

Final Truth

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Dedicated to my family and my heavenly Father;
the latter gave me my talent and passion, the former has given
me constant love and support.

And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord:
“Oh Lord Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the
cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the
earth. You have made heaven and earth.”

Isaiah 37:16

Prologue



This is the only place I feel confident writing my story. It should be interesting since I've never written my story down before. I'm worried that it'll all be for nothing. Most people already have their perceptions about me at this point. Thus, one might find it pointless for me to write anything down. People are, after all, stubborn in their opinions and views. I know I am. Yet, I've seen so much more than the average adult travel writer. And much of it, I don't want to lose. Putting it like that though, I realize I could write until my hands fall off, but I can't put down what I want the most.

We'll just see what happens then, I guess. A good start might be that Dad bought me this sketchpad for my climactic tenth birthday. I guess he thought I would take after Mom and draw in it. Well, I'm seventeen now, and I'm certainly not drawing. I can't—literally and emotionally.

From what I can remember, Mom's sketches were good. They were good because she loved drawing and paid attention to the details she was copying down. My memories of her drawing and sketching are faint, but my certainty that she loved to do it, isn't. I can't say if mine are good or not because I've never found the courage to draw. I don't want to be like Mom in that regard. I want those sketches to be hers.



Marta stopped her pen as her chin gave a sudden quiver. She felt the cool breeze coming through the drapes in her window. It was as calm as the evening colors fading outside. Marta wasn't calm, though; she hadn't been for a while. That's why she was here, pushing the limits of the library's hours. She'd found the chair farthest from the front desk, so it took the librarians longer to discover her as they made their rounds; at least until they figured out that she planned on making this a regular thing.

Why was she doing this again? She'd only gotten a couple of paragraphs in, and she was already at a loss for words. There were two hundred and fifty pages to this journal! How was she supposed to . . .

Try breathing first.

An inner voice reached out and soothed Marta, traveling outward from her chest and down her arms. She touched a hand over her heart, showing that she'd heard it.

OK, Lord. Just let something good come out of this.

Marta angled the pen again and thought for another moment before going on.



Through the years, I've opened this sketchpad and stared at its blank pages, always thinking of what Mom would decorate them with. As for me, nothing would ever come to mind. But now, here I am with a pen in my hand, and this non-sketch book sprawled open in my lap partially because my therapist has recommended it to me.

Yeah, talk about killing the mood. And here you thought you'd be experiencing something whimsical and breathtaking. Sorry to disappoint, but I've never gone on whims. I have been going to see Mrs. Verner these past two months due to court-issued—more like court-ordered—counseling. And it was Mrs. Verner who figured that since I wasn't saying much to her, maybe I would "say" something to a non-condescending piece of paper. That comment alone should say it all, like how condescending she is.

She's not alone in her thoughts, though. The thoughts from others range from "snooty" to "traumatized," but I suppose I don't help to disprove them. I'm easily joyful, saddened, angered, open, and honest when my guard is down. It's getting that guard down that's the hard part. I won't let it down until I want to. So, until that point, they only have my guarded self to work with and their own opinions. I don't bother to explain when they haven't stood where I have stood. So, I guess I'll give

this writing thing a shot in hopes that it can bring about a better understanding for me, for everyone.

There's so much inside of me that my therapist has ordered me to write it down, to express myself. It's an odd request when you've been raised in the mentality to *not* openly express yourself. I have learned this flawless trick from my dad along with everything else of his teachings from the time I was seven when my education about life really began.

The Beginning

1993 to 1995



I know there was the prologue, but that was just to get my bearings. My story doesn't start here on the day I started writing. This story starts with my mom. True, without Dad and God's divine provision, I wouldn't have been born. Without Mom, however, I wouldn't have this much to write about, maybe. I'm seventeen like a couple other hundred million people around the world right now. But, how many of them can write in three languages and speak five? What other teens have felt so much older than seventeen because they've walked so long and so far already in their young lives? Again, these are possibilities I can't say would've happened without my mom.

