

# BUILT to BREAK

When  
God writes  
your story  
and all hell  
breaks loose



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BEKAH T. BAKER

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This memoir is a subjective story depicted from my own viewpoint, individual experiences, and personal recollection of events. All names have been changed except my name (Bekah/Rebekah) and the name of my deceased father, Richard Thompson. Dialogue has been written from my memory, voicemails, texts, emails and social media direct messages. Various events have been condensed and second-hand dialogue recreated. Along with names, certain locations have been changed, identifying physical characteristics altered, and generalizations made to protect the privacy of those depicted. However, so that my authentic experiences are not misrepresented, my personal conversations and firsthand interactions have been written accurately, to the best of my recollection. I respectfully recognize that the memories and perspectives of others pertaining to the events described in this book are different than my own. This book is my truth, biased in that it is only from my perspective, but I stand unwavering and without apology by my memories of all the conversations and exchanges I experienced during this period of my life.

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# DEDICATION



To my Papa  
I promise to never doubt in the darkness  
what God has shown me in the light.

Richard Edward Thompson  
12/10/1933 – 09/22/15  
(Papa's quote adapted from V. Raymond Edman's quote)



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



You're not a victim for sharing your story. You are a survivor setting the world on fire with your truth. And you never know who needs your light, your warmth and raging courage.

—Alex Elle

**IT DOESN'T ONLY TAKE A** village to raise a child; it takes a village to raise each other out of seasons of crisis and loss, to navigate through life and all the curveballs and the pitfalls that come with simply being human. For my village, I am deeply grateful.

To my babies: I do realize none of you actually are babies anymore. But you'll always be *my* babies. You four are God's tangible proof of His unimaginable love to me that He would entrust me with such incredible, unique, and beautiful souls to mother. Thank you for proving God's grace isn't just sufficient for me but for each of you too. Thank you for asking questions, for praying with and for me, for being sensitive to God's voice, and for generally being the most amazing humans I've ever had the honor of being around.

To my mom: Thank you for always having my back. For insisting this book be written and for telling me: “Whoever doesn’t like it doesn’t matter. The haters aren’t your audience. Write the truth.” I love you so much. We both experienced so much loss and your strength and tenacity inspired me to keep going. You helped me realize when God gave me this assignment, it wasn’t about me; it was about my obedience and those souls He will help through my story.

To my pastors: Thank you for loving and supporting my kids and me 100 percent. Thank you for encouraging me, keeping tabs on me, praying for me, and always reminding me to move my life forward with confidence, knowing that no matter how hard life is, God is always good.

To my Sissy: You’ve been my prayer warrior, confidant, sounding board and my safe place to come completely undone. Thank you for the flying across the country to simply lay eyes on me and speak life into me. You refused to let my fear repeat your history. This is our story.

To my BFF: Our worlds collided in chaos when God knew how desperately we’d need each other and our friendship forged in the fire of crisis and loss. I have faith our bond will grow in the soil of God’s purpose and peace. I love you FAANMW.

To my girls: Thank you for forcing me out of bed at 5 a.m. to train. I would have gained at least fifty pounds from inactivity and overeating without you guys keeping me accountable for my own health and well-being by asking me to help you with yours! Thank you for paying me enough to cover my car payment each month. Thank you for listening to me vent and for helping me adjust my perspective when needed. Thank you for just consistently being there. I will always be grateful.

To my friend who asked to read this manuscript when it was still verbal vomit, filled with profanities and raw with my heartbreak and grief. Thank you for immediately seeing the value in my story. Thank you for giving me a male perspective, for insisting I keep my story in my



voice, keep it real and raw and for making me believe in my assignment and ability to be an author.

To everyone who encouraged me via texts, phone calls, and social media messages, to face my fears head-on and share my story, who told me my voice was relevant and needed—that I was needed: my voice, my journey, my faith. No negative “what-if” is worth exchanging for the lives that will be changed. Your belief in God’s plan for my life kept me pressing forward when it felt like this season of sorrow would never end. Thank you.

