



KILL THE GIRL

Coping to Healing

By Tamara Conway

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By

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DEDICATION

To my mom and dad. It took me many years to understand your stories. But I want you to know that I have begun to not just understand, but also know that part of my story is yours as well. While I can't tell yours, I pray that in me telling mine, you find some release and freedom. Your pivotal decisions to acknowledge mistakes and get sober began the journey of breaking the generational curse. Your decisions changed the trajectory of our lives and today you get to see the results of that decision lived out. I love you both, Thank you!

To my siblings, I love you both and I pray you see yourselves in the pages and know that by God's grace, we have pressed through and made it here. I love you both!

To my grandmother, if you were here...I would tell you just how much your prayers still pour over my life to this day. I wish you could have seen the culmination of them being answered, and they aren't even done yet. But I know that one day, you will by God's grace, get to hear the entire story of how we made it over. I love you, granny!

To my husband and children, who are a result of those prayers, and my own. You are proof that God is good! Thank you for always telling me I can do it, and giving me such amazing lessons in life, maturing me, forgiving me, and growing me in ways I never thought possible. I love you all so much!

To every person who ever impacted and poured into my life! My village is immense and strong. Please know you are all LOVED!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FORWARD6

PROLOGUE6

Chapter 1: Laying The Bricks17

Chapter 2: Pathology

Chapter 3: Survival Brain

Chapter 4: Everyone Leaves

Chapter 5: Changes and Challenges

Chapter 6: When the Fairy Tale Ends

Chapter 7: The Spiral

Chapter 8: Daddy’s Home

EPILOGUE

FORWARD

PROLOGUE

Years ago, I heard one of the most powerful truths that changed everything for me. This truth was staggering and hit home so profoundly. What was that truth? Well, first, I was on a hit list! Yes, me ... on someone's hit list. You can only imagine how impossible that seemed. I had no idea what I did to become a target. Second, I wasn't the only one on that hit list, but my parents, their parents, their parent's parents, and even further back. It was an all-out assault on our entire family generationally. This truth blew my mind! I was totally unaware that every day there was someone after me, and he was playing the long game. He even had my children and their children on the list as well, and they weren't even on the planet yet. This was diabolical, and when it was revealed to me, I felt I had no recourse.

The question you may have, as I did, is "Why?" I was able to gain a bit of insight into the answer. This scheme includes the attempt to ensure that every child is born into a dysfunctional, disconnected, disillusioned, disadvantaged, degrading, dangerous, or disastrously broken home; that this dysfunction is so pervasive; that its impact is felt for generations. What this showed me was that the issues in my life were genetically, biologically, physiologically, and spiritually set far before I was planted in my mother's womb. Her mother and father, and their mothers and fathers, and their mothers and fathers ... and so on and so on, were also attacked, scarred and, if

possible, prevented from even making it into the world. Crazy, right? But this plan has been successful for centuries. However, once I realized that I was directly in this bullseye, I also recognized that there was another plan, a plan that sought to rescue me from this cyclical disease of brokenness. I realized that, in fact, if I made one different choice, just one choice to say no, or yes, it could have a drastic impact on the trajectory of my entire life and the lives of my children and grandchildren.

Once I realized that I could be equipped to play the same game and put the destroyer on a hit list as well—and be assured that I could WIN—well, the game ceased to be a game and turned into full-on WAR. The war for my life and yours. One of the major strategies to winning this war is realizing and acknowledging that we are broken. That in our brokenness we are desperate to be reconciled to the image we were created to reflect. For that to happen, we need healing. But when we don't even know what that image is, or that we even need healing, we feel at times as if we are walking in circles. So, we try to figure it out and come up with our own metric. The only problem is, there are so many measurements of identity in this world, that we feel like we're drowning in each current, being dragged under by Leviathan itself, barely keeping our heads above water. We are fighting to breathe and grasping for something to hold onto. Sometimes, we can find some footing, for a moment able to catch our breath, only to find ourselves slipping and being dragged back under the waves.

One of those moments for me was during a suicide prevention training certification many years ago. I was a young adult with a full-time job and in school again part-time at the local community college. I was trying to recover and put my life back together, having lost so much a few years prior. A friend had invited me to join her and become part of a team of suicide prevention specialists, who would work in the evenings taking phone calls from people who were contemplating or threatening suicide. I had always wanted to help people, and this would be a start. The night of the training, we arrived at the community clinic which was sponsoring the training and providing space for the call center. The room was packed. People from all over had come to be trained as a volunteer in this amazing work. Suicide was touching so many lives and something needed to be done to help. It was a sobering reality check. I wasn't sure what to expect, but I knew it would be a learning experience.

