone about everything.

Imagine all this weight and condemnation on a middle schooler, I felt like I started to fade away and I would put on this mask, I wasn’t sure who I was anymore. I knew I loved God but if I loved God why was I watching these movies and doing things God said not to do. I knew I should be taking care of myself and eating right so that the complications of diabetes would destroy my life. I was so confused and the thing that I used for a stress reliever was also the thing that had a potential to kill me.

Church Friends

 Church was still a huge part of my life, I went every Wednesday and Sunday, all day Sunday. I started to make friends there, but my best friend was my cousin, she was so cool, and everyone loved her but not as much as I did. She was older that me by a year and everywhere she went she took me, people at church already knew that when they saw her, I was right there. She knew about me having diabetes, but she never treated me differently, she still treated me like a person. One thing about me is I’m going to laugh, and she laughed right along with me. She kept me out of a lot of trouble, we spent time together all the time and at church it was no different. We started to hang with other girls from the church, I felt uncomfortable around a lot of people, but people loved my cousin, so I had to get used to it, she went into the youth center before me but after church she came and got me and I hung out with the older kids. She always included me she never left me out of her life.

 Once I got into the youth center it felt like I was granted access to this member only club, Generation Upright was a whole vibe! Both my cousins were already in the youth center, and I was already hanging out with most of the people in the youth, so I felt like a celebrity. My oldest cousin was the cool guy who made beats for our gatherings, every time I walked into GU he was in the booth playing all the beats getting us “crunk”. He called me “stub-a-lubus” because I was round with stubby legs and arms but once I got into the youth center, he shortened it to “stubs” and that’s what all the guys started to call me. I didn’t mind because my cousin was the cool so if he gave me a nickname that meant I was cool too.

 My girl cousin was the Princess of Generation Upright, she always had on the latest clothing, the hottest hairstyle, and she just had it going on. She was more girly than me I was a more tomboyish, but we matched each other’s fly, wasn’t nobody touching us in the shoes or hair department. She stayed with the wet and wavy braids, and I had the braids with the deep swoop, on thing we didn’t play about was our hair. She never tried to make me dress like her or act like her, she was kind and nice to everyone and I was not about to play with you, and some would say I was mean, we balanced each other. When I was with my cousins and our friends we never talked about my medication, my blood sugar numbers, or how if I didn’t take care of myself, I would die. We talked about regular teenage stuff…the cute boys that came to church and how our pastor made us laugh in the sermon.

I liked to come to church to see my friends and be around my GU family, but I was listening to the word. I took notes and really wanted to live this life that our pastor said we could have by building relationship with Jesus, I was on the praise and worship team, and I felt something every time I sang. Even as a teenager I felt so much relief singing and worshipping the Lord but deep down I knew I had this desire and it wasn’t something that the Lord was pleased with, I never thought that the Lord could heal me from these desires I thought I would just live like this forever. I loved my cousin so much and I knew she would never judge me, but I couldn’t tell her or Jesus about my secret, so I put on another mask for my church friends. We laughed, we had deep conversations, we even prayed together but they never knew that I had a food addiction or that I was addicted to porn.

School Friends

Things started to change in school when I met a girl, she came to my school in 8th grade, she was from Mississippi, and I loved to hear her talk. She just started talking to me one day and at this point I was super shy and didn’t talk much in school anymore, but I wanted to talk to her. I wanted to ask her the first day we met to be my best friend, but I knew that wasn’t something people are supposed to do. We hung out at lunch, we walked to and from school together, and after school we went to the park and hung out. This kept me away from watching the playboy channel and she made me feel like I was a normal person. She genuinely like me for me, she would always compliment my hair because I stayed rocking the braids or the deep swoop with the ponytail, and she would say kind things to me. After a while I became comfortable with her, and we would make each other laugh all day long. We has silent read class after lunch, and we would look at each other and just busting up laughing we use to get into so much trouble in that class.

She was always eating these orange sticks and one day I said, “girl what are you eating” and she said “Chick-o-stick” I laughed hard because of the way she said it, then she started laughing and I asked her again what she was eating, and she said “CHICK-O-STICK!” After we laughed so hard that our stomachs hurt, she finally said “its candy”, I told her I had never heard of it, she gently informed me that everyone in Mississippi eat them and asked me to try it. I tried it and I was shocked, Chick-o-sticks are made of peanut butter, cane sugar, corn syrup, and toasted coconut, so I other words it was SWEET, and I loved it. We would go to the NEX which was a store for the military and buy Chick-o-sticks, if she didn’t have one, I had on and if I didn’t have one, she had. She didn’t know I had diabetes thought, I didn’t want to tell her because we had become such good friends, and I didn’t want her to think I was weird. Towards the middle of 8th grade a new girl came to the school with her brother and the we all became friends, and we had a little crew. The new girl was loud and hilarious, she always kept us entertained, after school I would put my stuff down and go to the park. All the girls would go there because the boys all played basketball there, but I was going just to hang out with my crew. When I was with them, I felt like I was in a perfect world with my perfect friends, next year we would be in high school, and we would talk for hours about how high school would be. We walked everywhere all-around military housing just talking and laughing, this was the best time of my life and I felt like these were my people.

