

STARTING POINT

Journeys of Teen Moms
Who Overcame

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Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022

Toll Free (844) 2REDEEM (273-3336)

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Cover design by Brittany Osborn, Nathaneal Clanton, Madison Stadler, and Mackenzie Stadler.

ISBN 13: 978-1-68314-156-3 (Print)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2016959817

MY PRAYERFUL NOTE TO YOU...



TO: _____

FROM: _____

I BOUGHT THIS book for you, and it was meant to be placed in your hands. It may be to simply pass through you and become a blessing to someone else. It may be that it was meant to be placed in your hands on this exact day for this exact moment.

May this book give you hope.

May this book encourage you. Empower you. Inspire you.

May this book change your life.

May it be your own personal *starting point*.

MY HEART BEHIND THIS BOOK...



DEAR TEEN MOM (or soon-to-be Teen Mom),

This book is for you.

This book is also for every educator who works with kids in tough situations, for church leaders, for parents, for anyone who wants to understand the heart of a hurting youth.

This book is for you.

Many of the stories may be tough to read. Behind the words is a lot of hurt. Many of these women have been through tough stuff. Some of their stories will walk you through a short season of their lives, and others will take you down the road of a rocky several years' journey.

You will walk with them through the early life events that led to teen pregnancy, and hear the different reactions to a positive pregnancy test.

You may even hold your breath with them as they climb over boulders that seem impossible, while they continue on their path towards a better future.

You may connect with many of them as they go through a roller-coaster of emotions—from hurt, excitement, and anger, to joy. You will understand through these stories how being a teen mom changes your entire life, as do the decisions made along the way.

You are not alone!

You will also be part of each woman's journey as they choose to let a God they didn't know, a God who was there when they didn't know it, come in and radically change their lives.

Please be reminded that these are *their* stories. When you are reading, and see the name God or Jesus, and it freaks you out, or maybe you don't believe, please continue to read on.

Why? Because these stories are meant to encourage you. They may even transform your life as you read and connect with women who have been in your shoes.

Being a teen mom, or a mom at any age, is not easy. I applaud you for opening this book, because it is a step towards fighting for a better future for you and your baby. Continue to seek others who will speak encouragement into your life, and don't be afraid to ask for help. I am so excited to use my story, as well as the other women's stories, to impact and inspire the lives of other teen moms.

One thing that I have learned about God over the last several years is that *everything* is in His timing, and He will make it great! You may be in a place of feeling hopeless, weak, and discouraged. I was there too, and know how it feels; despite that, as I look back on my journey, I know that every piece of it was worth walking through. It made me stronger and it made me who I am today.

I am sure you've heard the phrase, "If He brings you to it, He will bring you through it," at some point in your life, and it is so true! God can take all things, every situation, and use it for His glory.

You are not alone!

Above all, this book was written to give you hope. There has been a tugging in my spirit for many years to sit down, get my story on paper, and gather other stories; but I kept telling myself that I didn't have time, that I am not a writer, and that I didn't have the ability to put it all together in a book.

I would tell myself that maybe I would try writing when life was less busy—but I also knew there would never be a perfect time. I reminded myself that I wasn't ready when I found out I was pregnant in high school, yet somehow found the strength to be a mom. I finally stepped out in

obedience and began to write. God did the rest! He handpicked every woman who *He* wanted to share her story and placed them in my path.

To the women that shared their stories and hearts, and saw the vision for this book as a tool to impact lives...*thank you!* It's not easy to look back at what you walked through, or share with others what the "old you" looked like. To be honest, I was the last to complete my story, because it isn't easy; however, each of you pushed through because you knew that your story just might change one life, and that the struggle would be worth it. Adversity can do two things: It can either define you or refine you into who you are called to be. You ladies chose not to allow your past to define you. Your strength and courage is matchless! You are overcomers! But it takes a world changer to reach down and help others. You women are *world changers!* Each of you is such a blessing and inspiration to me and I am honored to have your stories in this book.