As the training began, we were given a breakdown of the clinic's mission, why they were sponsoring this program, the statistics of suicide, and some of the staff's own stories of battling suicidal thoughts. We then met the trainers, and I truly enjoyed the lectures and learning. I was not ready, however, for what I would face while preparing to help others. I had to be open about my own struggles. For the first time in my life, I would have to allow myself to be vulnerable. It was the only way I could possibly understand what it would feel like for those who would call the hotline for help. At first, it made so much sense, but the practicality of it was going to hit home very quickly.

During the training, I couldn't help but notice that one of the instructors looked familiar. I couldn't quite place her, but I knew I remembered her from somewhere. Not too long after the first session, she walked over to me and said, "Hi Tammy." I said "Hello," being polite. So I was right, we did know each other, but from where? Then she said, "You don't remember me? I am your cousin's mother!" When she said that, I wasn't quite sure which cousin she meant, but as I thought for a moment, an old image of her flashed through my mind. Wait! This couldn't be her! Is she serious? It finally hit me that, in fact, this was my cousin's mother, but she was different. She was waaaaay different. She was nothing like I remembered her, as an addict! But clearly, the woman standing in front of me was no longer an addict. We talked briefly, and she told me how she had gotten clean, returned to school to finish a psychology degree, and was working as a counselor, doing training like this and so much more. I couldn't believe what I was hearing and seeing. It was one of the first things that rocked my world that night. She talked to me about how God changed her life and how she believed God had led me to this place that night. I was in total disbelief at what I saw, yet it was real and it was the most encouraging thing that could have happened before my life would be flipped upside down in the next hour of the training.

Once we had a bit of training under our belts, we were placed into groups of about seven or eight and participated in role-playing of sorts. These groups became animated, voices a buzz all around the room. Circles of strangers coming together would eventually become our

safe spaces. We were then instructed to share something about ourselves that no one knew, or that we had never before discussed with another person. At first, everyone was a bit hesitant. We barely knew each other and we were getting ready to divulge some very intimate or deep information that perhaps we had determined never to tell anyone. I can't say we were enthused, but once someone began, the momentum picked up. Some folks seemed a bit more at ease with sharing than others. But there is something about the dynamics when one person takes the plunge: it opens the sea of possibilities in transparency that I believe everyone yearns for. Soon more and more people were willing to open up. We were able to witness the people around us experiencing their burdens being lifted. It was so unexpected.

This was supposed to be about us coming to learn how to help others, not us coming to get help. We are all fine, it is those folks who will be calling into the hotline that need help. This wasn't for us, was it? Then, before I knew it, my turn was almost upon me. I was watching and listening intently and determining that when it was my time to speak, I would just share something superficial. They won't even know the difference, I thought. I mean, they don't know me, so who cares. Plus, I don't know them either and what good would it do for me to share here anyway. The more I saw people share their own painful secrets, the more tears I saw on other faces, the more that sparked a familiar message that I firmly believed, which was that tears were weak. That was not going to be me. Is this necessary? I wondered. But before I could rationalize my way through what I would say,

it was finally my turn. I sat there for a moment, and then I decided, You've come here, and you've heard all these folks share from their heart. Don't cheat, be real, be honest.

My heart was beating fast, and somehow I knew that this was going to be a pivotal moment for me, one that would change my life forever. It wasn't just about the possibility of talking suicidal people down from an emotional ledge. It was also about taking a leap of faith when it came to walking through my own door of freedom, one that I had never imagined could be open. I would be taking a leap into a life where I told the truth first to myself and then to others. That wasn't my norm. It was challenging and yet the idea of it intrigued me, and my desire for it grew as I sat there in that circle with strangers. What better place to tell the truth for the first time about myself, my state of mind, and my life, than with people I didn't know and who had no stake in what I would say? It wasn't until this thought hit me that I finally realized this was the chance of a lifetime. I had this perfect opportunity to just say it without fear of repercussions, except that my secret would be out. So, after sitting for a moment and seeing these strangers looking at me, with their smiles, or watery eyes, I decided to take the first step forward in my choice to heal. I grabbed the door and flung it wide open—and said it! “My name is Tammy and I was molested, and experienced physical and emotional trauma.” There, I said it, and it was the truth, and it was the first time that I had said it out loud in my entire life. And you know what? It felt good.