My blood sugar kept getting higher and higher and I couldn’t even understand at this point what was happening, the doctors said if I exercise and at right, I would be fine. I felt that I walked a lot and that was good exercise, but my number were increasing and one day I ended up in the hospital again. My friends didn’t know what had happened to me and they started to call my house to find out what was wrong. My mom told them that I was a diabetic and my blood sugar was high and I had to be admitted to the hospital, they were afraid for me and worried. My mom then called their moms and asked was I at their house eating food, the moms said no and that we were mostly outside. My friend did tell my mom about the Chick-O-Sticks and my mom told her not to give them to me anymore. All of this happened without my knowledge, so when I got back to school, I was going to make up some lie, but they confronted me and asked why I didn’t tell them and that they were so worried about me. In the moment I didn’t see that I had people in my life that were concerned about me and my health, I was mad at my mom for telling my business once again. I was so angry, and I wanted to go to my mom and give her a piece of my mind, I wanted to yell at her and tell her to mind her business, but I knew better so I said nothing. I started to isolate again and then my one friend that I was close with moved back to Mississippi and me and the other girl weren’t that close, so we drifted apart.

I felt like when people found out about me having diabetes that they always left or changed how they felt about me. I was feeling so alone and started to hate myself and my life, I went to school and started to get better grades, I found out that I had a favorite subject which was Science. I wasn’t sure if I liked science because of my teacher who everyone in the 8th grade had a crush on or because I was interested in the subject. When I was promoted from 8th grade I was excelling in English and Science.

I couldn’t wait for high school because I would be going to Serria High School and that was were both my cousins (the cool guy and the Princess) went to school. I would dream about how the school days would go, how I would know everyone, and I dreamed of being popular like my cousins. All that changed when my parents told me I wouldn’t be attending that school and that we were moving because my parents had bought a house o the other side of town. I felt like my heart was ripped out of my chest, I was so angry at my parents, and I had decided at that point that there main goal in life was to ruin mine. I this is were the anger, rage, and resentment towards my parents started. I became so depressed and sad, I would cry all night and when I got up I would be angry all day. High school seem so scary now and I was terrified. I was promoted from 8th grade to 9th and I started a new school with no friends, depressed, and lonely.

Chapter 2: Adolescence: High School, Friends, and Diabetes

 High school was the best and worst time of my life, I had so much anxiety, I was always overthinking and creating scenarios that never happened, and I was fearful of everything. I was afraid of everything except dying, I kept hearing it for so long, that I was going to die, limbs would be cut off, I would be blind, and all the other horrible effects of diabetes that I said if I’m going to die, let’s go out with a bang. I ate whatever I wanted, and I was so angry at my parents that I thought eating this way would hurt them.

My mom had spent so much time in the hospital herself and when they told her that changing her eating habits could change the way she felt, she cut everything out of her diet. She was eating baked chicken with no seasoning, rice, and corn every night, for lunch she would boil a hamburger, and for breakfast a piece of salami on a piece of bread. My dad did PT every morning so his body was healthy, they would try their best to help me but to me it seemed like the doctors had come home with me. I was overwhelmed and the anger, bitterness, and resentment continued to build, I would hate for anyone to tell me how I should be doing things because they didn’t live my life. They didn’t know how it felt to be the only one in your church friend group, your school friend group, and your immediate family that had an illness that everyone said you could die from. That was everyone’s go to; to tell me I would die from this illness.

I would be in my doctor’s appointments, and I was there but I wasn’t there, I would be off in my own imaginary life, being who I wished I could be in the real world, I didn’t need to say anything because that’s how the appointments went. The doctors talked at me, and I sat there and cried until one day the tears stopped and I stopped feeling anything. Nothing they said had any effect on me and I believe they started to see that as well, there was no more empty promises that I would do better, I was just there physically but mentally I had already checked out.

Having a chronic illness weighs on you mentally, especially if you’ve had the illness since you were a child. I’m not sure who taught my doctors to be doctors but I guess these are the tactics they use on soldiers in the military. They didn’t get the results they were expecting, I am a words of affirmation type so there is no surprise that I responded to these tactics the way I did. It had the same effect on my mother, they made her feel as though she was a bad parent and even threatened her with child abuse. I was completely over this disease and these doctors, even the doctor that was my favorite changed and started to be like the rest of them. They did offer therapy, but I said no because I had believed that therapy was for white people and black people don’t do that. We pray and Jesus would help us.

In high school taking my blood sugar was not the focus, I would use my five-minute pass they gave me to leave early, but I wouldn’t go to the nurses office. I don’t even remember the nurses name and she didn’t know me. She never called my mom if I didn’t come in to take my blood sugar. I had a box in the office that I brought freshman year that had a blood sugar machine, needles, and strips and that same box stayed in the nurses office until my last day of school.