In the archive of my memories, Mom was a person who always came up with a smile. She didn't operate like other people, now that I've met others to compare my memories with. She operated in shades and tones. There was no ordinary word

for it. There still isn't, but that's where love and memory collide—somewhere beyond words. Finding out about her childhood, her dreams, maybe that's why I'm writing this, to somehow open a secret door of memories that were too precious, too scared to come out before. As I am, I can't write much about Mom, but I want to.

Francine Belle Boyd, my mother, was named after a Confederate spy. This name was dictated by North Carolinian folks. Francine was raised a Southern belle; she had strawberry-blond waves of hair, a fetish for Elvis sandwiches (those things with banana and bacon on them), and a love of anything to do with the oceans. At least, that's how Dad described her when I asked him to put her "in a nutshell." That's a stunted phrase for something as complex as a human being.

On top of her amazing drawings, Mom was never without a camera. There's hardly a second of my baby years that isn't permanently pressed under the plastic of a photo album. Finally being in America, I've gotten to see them for the first time. Their pages are worn at the hinges because they've been flipped through so many times. I don't know what to make of knowing that people were missing me.

I look at Mom's blonde hair, angled and chin-length, Dad's shaved brown hair, his square jaw with its dark, scruffy stubble. Then there's me with the beginnings of my red hair. It's more reddish-brown now, though. With Dad's intense blue-green eyes and Mom's round cheeks and freckles, it's easier at times to identify myself through the lens of my parents. My ties to them are so important no matter how brief.

Writing about Mom like this makes her seem larger than life—almost surreal and definitely out of the league of any guy who would try to court her or whatever they do down South. But she managed to marry a pretty cool guy in the end, a cool-headed one anyway with round brown eyes that can laugh with you one second, then stare you down the next.

My words and thoughts are incomplete with Mom. They're easy and focused with Dad. They're strong; lucky for the both of us—strong words for a quiet and reserved man. I can say that now when my usual teen angst doesn't cloud it as a joy-killer.

Paul Christian Highland, my father, came to Francine Belle out of the clammy streets of Detroit, Michigan. Seriously, that's the word he used to describe it when I asked him about where my (paternal) grandparents lived. My honorary grandparents, that is. Dad grew up a foster kid, becoming a Highland to Bruce and Marlene when he was sixteen. Bruce was a WWII veteran who passed away in 1995 but not before he passed love and respect for the armed forces onto Dad who enlisted in the Marines right out of high school. His training stationed him in Virginia, only half an hour from where Mom was minoring in photojournalism under her major of international relations. Obviously, both Francine and Paul had a taste for things beyond their homeland.

Marriage seemed to be inevitable for my parents. When Paul finally proposed to her, it became a joke as the first and last rash thing he ever did, seeing as how the proposal, the wedding, and the honeymoon all took place in the same month! Dad, Paul, was on a two-week leave before he entered special

ops training for the Marines, while Francine was in her third year of earning a degree. They were both hyper about the threshold of the rest of their lives, and I guess an engagement ring was the best way to express themselves. Dad didn't doubt that Mom would say yes, otherwise, he would never have done it. But they did, and after a three-day honeymoon, Dad was back in training, and Mom continued studying and interning at a paper in Washington DC. That was how their separate lives joined in November of 1993.

Eighteen months later, on April 21, 1995, I was born. I recite this fact to myself at least twice a day out of habit. I keep my birth date close to me, being one of the solid facts to remain unchanged throughout my life. I also hold onto anything that Dad's ever told me about the "blessed" event. Apparently, Mom had a friend tape the whole thing for Dad, who was in Afghanistan on that day. Unlike the photo albums, I've never seen it. It's a memento that's lost, retained only in my dad's memory. But he told me about it. He told me how Mom would smile into the lens between every contraction. She would tell Dad all about who I would be most like and what kind of life I would pursue with the superior combination of their personalities. (Mom was a very proud person.) And after hours and hours of this, my screaming finally silenced hers.

I was wrinkled, pink, and bald, but I was there. At the beginning of my life. Boy, if I had only known about the years to come.