At that moment I felt as if boulders were dropping from my soul and landing on the floor around me like an avalanche. I felt physically different. My body had held onto the trauma, memories, secrets, shame, guilt, regret, and so much more for so long. The release triggered tears to flow, and at first I didn't realize it, because I was basking in the physical release. But then I realized I was crying. I wasn't quite ready yet for that kind of vulnerability, so I stopped myself and quickly pivoted my body toward the next person to signal that it was now their turn. However, there was no skirting past what I had experienced that night. It was revolutionary. It was the start of something amazing and awakened in me a yearning for something authentic: speaking out loud things that I had held in silence; beginning to be honest with myself first. Before I spoke a word in that circle of strangers that night, I had first spoken it to myself. In the moments leading up to that community moment, I had to wrestle with this in my own heart. I had to stop telling myself the lie that there was nothing to say, or if I said it, something truly horrible would happen. One of my rehearsed lines was, "I'm fine, look at how I made it." But that wasn't the truth. The truth was that I had taught that little girl within me to hold it in, and never realized that I stopped her growth the moment I adopted that skill. It was not a skill to save me. That old coping strategy stunted my emotional growth.

Subsequently, this new way of confronting life also began transforming my relationships with others, as far as telling them the truth. I had no clue where this would lead me, but I was ready for it. Ready to be FREE. Yet, I realized

that the freedom I craved wouldn't come from a one-time ordeal, but over some time and with many challenges. That night, however, I acknowledged for the first time that I had been drowning for so long underneath the weight of these burdens and hadn't even known it. I was barely breathing, gasping for air, day after day. Not living, just surviving. I realized that there was more to life, and I wanted it. That circle of people who sat with me had no idea that, as I listened to their stories, they gave me the strength I needed to attempt better for myself. So, that night, I chose to lift my hand out of the water, and say "HELP!!!", by being transparent and grabbing a life jacket. How was I going to be rescued? I had no idea, but for the first time in my life, that felt possible.

This book is not about airing out the sordid details of my traumatic life, while it may feel that way for some as they read. It is also not about belittling or outing my family for neglect or brokenness, though I am sure you will find something that will spark those feelings in you as well. My reason for writing this book is to give a glimpse into what God can do in the lives of people who are broken, abused, ashamed, and, for all intents and purposes, given a platform in life to fail. This book is also about removing the stereotypes. Life is not lived in black and white. There are indeed grey areas that we so often want to ignore. What do I mean when I say "grey areas." While we may see people's lives and actions and determine from that who they are and how they should improve, how they should have done things differently, better or more, it is far more complicated to understand the nuances of people's experiences and see

how these shaped their outlook on life and choices. Concluding that they should be different or better people, or should have done more in their lives does nothing to help them change. The truth is, by beholding we do become changed. That change cultivates, grows, and matures us into products that produce what we have seen. I am so glad, though, that by the power of God there is a true chance to change and grow. But how long does that process take? Well, I've read someplace that it takes a lifetime.

It has taken me over 10 years to write this book. I didn't know why it was taking so long at first. I had tried many times to write it, and after doing so, it didn't feel complete. My last attempt was a few years ago, when my younger son accidentally deleted it from my computer. As you can imagine, I was in complete shock, and heartbroken. I knew I could not recreate what I had done on those pages. But then I realized something important. As I began to rewrite the book, I was writing it from a very different place emotionally—a place and process of healing, not a place of hurt. This turned everything around for me.

The story that I now choose to tell in these pages may not just help you to understand me, but to possibly see yourself and others in a different light, and ultimately help you heal in a way that is generational. I'm not just talking about your children and their children. I realized that in my healing, my parents had healing, my siblings, my husband, my friends and so many more. The power to put something into the world that is a catalyst for healing completely

changed my perspective on just simply telling my story. I wanted to give hope. That is what I pray you find on these pages.