I had a doctor’s appointment scheduled; I was preparing myself for this long-drawn-out appointment, my mom was there, and I could tell we both were thinking the same thing “here we go again”. My doctor’s appointments in the past consisted of 1-2hours in office with the doctors, crying and wanting to fight everyone in the office because they would tell me I was overweight and show me the BMI chart and tell me I needed to get to a certain level to be healthy. A BMI chart shows you how much body fat you should have based on your height and weight, this chart said that I was morbidly obese. I always had to miss the whole day of school because me and my mom would be drained. They put us in a room, and we waited longer than usual, then I heard the doctor knock, this time there was more than one doctor. They did their doctor talk, and I wasn’t listening and then I saw a needle and a squishy pig, so I started to pay attention. They told me that the pills I was taking should be regulating my blood sugars, but because they weren’t they were going to add a long-acting insulin. I never understood what diabetes was, and in this moment, I still didn’t understand what was going on. I had questions but didn’t know how to say what was going through my head. They asked, “do you understand?” and I just said yes.

They took the syringe and the pig and showed me how I was to inject the needle into my body, I would take the shot at night, and it was supposed to last me throughout the next day. I was supposed to repeat this every night. This is also when they told me that I would be transferring out of pediatrics and into the adolescent clinic. It felt like they were relieved to get rid of me and the feeling was mutual. I went to an appointment in the adolescent clinic, and it was totally different then what I was used to, my appointment was 20mins, I did blood work and went home. I was shocked.

My mom told me that she wouldn’t be going into see the doctor with me, she said she would wait in the waiting room. I knew everything was taking a toll on her, plus it was time for me to start going to my appointments on my own. A couple of appointments in, the doctor looked at my numbers and he said, “diabetes is a very complicated disease and if you don’t want to take it seriously, I won’t be able to help you.” I didn’t know how to take that, because I was used to the pediatric interrogation. I felt that I wanted to change, I just didn’t understand, and I didn’t know how to ask for help. I didn’t want to seem like I was dumb for not understanding or asking the same questions over and over, so I became prideful. I didn’t want anyone to tell me how I should live my life, I felt like I had been under other people’s control my whole life. I was in charge of me, and I thought “none of you doctors seem to be able to help me so what else is new”. I had already made up my mind that I knew what was best for me and none of the things they told me had happened so, forget them and what they were saying. I would still try and walk and drink water, take my insulin when I felt like my sugars were high and thought I was taking care of myself. I don’t remember much about the adolescent clinic; I don’t even remember the doctors name.

My high school years had a lot of highs and lows for me, I was making friends, but I had learned the art of making people believe I was telling them intimate details about my life but because I lived in a fantasy world I was lying and making up things about myself and making my life seem fabulous when it wasn’t. The stories I told others I had an active sex life, I had boyfriends, and lots of friends. The truth was I never went anywhere but church, diabetes ran my life, everything in my life revolved around diabetes, and my home life to me back then sucked.

My mom and I had a good relationship growing up but as I became a teenager, we seemed to but heads a lot. My dad and I didn’t get along at all, to the point where there were physical altercations. I felt like he never tried to get to know me, and he only had a part in my life when it was time to discipline, this also cause me to be angrier at my mom because I felt she never defended me. I felt like no one ever defended me, all I had was adults telling me what I should be doing and how I should be acting, but no one ever asked me how I felt. I was so confused about life, to a 16-year-old girl who had experienced all I had experienced, I felt that God hated me and so did my family. So, I thought what’s the point of living, why would I continue to live this life and it seem like this world hated me and wanted me gone, this is when depression sat in at high levels. To hear from the age of 12-16 that you were going to die on top of my home life not being ideal, and the mask that I had to put on with different friend groups led me to believe that life was too hard and complicated.

Sophomore year was coming to an end, and I was so excited about next year, I found my school friends that loved me, and I loved them. They wouldn’t let me hide and they always included me, I knew these were my friends because on my birthday they all sat in the back of the bus, and they would always invite me to come sit with them, but I was so afraid that I always declined. I got on the bus and sat down then suddenly, I heard everyone in the back of the bus say, “Happy Birthday Alyssa!” really loud, I felt so seen. I knew that junior year was going to be epic. Then I found out that my dad was retiring from the military, we sold our house, we moved, and I couldn’t go to the same school next year. The school that I went to was a school for bad kids or kids who were holding on by the hair of their chinny, chin, chin. It was so ghetto and I was fuming, it seemed that every time I found people that I started to trust and even thought about telling them about the illness and the struggles I was having mentally, they got ripped from my life, now I had to make new friends and learn a new school I started to hate everything and everyone.