To Redemption Publishing: Thank you for your mission of giving an outlet for authentic stories to be told. Thank you for your wisdom and direction in thoughtfully guiding me in a way that gave my story focus. Thank you for enabling me to find deeper depths and higher heights in my quest to express my life through the written word.



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# PREFACE



I'M WRITING THIS TO YOU. The one who needs to know you are not alone.

I see you. The one who has lost something that meant everything.

You didn't deserve to have your life stolen . . . be it from sickness, betrayal, or any other thing. It's *not* okay.

I've been there and I'm so sorry.

It sucks.

I know what it's like to find the life you thought you had utterly destroyed and the very oxygen you are breathing snatched out of your lungs and sucked into an abyss of darkness.

I understand feeling bewildered and angry and abandoned and confused.

I've asked countless times, *Why? What did I do wrong? What did I ever do to deserve so much pain and loss? Why is God letting this happen to me?*

As you read my story, I pray you will hear between the pages the whisper of God saying, *I see you. You are my precious child. I see and I know. You are not alone.*

As you read my heart spilled out on these pages, I implore you to hear me when I tell you not one moment in your life has been or will be wasted, not one tear unseen, and no cry unheard.

Whatever it is you've gone through, or you may currently be right in the middle of, is going to equip you in a way that can only come from experience. Experience that forces us to a place so desperate that we see our frail humanity and absolute inability to make any of it better.

There is *always* purpose in our pain. One of the most important ones is restoring us to an authentic and tangible relationship with our Creator. In the deepest, darkest canals of my misery God was always there. I cursed and cried and begged and screamed and moaned and broke under the weight of that darkness.

And God never left my side.

Because He knew He had built me to break.

Now that I've come out the storm, I am not the same woman I was when it hit. That was the whole point—for me to experience a God who didn't calm my storm but rather calmed *me* as that storm ravaged my life.

This story isn't about what happened to me and what *they* did.

This story isn't about what I did or didn't do in response.

This story is about what God did.

Only after being completely broken could the beauty and purpose God intended for my life be created. From the dust and shattered bits, He breathed life into the very reason for my existence.

Every single one of us has gone through various types of tragedies in our lives that have left us broken: be it a relationship betrayal, a devastating medical diagnosis, death of loved ones, or absolute financial ruin.

God promises in Romans 8:28 to make something good out the storms that bring devastation to our lives. I stand as a testament to that truth.

The question is, Will your brokenness make you better or bitter?

Bitterness is simply unhealed brokenness. Will you allow the God who built you to break to now rebuild and heal you, infusing strength, compassion, tenacity, empathy, maturity, and love into those cracks from the broken pieces of your life?

No, it's not fair. It's not.

But you are going to get through this and you are going to be okay.

I promise.

Bekah





# PROLOGUE



“MOST OF IT IS TRUE.”

Those five words snatched the oxygen out of the room and immediately forced my world to simultaneously implode and explode without warning. I was catapulted into absolute mind-numbing darkness. Thick, suffocating darkness. I sank to the floor as my body instinctively curled into the fetal position. I rocked back and forth as a sound I'd never heard before escaped out of my lungs. It sounded like a wounded animal. I struggled to catch my breath.

“Papa! Papa! I want my papa!”

I needed to be safe. To breathe. My life . . . my beautifully imperfect, but sparkly and intentional life had been viciously destroyed.

“I'm so s-sorry . . .” he stammered with tears running down his contorted face. “We didn't mean for this . . . I mean, *I* didn't mean for this to happen. . . She's actually a really nice girl.” That last line sliced through my fog.

“She's really *what? Who? Who is she!*” I sputtered. At least I think the words came out. I don't remember if they made it out of my mouth.

“I don’t know. I just don’t know what happened . . . I didn’t mean to hurt you . . . You were never even supposed to know . . .” His voice trailed off.

I sat there numb, my knees pulled to my chest. A mere hour earlier I had received a message in my Facebook inbox.