If you were or are that child trapped in an adult's body, trying to figure out a way to heal; if you were or are that broken man or woman, parenting from a place and space of brokenness and pain; if you are that teacher in the classroom, operating as a surrogate parent for children who simply don't have loving guidance at home; if you are the church member who can't quite understand how to connect with those who are coming into the congregation with baggage, or maybe you're that member who is struggling to figure out how to connect with those who seem to have no baggage at all; if you are the husband or wife trying to figure out how to understand the pain or past of your spouse; if you are sitting in a jail cell or sleeping on the side of the road and feeling abandoned by everything or everyone; or if maybe you are just a person who likes to read about other people's stories, I pray you see hope as you turn to each chapter. May you find God speaking to you from each page, encouraging you in the fact that, **YOU ARE LOVED.**

CHAPTER 1

LAYING THE BRICKS

It was a normal afternoon, and my cousin, my middle brother and I were playing upstairs. My older brother, about 10 years older, whom I absolutely adored, had left home already and was living on his own. I loved hanging out with him because I always got a treat or a toy of some kind. After all, his girlfriends wanted me to like them, so they bought me gifts. It was a win-win situation. Because of the age gap, he was always more like a father figure of sorts, than a brother. He had left home when he became of age, and who could blame him? Home was a crazy place at times, and I think he and Dad didn't always get along very well. So, we only saw my older brother on occasion.

This particular weekend, as all of us children were upstairs playing, I heard some thumps and bumps downstairs. They weren't startling to me at first because it was just noise. My mom was always cleaning or doing something, so I figured this was her doing her thing. But then, the sounds grew louder and I thought that I heard a faint voice calling. Again, being in my own little world, not wanting to leave my play, I ignored it for a while. However, there was no denying that my mom was calling out for something or someone. Now, as most children probably do, I determined, based on the tone of voice, whether this was something that required an instant reply. Parents don't

understand how important these imaginary moments are and, if they could see just how close you were to conquering the pretend planet or building the most phenomenal edifice, they would leave you alone, right? However, no one wants to get in trouble. So, you have to play it close and test the tone to see what it means. The depth of my mom's voice determined if this was a "you better get here right now or else" moment, or a "just checking to see if you're okay" kind of moment. And that's the metric most kids follow. But soon something happened that shook all of us out of our play mode and into one of the most frightening scenes we had ever experienced.

Suddenly, the door that led upstairs where we all were, flung open violently like a storm had blown through the house. Then my mom screamed our names, her voice full of pain and fear. That tone was scary. It was clear that something was very wrong. I remember getting up and running towards the stairs. There, I met my cousin and my brother as they charged out of his room, and we all bounded down to see what the matter was. When we got downstairs and turned the corner, I couldn't believe my eyes. What I saw would be seared in my brain for the rest of my life. The room just beyond the door was my parent's bedroom, and the door was wide open. I could see my dad holding my mom by her throat up against their bedroom wall. My tiny mom, maybe 5 feet tall, and my father, who had to be around 7 feet at the time, but as a child looked 20 feet, had her lifted from the floor like a rag doll. I was in shock, and even amidst all the screaming and yelling that was happening around us, I felt as if I were stuck in a

twilight zone. My mom was trying unsuccessfully to fight him off.

I could smell the strong scent of alcohol in the air as well. I was more than familiar with that odor, as I had it around me my entire life to that point. My father, my uncles, my cousins, and friends of the family seemed to always be drinking and/or intoxicated. As it turns out, most of my cringe moments as a child were surrounded by alcoholic or drug-filled rages. This was one of the first that remained etched in my brain.

I couldn't move, I was frozen with fear. My brother, on the other hand, swung into action. He ran to my mom and began trying to help her. But he was certainly no match for my father, as he was probably the same size as my mom. My cousin was screaming at him to let her go. Eventually, somehow, I snapped out of it and went into fight mode. He had my mom by her throat and was hurting her. I had to do something! Why was he doing this? How did this happen? I remember thinking. Out of nowhere, something came over me, propelled me forward, and I ran into the room. I fell to the floor where my father stood, choking my mother. I began to do what any little kid who saw their mom in danger would do; I started biting his ankles. I was small, but I could sink my little teeth into his pants leg and cause some real damage, I thought. I began to beat on him with all my might. Between bites I was yelling, "LET GO OF MY MOMMY!!!, LET GO OF MY MOMMY!!!" None of that made much difference. The rage in him seemed more powerful than the rage in me, but that wasn't going to stop me from

getting him off her. So, I bit harder, and beat harder. He was going to let her GO! I screamed and cried as loudly as I could, but my cries had no impact. I felt hopeless, but I just knew something had to stop this. At times I could feel him trying to swing his leg around to get me off, but I refused to let go. I felt like hours had passed, but it was only minutes, and nothing was working to get him away from her. Then, something got my father's attention.