I eventually made a friend in junior year; she was gorgeous, and everyone knew it. I never understood why my friends were always pretty and popular, I hated attention, and I was so shy, but she never left me out. She thought I was cool, and I was so confused but I loved her for excepting me. We had English class together and we met another girl who was also popular and pretty and we called ourselves cookies and creme, me and one of the girls were dark skinned and the other was light skin, like an Oreo. Junior year was a fashion show to me, I got into fashion because of one of my church friends, we made outfits together and I loved colors. I would make shirts and do different things with my clothing; all the cool kids would say they liked my clothes and shoes. I felt like that girl, but I was still shy. When I was being creative, I felt like life meant something, I liked doing hair and seeing the clients faces when they saw their hair. I liked to make up stories, but I never wrote them down, I would just make them up in my head.

I had a great memory, I remembered everything and that helped me a lot during school. If I paid attention in class I could get decent grades, but reading, writing, and algebra were difficult for me. I would see letters backwards and write D’s when it was supposed to be a B. It was hard to pronounce words, and I hated reading aloud. My history teachers name was Mr. Jones, he looked like Sinbad to me, I think he was the basketball coach too, so he was the cool teacher, I liked him. His class was fun, but he always made us read aloud, so in his class I had good grades, because I would go home and read each chapter to make sure I knew how to say each word so I wouldn’t make a fool of myself in class the next day. I found out that I really enjoyed history and that was my favorite class. All the cool kids were in that class or wanted to be transferred to that class, me and creme had that class together and we had so much fun in History.

No matter what happened in my life I always had good friends, I would tell them certain parts of my life, and I wanted so badly to let someone all the way in, but I was afraid that I would lose them. That seemed to be the pattern, I would get close to people and I would have to leave, or they would leave, so I never talked to anyone about my mental state. I did try one time to confide in someone about the suicidal thoughts and how I didn’t take care of myself because I wanted diabetes to kill me. That person told me that suicide was a cop out, that was the day my heart stopped feeling anything. I trusted that person and believed that I could tell them my innermost thoughts and that day I decided that no one would ever get that close to me again. Creme ended up moving and didn’t come back to school senior year, I was sad and didn’t even want to go to school next year.

I knew people in my senior year, but I had my core group of friends, and it consisted of me and three other girls. They were so funny to me, I was myself with them and we were all so different, you would think we wouldn’t be friends, but we clicked instantly. Three of us were seniors and one was a junior, we didn’t like the crowd and we did our own thing, to us we were the cool kids. I had to do the same thing at this school that I had been doing since middle school and bring my blood sugar machine to the nurses office. This nurse didn’t care either, but my mom made her care, which made me have to go to the office and check my sugar. The nurse had a clip board, and she wrote my sugar down, I wouldn’t take it, I would just pretend and tell her a random number. My friend that was the junior, her sister had gotten sick and went into the hospital, come to find out she had diabetes. She had to start going to the nurses office to take her sugar, one day I walked in the nurses office, and she was in there taking her sugar. I was so nervous because my secret would be exposed, I grabbed my box and hurried to the bathroom. From that day forward I went to take my sugar after lunch so I wouldn’t be seen by her.

She asked me in front of everyone why I was in the nurses office, I was caught off guard and couldn’t think of a lie. She asked me if I had diabetes and I said “no why would you ask me that”. She looked at me strangely, I knew she knew, but I would never reveal it to her or my friends. My friend that was a junior would tell me about her sisters experiences and how her sugar was always high, and she wouldn’t listen. I wanted badly to let her sister know that I understood how she felt but I couldn’t tell anyone. Diabetes felt to me like the plague and once people knew you had it you were weird.

It was the second semester of senior year; my counselor called me into the office and told me I wasn’t going to graduate because I didn’t have the credits. My credits from freshman and sophomore year had helped me but because of me slacking off junior and the first half of senior year I wasn’t going to make it. I did everything I could so that I would walk across that stage and not have to return to high school again. Most of the seniors had five classes and could leave school after lunch, I had to take seven classes and join a after school club. Most of my classes senior year were with underclassmen, I felt so embarrassed to be a senior in these classes. Then I saw that some of my friends were in the classes with me, so I felt better about it. I picked a after school program called Key Club, we would go to the middle school and mentor the middle schoolers. We were supposed to be helping them get ready for high school by giving them the do’s and don’t’s of high school. They thought we were so cool and if felt good to be giving them advice, you could tell some of them were terrified to be going to high school the next year. I graduated high school; I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do next, I was debating on whether to go to nursing school or hair school. I remember me and my dad having an argument because I said I wanted to go to hair school. He told me I wouldn’t make money and I shouldn’t go so I decided to go because he told me not to. I was turning 18 soon and that meant I was an adult, and I could do whatever I wanted.

Chapter 3: In Impact of Lifestyle Choices

The doctors told me all the complications diabetes would bring, I wasn’t listening because my body seemed fine. None of what they told me could happen had happened, so I didn’t believe them, I thought the doctors and my parents just wanted to control me. I also started to stray away from my walk with God, it seemed as though he didn’t care about me, so I wouldn’t care about him. I started to do everything I was afraid to do, I started drinking, smoking, and having sex. I did these things because I thought it would help ease the pain, hurt, and frustration I felt. The first time I tried these things it was a rush and I felt like everything was going to be ok. I needed to do these things to feel ok. Once I turned 18, I have no memory of doctors’ appointments, I do remember that when I would start to pee a lot, get yeast infections, and be extremely thirsty that I would take my pills and insulin for a couple days. I would even double the doses so that I could get the numbers down and feel better.