To everyone who helped point me in the right direction, and who helped turn blank sheets of paper into a book, and to those who helped edit, contributed financially, and gave ideas to make this book better...
thank you!

To every reader, I pray that you are blessed by this book!

THE INVISIBLE GIRL



MY HEART RACED and I could feel the knots forming in my stomach as we pulled up to the abortion clinic. The protesters' shouts pierced my ears as they held up signs and screamed at us not to kill our baby. I already felt nauseous and now it seemed hard to even swallow.

As we entered the clinic, the staff were stone-faced and cold. I desperately needed someone to be kind and tell me it would be okay, but nobody there was friendly or comforting. I sat in the cold room, listening to a father and his daughter making jokes and laughing in the corner as if what everyone was doing was okay. I wondered why it seemed so easy for everyone. How had I gotten to this place, sitting in the waiting room of an abortion clinic?

Growing up, I was the middle child, and always very quiet. I often felt like no one heard me when I spoke, or even noticed I was there. For most of my life, I felt like an *invisible girl*.

When I was two years old, my mom divorced my father. He was rarely home because his priorities were drinking and partying. Eventually, my mom got fed up, and divorced him. Since I was so young, I'm sad

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to say that I have no memories of my father living with us. My mom remarried shortly after the divorce, and my biological dad signed away his parental rights so my mom's new husband could adopt all three of us. My mother paid my dad one thousand dollars to comply with her request, and then he disappeared from our lives.

At first, it seemed the perfect fit with her new husband, my stepdad—but soon after, they had a baby together, and that little girl became the “apple of his eye.” She was unable to do any wrong in his eyes. My siblings and I became a huge burden to him and I was once again *the invisible girl*.

Not long after my new sister arrived, I began to fear my stepdad intensely. He was heavily involved in drugs and stored them in my dresser. He only had to tell me once never to open the top drawer. I was terrified of him and that fear kept even a curious little girl from ever looking in the top drawer of her very own dresser until I was thirteen years old.

At the age of thirteen, one of the happiest days of my life was when my stepdad finally moved out of the house. Things were difficult for my mom, being a single parent of four kids, but she did her best. My stepdad moved to California to continue his drug sales, and we stayed in Colorado.

My stepdad decided to try to get my mom back—he wanted her to remarry him and move to California. He knew the easiest way to do it was through the kids. He started becoming overly nice to all of us. I remember thinking: *He wants me, look how he is being so nice!* I convinced myself that he had changed, and when he asked us kids to go to California to stay with him (in hopes my mother would follow), we packed up our things and said goodbye to Colorado. I hugged my mom a little tighter that day, unsure of when we would see her next.

After spending some time in California, I had a strange burning in my spirit. I couldn't explain it, but I just had to attend the private Christian school in the area. I was never religious, but for some reason this urge was unrelenting. I knew I was supposed to go, but the only problem was my stepdad was not willing to pay for any of it. My needs didn't matter to him. The fact that he was willing to pay for my sisters to attend was a slap in my face and left me feeling like *the invisible girl*,

once again. But I was filled with determination and nothing was going to stop me. So at thirteen years old, I found a job at a video store. I worked from the time I got out of school each day until about 8 p.m. and every weekend. It was long hours and I was exhausted, but my desire drove me. I made \$160 per month and put every penny I made towards my tuition and school needs. Although it was tough working and being a full-time student, I knew I had to be there.

It was at this school I learned about Jesus. This may be hard for some of you to understand, but during my time there, I heard God speak to me and say, “If you have sex before marriage, you will get pregnant.” I wasn’t scared about Him telling me this—by that time I was used to praying. I just thought to myself, “No worries, I would never do that.”

Even though this stuck in my mind, I soon went against what I knew in my heart.

After we lived with my stepdad for only a year, I decided I wanted to move back to Colorado to be with my mom. The house we lived in was overrun with mice and cockroaches. His drug dealing out of the house not only continued but it worsened. The people who stopped by scared me. A friend of my dad’s (a forty-eight-year-old man) even made a pass at me.