My brother, who had left the room during all the commotion, had emerged again with a knife, a huge knife from the kitchen counter. I knew that knife! It was always placed inside the wooden slots that held it so neatly on the kitchen counter, and I was never allowed to mess with it because it was dangerous. But my brother had it in his hands now and was pointing it at my dad. He was yelling some profanity in hopes that it would startle him into seeing that my brother meant business. He screamed out, "LET HER GO, GET THE ***** OFF MY MOTHER." Somehow, it was as if a demon at that moment left my father, as he turned and looked at my brother, and suddenly let my mom go. She dropped to the floor gasping for air. Maybe it was the fear that this little boy who was holding the largest kitchen knife on the face of the planet was getting ready to stab him. But I remember the look on my dad's face. It was as if he didn't recognize what he was doing. When he dropped her to the floor, my grip on his leg remained until he pulled me off him. It was as if I had lockjaw. I wasn't going to let go until I knew she was safe.

I eventually let go and ran to my mom. She was visibly upset and screaming for him to get out. My brother would not take his eyes off my dad until he walked out of the front door. He kept holding that knife, pointing it at him, ready at any moment to let him have it. My dad left the house that night, intoxicated, and who knows what was going through his mind. When he walked out the kitchen door, down the stairs, and out of the house, my mom locked the door behind him. It was one of the most unbelievable scenes I had ever experienced, and from that moment I was transformed. That innocent child would never be the same.

I remember later that night that everyone was scattered in silence. My brother and cousin had retreated upstairs after a while. Reflecting now as an adult, I am pretty sure they were also changed that day. I don't know what they were discussing in that room, behind that door, but I am sure it was not back to play as usual. As for me, my mom was downstairs in the living room and wherever she was, I wanted to be. I would not leave her side, and I stuck to her like glue. I had to protect my mom, and I knew exactly where the knives were, too, so I had a plan. I was stunned and had no way of dealing with how to process what had just happened. Imagine experiencing a traumatic scene such as this, and no one knowing what to say, or help you process it. Yet we humans move forward in such a way that suggests that we must keep living somehow. All I could do was sit on the floor in the kitchen, near the door that my father had walked out of a few hours earlier.

That evening, he returned, but my mom would not let him in. She made it very clear to me that, no matter what, I was not to open that door! I heard him enter the downstairs entrance to the house and walk up the stairs. Would he bust through the door, what was going to happen? I was terrified! But his footsteps slowed once he reached the top of the staircase. I heard the knob wiggle, but the door was locked. He was not getting into the house. All was silence for a moment, and I sat there on the floor looking at the door, wondering what he would do. I then heard his body slide down the door as if he was taking a seat and I saw his fingers slip under the door. There had to be at least a one-and-a-half-inch gap from the floor to the door itself, and his fingers slid right under. They were big and dirty. He was a truck driver and worked in a steel yard, so he collected a lot of dirt on his uniform and brought it home. My mom hated it. He had to leave his shoes downstairs in the hallway entrance to the house because they tracked dirt all over if he wore them inside. That same dirt was packed under his fingernails. Funny thing was that I hadn't noticed until then just how dirty they were. I could only see his fingers, but I could hear his voice from the other side of the locked door. As his fingers swayed back and forth, I didn't know what to do at first. He must have known I, or at least somebody, was there. I moved closer to the door where I could hear him asking to be let in, and saying he was sorry.

Not only could I hear him crying, but I could smell him, too. His smell was complicated and familiar. Again, the scent of alcohol was present, but the smell of the truck yard was there too. That smell was a part of my daily life. This last

job he had was for a dairy company, hauling merchandise, and we loved it because he brought home crates of chocolate milk, which we loved, even when he came home drunk. This complicated scenario we lived out every day. I remember thinking, Will we still get chocolate milk? Crazy thought, right? But my little mind was only trying to process and figure my way through what I knew was happening, which was a change, a separation perhaps, a divorce, a word that I had no to understand at the time. I also lost my sense of trust that night, and my sense of safety. I had no clue how to trust my dad again after that.