I would drink while taking my medications which is dangerous, I was smoking cigarettes maybe a half a pack a day, and I was having unprotected sex. I thought I was living the good life and doing what was best from me, because you only live once right? I started to notice my clothes were getting lose, I wasn’t trying to loose weight, but I walked a lot, I took public transportation to get to cosmetology school and so I thought the weight loss was due to walking. I thought this was healthy weight loss. I was into working out, but I wasn’t doing it consistently enough to have this much weight loss. I didn’t think anything of it. What I didn’t know was that with my blood sugar being so high I was urinating mor frequently and this was causing dehydration and muscle breakdown and was causing the weight loss. I wasn’t seeing my doctor regularly, so I had no idea what was going on. What I did know is I started to get attention from guys I thought were out of my league, I was able to shop in the small girl section, I felt like I was a movie star.

I was starving for attention and anyone who gave it to me I clung to them, whether it was my friends or a man. I had a thing for military guys, especially the ones from down south, there was an 18 and up club that I went to every Saturday night and every Saturday night I met a new guy. I wasn’t shy anymore, the alcohol helped me be free, and i loved to dance. The 18 and up club had a routine for playing music, they knew that all the military guys came there, and they were all from different states. So, they played the music in sections, they played Cali music and I would be on the dance floor, they played East Coast music and I would be on the dance floor, they played music from the South and I was on the dance floor. The down South music was my favorite because at that time there were a lot of dances coming from down there and I knew every dance. I liked the country boys and they seemed to like me, or at least I thought they did.

I was dating a guy but being at this club every Saturday I was dating a lot of guys, but I had a rule I would only be sleeping with one guy at a time. I watched a lot of Maury and if I got pregnant, I wanted to know who the father was. I started to dislike my boyfriend, he was my first time and the way I lost my virginity wasn’t anything like I had dreamed it would be. I blamed him and I felt like he ruined it for me, so I started to hate him. I lost my virginity on the bathroom floor of his barrack, I felt disrespected, and I didn’t feel like I was his girlfriend, I felt like I was a side chick. Which is what I was, he later told me that he had a girlfriend back home, but I was his girlfriend here. I thought that was so sweet that he wasn’t messing with any other girls here, just me.

I started meeting so many guys that it was hard to keep up, I wasn’t sleeping with them at first, they were just fun to hang out with. I loved their accents, they were funny, they always had nice cars, I never had to pay for anything, especially the alcohol. Drinking and smoking cigarettes had become my favorite thing, when I was drinking, smoking intensified the feeling I had. I felt good I was laughing and having fun, no diabetes talk, no doctors, I was a different person with these guys. I was whoever I wanted to be; I was everyone except me.

I partied hard on the weekends, but I went to cosmetology school on the weekdays. I was excelling in school, I was catching on so quickly, and all the teachers saw my talent. My life was so much better than it was in middle school and high school, I was just living young, wild, and free. I didn’t have a job and my sister was working for the bus, so I got a free bus pass and that’s how I got around. I didn’t want to ask my parents for money and the guys I met gave me free stuff. I learned quickly that nothing was ever free, you had to pay for it in some way. I would always feel bad that these guys would be taking me out and spending money and I didn’t have anything to give them, and I really thought they were just being nice. I ended up paying them back with my body, the feelings I felt growing up when I would masturbate or watch porn always came back after those encounters, I felt dirty, I thought sex was dirty, and I felt like trash.

My body began to feel different, I was always tired, but I was young so I would shake it off. I thought the tiredness was from the long weekends partying, I could fall asleep anywhere and I could sleep all day, but I never was rested. The yeast infections were getting worse, the over-the-counter medication wasn’t helping, and I could never find relief. Sex began to hurt but I did it because that’s what the guys wanted, and I wanted to b wanted by them. I was still living at home with my parents, I was telling my mom that I was going out to clubs I never lied to her about where I was going. One night I met some guys, and I got so drunk that I passed out, I didn’t come home until 12pm the next day. My mom was worried and after that she put me on a curfew which was 12am, I told her the club didn’t start jumping until 12. She stayed firm and I told her that I would follow the curfew she gave me.

I stayed out late on another weekend and my mom said that if I couldn’t follow the rules I needed to leave, what I heard was leave so I left. One of the guys that I hung out with had an apartment and he said I could stay with him; it was fun we partied all night. I stopped going to cosmetology school because I was late multiple times and they said I would have to come back the next term. So, I smoked and drank all day, the guys kept me supplied with alcohol, but I had no medication with me. I couldn’t take doses when I wasn’t feeling well, I was so stubborn, and I wouldn’t go to my mom and apologize. I was peeing so much that sometimes in my sleep I would pee on myself, I would be so embarrassed, but I kept on doing whatever felt good at the time. One night I blacked out. I have no memory of what happened that night, all I know is I woke up in the bed with the guy that was like a brother to me. He told me nothing happened, plus I was fully clothed, so I believed him.