When I told my dad I wanted to move back to Colorado with my mom, he made it known he didn’t want me to leave. I know he believed if he had possession of me that there was still hope for his relationship to mend with my mom.

My determination kicked in once again, and at the age of fourteen, I hitched a ride with a stranger and headed east towards Colorado. I kept thinking: *Please God, just get me back to Colorado.* It was not a fun time—I even had a severely infected toe and no one to help me. No one had any idea where I was, but I finally made it home after two weeks on the road with strangers.

I met my boyfriend the same year I moved home. He wasn’t aware of my real age. I’m not proud that I lied and told him I was eighteen. He didn’t know my real age until we had been going out for about a month. I always looked older than I was and I lied and told him I was in college. He was shocked to learn I wasn’t even fifteen years old. He stopped seeing me for about a week after I told him this news, but I

I was only fifteen!
How could I be
pregnant?

knew I wanted to be with him and kept calling him.

His parents raised him in church, and that's where we went on our very first date. I loved going to church with him, and was thrilled to learn we shared the same faith. When the school year resumed, I continued going to high school, and he moved several hours away to pursue his college degree. We would talk once a week on the phone, and he would visit on school holidays. It was hard being so far away from him.

We had only been dating about six months when I started feeling sick. My period was late, and although we used protection, we didn't use it all of the time. The words I heard God speak to me when I attended the Christian school started to ring in my ears once again.

I went to Planned Parenthood hoping to prove my suspicions wrong. It felt like someone punched me square in the gut when the test came back positive. I was only fifteen! How could I be pregnant?

Since the college my boyfriend attended was in a remote location, we were only able to talk on a scheduled day, at a scheduled time, once a week. I didn't have a phone and had to go to my aunt's house on Sunday evening to make the phone call. It was incredibly difficult waiting for that day to come! I can't remember exactly what I said during that conversation, but he got in his car and drove the five hours home that night.

When he arrived at my house, we really didn't know what to say to each other. Although I had very mixed emotions, we decided the best choice was to have an abortion. I knew in my heart I really didn't want to go through with it, but felt like it was my only option. My heart was racing when I called the clinic to make the arrangements to end my pregnancy.

On the day of the appointment, I forged a note with my mom's signature to get out of school. My boyfriend went to his grandmother and asked to borrow \$200 to cover the cost of the procedure. He lied to her about what it was for—he told her it was for college expenses. He picked me up from school and we drove to the clinic in another city. That's when we pulled up and saw a lot of people picketing and

protesting outside the abortion clinic. I was so frightened and I just felt sick to my stomach. It felt like I was living out of a scene from news footage that I had seen on TV.

During that time, this was a common scenario at abortion clinics—however, as a small-town girl, I had never seen this firsthand. For the first time in my life, I actually wished *I was invisible*. Sitting in the waiting room was where I finally broke down. I began to sob uncontrollably and couldn't stop. I could tell my boyfriend was feeling uneasy with the situation as well. His hands were trembling and he was fighting to hold back the tears in his eyes. At that moment, he reached over, grabbed my hand, and said, "Come on, we're leaving. We don't belong here."

As we walked out, my boyfriend noticed two of the picketers were his Sunday school teachers from when he was a little boy. The couple didn't recognize him, yet I think seeing a familiar face may have given him some comfort, assuring him he was making the right decision.

We got in the car, took a deep breath, and began to drive away. We drove about a quarter mile before I suddenly felt the car traveling very quickly in reverse towards the picketers. I was confused, and still in a state of shock, so I remained silent.

Thoughts began running through my head... *Oh no, he's changed his mind and is going to make me do it!* To my surprise, when we reached the picketers, my boyfriend rolled down the window and boldly stated, "We didn't kill our baby today. We didn't do it!" The picketers were thrilled that we had not gone through with it. I believe it gave them comfort to know that they had a part in our decision. As we drove away my boyfriend turned to me and told me that he clearly heard God speak to him saying, "I will bless you for the decision you made today. I will take care of you." We drove to his parents' house in silence, terrified at what we would face when we got there.