While sitting there on the floor by the door, I didn't know what to do. I loved my dad, and hearing him cry broke my little heart. But I also remembered that just a few hours earlier he was hurting my mom, and that scared the living daylights out of me. My heart was broken and yet was full of love for this man. I didn't quite understand how those two emotions could exist at once. I held his fingers as he cried on the other side of the door, and I remember my mom walking past and looking at me to remind me not to open that door. The look was as if she were saying, "Don't you give in, stay strong." She didn't have to worry about me because the fear I had for him at that moment outweighed the love I felt. She never pulled me away; she let me sit there until he left. I was eventually told to go to bed, but I was too scared to sleep. What if something happens and she needs me? I didn't speak these words out loud, but they rocked me that night and many nights to come.

We later left that home, with its memories, some beautiful and some hurtful. I have memories of Christmas lights shining across the street on the Illuminating Company property. We were the luckiest kids in the world to see such amazing displays every Christmas with no effort of our own. Another great memory involved our cat. He loved the Christmas lights as much as we did. Unfortunately, he accidentally got out of the house one day and darted across the busy street to see the lights, but he didn't make it. My mom and dad held a funeral service for him and buried him next to the house in a shoe box. When I look back on it, that was quite therapeutic for us as a family, and I am so proud of my parents for doing so. It helped with closure.

But those memories were often overshadowed by the chaotic and violent outbursts that happened between them. They could see that we as kids needed to say goodbye to this beloved kitty, but they did not know how to address the obvious ills that we experienced with them and the dysfunctional relationship lived out in front of us every day. I can't remember if it was the fight I just described that did it; perhaps it was an accumulation. But eventually my mom became a single parent again. She and my dad split up, and we moved a couple more times. They attempted to get back together on several occasions, but ultimately they divorced.

PROCESS

Rarely is time taken to process life events. Most simply don't have the tools, as well as the emotional vocabulary or capacity to do so. This leaves people trying to figure it out on their own. Throughout this book, I will ask you questions that may help you not just to process through what you read, but perhaps to process through what you may be able to identify with from personal experience. It is my hope that you find some helpful tools, as well as hope and completion on your own journey.

Question 1 – What in particular stood out to you in this chapter?

Question 2 – There was a tool used by my parents to help process change, loss, or grief. What was it?

Question 3 – In what ways could the same tool have been useful to process the loss of trust and trauma that took place that night?

SUMMARY – Here are a few more thoughts on this chapter:

1. Unaddressed traumatic events can leave a gap of emotional turmoil that lives on, which we will see in upcoming chapters. Though addressing them may be hard and frightening, it can be very helpful to relieve unresolved emotional energy that will most likely show up in some other area of life.

2. A dynamic exists in some cultures that makes it hard for adults to admit wrongs, ills, abuse, failures, etc., or to be confronted. Why? Well, it's considered to be disrespectful. In order to remain respectful, sometimes we forego doing some of the most important work in our lives, for ourselves and our children, in order that we may be able to hold onto a false sense of dignity. Don't be afraid to break the cultural norms and ask for help. Especially when what you have been doing has proven to be toxic and simply doesn't work.

CHAPTER 2

PATHOLOGY

*"an abnormality, dysfunction, mental illness,
or **family** psycho **pathology** manifested in terms of
behavioral, interpersonal, emotional, ..."*

DELHI PSYCHIATRY JOURNAL Vol. 11 No.2 OCTOBER 2008Chapter 3

SURVIVAL BRAIN

CHAPTER 4

EVERYONE LEAVES

CHAPTER 5

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

CHAPTER 6

WHEN THE FAIRYTALE ENDS

CHAPTER 7

THE SPIRAL

CHAPTER 8

DADDY'S HOME

About the Author



Tamara Conway enjoys being a wife to her supportive and loving husband, serving alongside him in pastoral ministry for over 20 years. She also is blessed to be the mother to 4 amazing children, who are the biggest blessings in her life. Together, with her husband, they created Stamena4life, LLC., which seeks to provide resources centered around addressing real and relevant issues within personal development, and relationships that lead toward healing. She enjoyed speaking, writing, coaching, and singing.

She is also a Grief Recovery Specialist, as well as Mental Health Coach. One of her greatest joys is helping people go from a place of coping to Healing.