 I had no money, no medication, I had messed up school, I was more depressed than I had ever been, and after the blackout I didn’t like drinking that much anymore. I ended up having to move to the barracks with some of the guys I hung out with, they tried to help out, but it just wasn’t working. The base I was staying on was the same base my dad worked at, I was so afraid that I would see him one day or that I would get caught in the room. I knew I wanted to go home, and I knew I was sick, I finally called my dad and asked him if I could come home, he told me I could always come home. When I got home of course there were rules, I was so use to drinking my feelings, but I wasn’t old enough to by alcohol, I didn’t have money, and there was no way my parents would buy me cigarettes. I was miserable and wished I never came back home.

My mom wasn’t going to let up on the rules, so I decided to see about getting back into school, they let me back in and I was only one class behind my original class. I was going back to church now as well, I confided in one of the guys at the church, he was older, I told him about everything that I had done. I needed to let someone know because all this was weighing on me, he seemed like a trusted friend, and I felt that he could help me with my walk with God. I knew everyone at the church knew I had left home so I felt weird, and the church people tried to act normally towards me, but I felt like an outcast. I was so annoyed by them and their self-righteous attitudes that I came to church just to annoy them, I would read the bible and say, “they are hypocrites” and call out all there flaws but I never allowed the word to penetrate me and heal me.

 I had to have been going to the doctor because I had my pills and insulin. I was still losing weight and urinating a lot, I didn’t take my sugar, but I felt better than I had been feeling. I was home, it wasn’t where I wanted to be, and I said that often, but it was home. One day me and my dad had the biggest argument ever, he said that I had left the door unlocked the night before. I told him I remember locking it and we just started arguing, all the anger and rage I felt over the years I let come out. I was yelling at him and saying anything I wanted to say, then it got physical, the police were called, and I pressed charges. That was the worst day of my life, after that day I saw my family start to fall apart and I felt like it was because of me. My dad left and went to Chicago with his family, my mom stayed in California for a while and then she left for Elgin with my grandma and my older sister, and her husband followed.

I was alone. I had a friend in hair school that I would talk to and tell her about my family issues. She said she would ask her parents if I could stay with them. They said yes and I moved in with her so I could finish hair school. When I went to her house, I had all my insulin and I put it in a lunch bag and put it in the refrigerator, I never told her I was a diabetic and they never asked what was in the bag. I stayed with my friend and her family for a while, I was grateful for them, but I felt like a burden. I had a boyfriend at the time, so I spent weekends with him and stayed at my friend’s house during the week for school. The guy I was dating at the time was actually my boyfriend, he told me everything up front, I knew about his son, and I knew about his crazy baby momma. He never lied to me until he did, he tried to come onto one of my friends at the time. Neither of them told me but one day out of nowhere I asked her “If something huge happened and you knew it would hurt me would you still tell me?”. She thought he had told me, and she said, “Let me tell you the truth”. She told me what happened, and I forgave her, but I was mad at him. I already knew who she was, so I wasn’t surprised, but I trusted him, and he broke that trust. We ended up getting back together because I didn’t want to feel alone and actually be alone.

I moved in with my aunt that was still living in California. I stopped going to church because the guy that I told all my secrets to went to some of the members of the church and told them everything. I grew up in this church and now I was treated like an outsider, like a stranger. My aunt told me that I shouldn’t let anyone stop me from my relationship with God or coming to my church. I started going back and I went to church and heard the word and that was it. I would help my aunt out in the kitchen, but I just kept to myself, which was easy for me to do since I had been doing this my whole life. I graduated hair school and decided to move to Elgin with my family, I said goodbye to San Diego and looked forward to my new life in Elgin. I thought the worst was over and that only healing would be in my future.

When I got to Elgin, I decided that I was going to get serious about my health and about life in general. I started working at a bakery to make money, so I didn’t have to depend on people, we were staying with my grandma, and I was around family. For the first time in a long time I was smiling, laughing, and enjoying my life. I didn’t have anything, but I had my family and that seem like all I needed. I was getting up everyday at 4am to go and open the bakery, I actually liked the job, and I was good at it. I was part time and wasn’t getting insurance, I knew I needed my medication, so I started to go to clinics to be seen by doctors. They had a lot of programs available, and I would get my insulin for 4 dollars and my pills for 1 dollar. I would get the medication, but I wasn’t taking it regularly, I stayed true to my regiment of only taking it when I felt sick. I went to the hospital multiple time for other issues but when blood work was done, they would always equate everything back to uncontrolled diabetes.