When we arrived at my boyfriend's home, telling his parents that his fifteen-year-old girlfriend was pregnant was one of the hardest things he ever did. His parents were very quiet. I knew they were extremely disappointed. My boyfriend's parents were ministers and he was an only child. They had high hopes he would follow their Christian example. They told him he needed to take responsibility for both this baby and for me. They told him that he needed to marry me and he reluctantly

consented. I felt amazed that he was going to marry me—I really loved him, but I figured I would raise the baby by myself.

Although we were emotionally exhausted, we knew the right thing to do was to make the half-hour drive that same day to break the news to my mom. The news was difficult for her. She was also a teenager when she gave birth to my older brother and knew firsthand the difficulties we would face. She didn't know what to say, so she didn't speak to me for three days. I think she was in total shock. I knew she wasn't ignoring me because she was angry; she just felt defeated. Prior to this, she talked about the “birds and bees” with me and I lied to her saying I was not having sex. She felt confident I was telling the truth.

I didn't plan to get pregnant. But now that I was, in my distorted thinking, I thought: *Finally, I won't be invisible anymore.* I will have a husband who sees me and loves me. I will have a baby whom I can love. And he or she will love me in return.

We had to go to a judge to get special permission to be married. In our state of Colorado, if you are under the age of sixteen, your parents can't sign for you to be married. You need special permission from a judge. The judge did not want us to be married, but finally relented and we were married six weeks later in our home church. By the look on the faces of everyone in our wedding pictures, you could tell they were thinking we would never make it.

Our daughter was born on Christmas morning, and she was beautiful, soft, and pink. Because I was so young, I almost felt like I was playing pretend. That didn't last long. Babies are hard work! It was nothing like when I played house with dolls as a little girl.

Being teen parents took a huge toll on us, even though our parents helped us as much as they could. We lived in low-income housing and were on state assistance for food because we only made \$42 per week with my job. My husband began partying a lot as a way to cover his feelings of being trapped in our marriage. He became an alcoholic, and I knew I couldn't let my daughter live the same kind of life my father created for me with his drugs and alcohol abuse. While my husband was away one day, I packed up our belongings, moved out of our apartment, moved back to my mom's house, and filed for divorce.

Coming home to an empty apartment was a wake-up call for him. Since he was raised in a Christian home, he knew where to go for help. He fell on his knees right then and gave his life back to Christ. I continued with the divorce and after three months, it still was not finalized. He was fighting me for joint custody of our daughter. During this time, I began to see a difference in him and my heart began to soften as he tried to prove to me he'd changed. The fact was, we still loved each other, and so we decided to give our marriage another try.

I wish I could say things are perfect now and we have been living "happily ever after." I can't. What I can say is after twenty-eight years, I am still married to my best friend and the love of my life. We have three children; our Christmas blessing little girl and two truly amazing sons.

When I look at the woman our daughter is today, I could not be a prouder mama. She is married to a wonderful man, and is a mother to two precious girls. Which means I get to be grandma, or "Grammy" as they call me. I can't imagine the hole that would be in my heart if I had followed through with the abortion that day and ended her life before it began. As I reflect back on my journey, I thought it was the picketers that helped change my situation that day, but I know now that it was the incredible man by my side, who was taught at a young age to listen to the voice of God in every situation to guide him. My husband's obedience and my childlike faith to follow his lead were what led us out of that clinic. Picketing and making people feel shameful for their decisions isn't what I want you to capture from my story. That's not Jesus! It was God gently, lovingly, leading us out of that clinic. He was our comforter in that difficult situation, and He is who we continue to seek to this day, allowing Him to lead us in every decision.

My life really began when I surrendered it to Jesus. I do not have an earthly father who claims me as his own, but I am the daughter of my loving heavenly Father. He knows me. He sees me. He loves me. I was not then, am not now, and will never be *the invisible girl*.

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See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

—1 John 3:1 (NIV)