*Your husband isn’t who you think he is. He’s in love with another woman. He’s had sex with her in your house . . . He called her the love of his life . . . Your sons have even met her . . .*

This was merely the tip of a colossal iceberg of so many lies and inconceivable betrayal. It was the beginning of the total obliteration of not only who I thought my husband was, but of who I thought I was—and more terrifyingly—who I thought God was. And maybe most catastrophic: who I thought He *wasn’t*.

This is *my* story, the story of the life I thought I was writing with the pen of the good choices I made—a simple story of reaping what I had sown. But then I was blindsided by the stark and harsh reality that I was not the only one holding a pen—on heaven or on earth.

This is what happens when God writes your story and all hell breaks loose.

These are the chapters of my life: unedited, raw, real, redemptive, horrifying, miraculous, heartbreaking, beautiful, shattering, painful, joyful, and humorous. Stories with a twisted plot and letters of my journey from childhood, marriage, motherhood and beyond. These are tales of my trajectory from the pit of perfectionism, verbal and emotional abuse, betrayal, manipulation, torment, suicide plans, anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression into the beauty and power of God’s ultimate sovereignty and . . .

His unimaginable grace.

His all-surpassing peace.

His unconditional love.

His unmerited favor.

This is the story of how I finally found absolute freedom.

The question I had to answer was, Do I want to be right or do I want to be free?

For those who are quite possibly at the end of your rope and the end of your hope, my prayer is—through my story—you will discover the overwhelming peace and absolute joy in realizing you are now set up for the most incredible rebirth—beyond what you could ever imagine.

My prayer is that our lives can represent the exquisite Japanese art and philosophy of *kintsukuroi*, the art of repairing broken pottery with gold to highlight and showcase the cracks and blemishes. The repaired piece becomes even more beautiful and valuable after being broken. There is great value in the process required to fix the pottery back to its full functionality and purposely highlighting those scars with gold honors that process.

In the darkest moments of my deepest sorrow when I was broken into countless pieces, God picked those pieces up and put me back together again, reinforced with the golden caulking of His grace and mercy, mixed with my forgiveness and obedience.

Yes, life broke me, but God has made me even more beautiful in those broken places.

I am stronger now for having been broken.

I have enlarged my capacity as those cracks have been filled.

I've learned nothing I lose is truly a loss when God does the subtracting.

I now stand confident with my scars shining bright for all to see where I've been healed.

I understand that what felt like God's punishment was Him positioning me to fulfill His purposes for my life. It was God setting me up to receive blessings I would have never experienced nor appreciated had I not gone through such loss and pain.

I know God has a bird's-eye view of my entire life, and He's working all things for my good and His glory.

“For a star to be born, there is one thing that must happen; a nebula must collapse. So collapse. Crumble. This is not your destruction. This is your birth.”<sup>1</sup>

I know this is true.

It happened to me.

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<sup>1</sup> An anonymous quote sometime attributed to Noor Tagouri.

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# ONE

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## GOING FOR PERFECT



“HE SAID HE ‘BURNED THE hell’ out of them. I’ll *never* be able to have more children!”

I was maybe five when I first became aware of my mother’s grief. I distinctly remember her look of devastation as she recalled the words of her doctor after he had performed her tubal ligation. I was my mother’s second and final pregnancy. The only time she ever came close to cursing was when she repeated those horrifying words the doctor said.

By the time I was six or seven years old, our family was actively involved in the same homeschooling program, aka cult, as the infamous super-sized family seen on TV. In that world, the greatest and basically *only* honor for a woman was to have as many children as humanly possible. The more kids you had, the holier you were. The greatest shame? To have “bought into the worldly system” and only birthed two or three children. My Mom felt this guilt deeply.

While I didn’t know it then, I know now that I am an absorber, so I felt her pain deeply.

What do you do when you are a little girl and you see your mommy crying that she can't have more kids? How do you fix it? Somewhere along the way, my pre adolescent brain decided:

*If I can be perfect, I can make up for the babies my mom wishes she had. If I can just be good enough, I can fix this!*

And that confession of compensation became my self-appointed identity.