I started to meet people in the town and the drinking and smoking started again, I wasn’t drinking as much but I was smoking a lot. Everyone in the town seemed to smoke so I met a lot of people while taking smoke breaks or people walking by asking for cigarettes. I went to Chicago one weekend to meet up with my best friend and her family and I met this guy. He was in the military and his friend knew they guys I use to hang out with in California. I thought great, now they are going to judge me from the past, but they were cool and treated me nicely. The guy was my type he was country from Georgia, tall, dark, and handsome. We hung out that weekend and I thought it was just going to be that, but he asked for my number, and we started hanging out.

I fell in love with him instantly, I only wanted to be with him, I took two trains every weekend to see him, and I told him I had diabetes. We talked about getting married and I knew he was serious, I didn’t want to keep things from him, so I told him everything. He told me that we would both stop drinking and we would eat better so that I could be healthy and that when the day came to have a baby, I would be healthy enough to have one. I didn’t know how to take him, I thought that he would leave, and say he didn’t want to be with a sick girl. He wanted to be apart of the journey, he wanted to know what I had to do, he cared. I was relieved, I didn’t have any secrets with him, he knew all about me and he didn’t care. this made me fall deeper in love with him, I stopped drinking and smoking. WellI stopped smoking around him, but I wasn’t drinking. All I wanted to do was be around him, he told me he wanted to marry me, but he couldn’t marry me because he was already married. He told me that up front too and I didn’t think it was going anywhere so I didn’t care, but now I was in love, and it was starting to bother me. they were separated and he told me that he would divorce her and marry me and then I would have insurance and be able to get the help I needed. I thought this was a great plan, so I stayed in the relationship because I loved him, and I was in too deep at this point.

I was taking my medication now, but I still wasn’t feeling better, sometimes I would take my sugar and it would just say “HI”. I would go to the emergency room, and they would tell me my sugar was almost 1000, and they would ask me was I ok. I would say if felt fine and one of the doctors told me that my body was so use to having high blood sugar levels that these numbers were normal. I didn’t understand how serious this was, they kept talking about diabetic ketoacidosis and asking me if I had ever experienced this. I would say no but I didn’t know what it was, no one had ever mentioned it to me before. I had all the symptoms, so they assumed that was what was wrong with me: being extremely thirsty, urinating often, being weak and tired, and being short of breath. I had been walking long distances since I found out about being diabetic, but I couldn’t walk far without feeling tired and having pain in my legs. I knew this was due to diabetes, but I didn’t want to admit it, I was twenty years old now, eight years after I was diagnosed and now, I was starting to see what uncontrolled diabetes could do to your body.

Me and this guy tried multiple times to have a baby, but I never got pregnant, he blamed himself because he said he was old. I knew I was me; I hadn’t taken care of my body and now I couldn’t have babies. Then one day he told me he had to go on deployment, my heart sunk in my chest, I had dated military guys and when they went on deployment you never saw them again. I was hurt but I didn’t hide that I was hurt, I told him, and he said he felt the same and that when he came back wherever he was I would come with him. We could barely talk because of where he was, I felt like it was over, and I tried to stay focused because I had started a new job with benefits, and I was making good money for a 21-year-old. Then one day I got a call from a Savannah, Georgia number and it was him, he told me he had a house on base and that I could come out. The first night I was there he went to hang out with his friends and I thought “seriously??” I saw that he had alcohol in the refiguator and I drank it, all of it. I decided them that I wasn’t gong to be having no baby by him and I wasn’t sure how long I was going to be there. I started drinking more especially when he was on duty, there were more issues with hi wife as well. She would be texting him and asking him to cosign a car for her and he came to me one day and told e he was going to do it. I got mad but then I had to hmble myself she was his wife and was entitled to what he had not me.

I felt like it was time to go home, so I went back home, I told him I was just going for the holiday but I knew I wasn’t coming back and so did he. I came back to Elgin and went back to what I was doing before working at a bakery and I started making friends and they started taking me out but I didn’t like partying in the Chicago. Then I met another friend and we became like sisters, she was family and we hung out and told each other everything but I never told her I was a diabetic. I wasn’t doing that again with anyone. I knew she was my friend because for my 24 birthday I was going to a club and I wanted to take a limo, I paid for it and then whoever wanted to go would just pay me back. I asked all these people and they said they would come but on that night it was just me and her, I was embarrassed and I thought she would think I was lame. She got in the limo, and we had a ball just me and her, she even got us a section by flirting with one of the bouncers. We were locked in, and I trusted her but not with my secret, she called me grandma because I walked so slow, she thought I was just slow, but it was difficult to walk.

Chapter 4: Impact of Lifestyle Choices Cont.

In 2010 I was in College, I was studying to be a counselor or a social worker, I was working as well, and I seemed to have everything under control. One day I was at school, and I was having abdominal pain, I went to the hospital twice and they didn’t find anything. I had been going to the hospital for an ovarian cyst and they told me they would rupture on their own. I was in so much pain that I went to another hospital, and they told me that the cyst I had now needed to be surgically removed. I went into the procedure and when I came out, I felt different, I didn’t want to move but I couldn’t lay in bed either. I always felt like something was crawling on me, certain fabrics would shock me, and I would feel like someone was stabbing me in my legs. I kept going to the hospital for this and they would look at me like I was crazy, no one knew what was wrong. So, I had to figure out how to deal with it, I started wearing tight leggings and it made my legs feel better. I became a homebody because I also developed OCD, and everyone had germs, and I couldn’t be around people. I love the water, but I stopped swimming because I believe that we were all taking a chlorine bath together, and it grossed me out.

Then the stomach issues started, one day I could eat whatever I wanted, the next day everything made me sick and made me have diarrhea. I thought I had a stomach bug, and it would just go away but it got worse. I stopped eating because everything made me nauseous and made me go to the bathroom. I also developed this burp that smelled like eggs, I was so embarrassed by all the smells and liquids that were coming from my body that I stayed away from people and laid on my sisters couch all day. I would only go to the doctor if I felt like something really bad was going on, I kept on believing that I could heal myself. What I was really doing was destroying my own body, I was tired all the time, and I was ill, but I had to work.

I ended up getting a factory job during the summer months so that I could have some income. My mom had given me her car that she paid off, and I just needed to keep up with the maintenance. She left the state and gave me her job being a caregiver for my grandma, that was so much easier than going to the factory job, my grandma knew I was sick, so she never asked me to do too much. During these times I started to believe I was crazy too, so I went to the clinic and told the doctor I wanted to talk to a psychiatrist. I met with my primary care doctor, and she gave me Prozac, but I never took it because I felt like it was wrong. I felt as though this was a sin and I needed to just pray to get rid of these feeling. I would tell multiple people that I wasn’t happy with my life or myself, I wanted to die, but I was just to scared to actually do it myself.

I cried all the time when I was alone, I wanted to have friends, but I didn’t know how to be genuinely me. So, my friendships were superficial and so were my romantic relationships, if a guy told me he loved me I would say it back, not even sure if I felt that way. I thought that I could learn to love anyone who loved me, but I just ended up disliking everything about them and eventually disappearing on them. Hurt people hurt people and I was hurting people left and right, I just wanted to feel something other than pain. Between 2012-2013 I was a miserable person, I knew I needed to be with the Lord, but it wasn’t until I felt like there was nowhere else to go. When we first moved back to Elgin, we were going to Pastor Gregory Dickow’s church, so I started going back there. I joined the church, got baptized, and I started working in the children’s church. I had so much fun there and Pastor was teaching me about the love of God and how I was forgiven. Things that I thought I knew but I wasn’t living as I knew them.

One Sunday the Leader in the Children’s Church told me she wanted me to start doing the offering, I was terrified, COME BACK TO THIS PART! I tried to hang out with some of the people I use to hang out with, I was trying to dress more sophisticatedly but when they saw me, they told me I looked like a grandma. I started to miss hanging out with them, one night I was in church, and I got a text asking me if I wanted to hang out and I left church and started hanging out again. I would just hang out. I wasn’t drinking or smoking in the beginning but then I started again. I felt like this was just who I was and I needed to except it. I really cared about this group of friends, I loved them, they welcomed me and they excepted me. They didn’t know I was sick, but they knew I walked slow, I didn’t eat a lot, and that I knew God. I remember one night we were playing cards, smoking, and drinking and they started asking me about the Holy Spirit. I thought, “are you guys serious right now? I felt compelled to talk, every question they asked I had the answer, and I felt Holy Spirit in that kitchen. That was the day I knew I needed to be in church and stay in church, I had been watching Dr. Bill Winston online and he always said that “Faith was NOW” my faith was increasing, and I was growing in God. I wasn’t comfortable hanging out with certain crowds anymore, I wanted to be better and do better, certain relationships just weren’t working anymore.

One of the girls and I fell out because she said I thought I was better than her, but I never said that, I loved her she was my best friend and my family. My little sister was my baby, I didn’t like anybody treating her badly. I knew she was out there doing bad things, but I never corrected her. I never let her drink, smoke, or party with me when I was doing those things because she was still in high school. One day my friend was over to my house, and she wanted to drink, I told her she couldn’t drink in my house, so she went outside. My mom found out that my friend had given my sister alcohol by reading her messenger messages, I called my friend and told her off. We stopped talking after that and I put all my focus on church and my relationship.

I learned about walking by faith at Living Word Christian Center and started to desire more for myself and my health. I would pray more and worship more and I started to believe that God was for me and that He had good plans for me. I was learning how to pray the word, I was believing and trusting that God would make a way. My sister told us that she and her family were moving to Houston, my heart broke because my nieces and nephew were my entire life. I didn’t go out anymore, I spent every day with them. They were my best friends and every day I went to see them no matter what I had to do. I felt the Lord telling me to move to Houston with them, I had no ties to Elgin, and I wanted a new start. I didn’t know how hearing from God went, I thought it was just me wanting to go because of everything that had happened while I lived in Elgin.

Was I running away from my problems? I knew if you ran from your problems they follow you, but I loved my sister and her family so much. I was so sad about this and I didn’t know what to do.