My identity was further formed at the age of eight when I experienced our church breaking up over my parents' marriage. My brown-skinned Jamaican father and my blonde, blue-eyed German-descent mother evidently were "unequally yoked." The actual scripture says, "Do not be unequally yoked together with *unbelievers*" (2 Cor. 6:14 NKJV, emphasis mine). The bottom line was that the faces of my parents and our family weren't accepted nor represented the message that particular church wanted to display. While I was young, I caught on that some people didn't think my parents should be married because of the color of their skin. If they weren't supposed to be married because of their skin color, where did that leave me, their biracial daughter? When I was around five years old, I remember someone asking me how my mom got me. I was so confused. "She just *had* me?" They pressed for more clarification until I pointed out my dad and observed the shock flood over their flushed faces. My parents were very good about affirming my identity as a child of God, but in real life I wanted to fit in as something different than "other."

This only fed my idea of needing to be perfect. How could I fix these people's perceptions of me and my family? *I know . . . I'll always be good. I'll smile; I'll follow all the rules and make people laugh.* I determined to

make up for and compensate for others' misperceptions or judgments about me being too black to be white and too light to be black. I was determined to be the epitome of all that was good so everyone would accept me. My nickname was even Sunshine!

Even with these negative events however, my childhood was ideal. I was never molested or physically hurt or abused in any way. I felt very much loved by my parents, I was involved in tons of charity work, and I learned to cook, sew, play the piano, and garden. I worked hard babysitting and cleaning the neighbor's house. I even had my own business baking and selling specialty breads at the age of twelve.

I was on the local swim team until I quit at thirteen because my mom refused to allow me to shave my legs. She must have thought it would be a great way to keep boys away from me, but it also ended my competitive swim team dreams and desire to be a lifeguard. I gained a lot of weight after that and was self-conscious. But my dad—I called him Papa—affirmed me daily, and I felt valued and beautiful even in my awkward puberty years.

Everything I did was about making my best better. It was the motto of the 4-H club my older sister, Rachel, and I belonged to where we competed for prizes and awards in cooking and sewing competitions. Everyone knew who we were and the best was expected when we took the stage.

It worked for me. If I did my best I was rewarded equivalently. This gave me a sense of control, the ability to counter the racism I experienced, and a place where I could be good enough to enable those I loved to be happy.

My logic pointed my focus toward becoming a literal rule follower. That was my investment so I could get a happy life in return. It became my obsession and identity. I decided it was my job to make those around me happy and to lay the framework and foundation for an “as-close-as-possible” perfect life for us all.

I worked faithfully in my parents' church and sang in the local kids' choir. I was the "weird" homeschooled girl but was friendly enough to be accepted by the "normal" kids. I made sure I followed every rule and practiced every note. I wasn't the best singer of the bunch, but I would be the hardest working and most compliant. That, I could control. I tutored younger kids in our church's neighborhood after-school tutoring program, and I read books to the elderly.

I only went on a few dates and didn't kiss any guy until I met the man who would become my husband. And that kiss only came after I knew for sure he was the one I would marry.

I built my life around the principle in the scripture, "For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7 NKJV). I was determined to only sow good seeds. It seemed very logical to me that it was a guarantee for only good to grow.

*Maybe this is why nothing bad happened to me as a child,* I thought. I was part of the startlingly small percentage of girls who escape childhood without experiencing sexual abuse. There was no explanation why I didn't. There were a few adult family members I was often around who sexually abused others in my family, but I was never violated. I was so protected and loved by my papa that perhaps I was a risky target. The chances were very high I would have told on anyone who did anything.

I felt my role was to absorb other people's pain because I didn't have to suffer any myself. My responsibility was to be a savior to whoever needed anything fixed. In exchange for all of that, I believed I would reap a "perfect" harvest for all the "perfect" seeds I had sown.

What's the point of being good and following all the rules if you're just going to end up in the same mess everyone else ends up in? My story was going to be titled, "What Happens When You Follow God's Way and He Blesses You!"

The end.

Or not . . .