

## Sample

*This book chapter was written for a client's personal story. Names are confidential.*

I really do believe that little girls summon up pictures of warm cinnamon buns, daisies, fur-balled kittens, innocence, fuzzy giggling delights, ballerina tutus, and cookie dough flour on their noses. There is an unshakeable preciousness about the fragile splendor of life itself that little girls tauntingly embody. Their mommies and daddies recognize it immediately and the cuddling and cherishing begins. They grow to expect it.

What happens beyond that recognition is what turns a little girl into a woman, spit spot, quick as a flash. Ask me how I know.

I'm XXXX, but I wasn't always her. I used to be XXX, a native to southern California, one of the universe's garden spots. I grew up in a city the envy of small children everywhere else because my city held Disneyland, that starter of stars-in-your-eyes for little kids! Society's affluence had led Walt Disney to create his perfect little kingdom where the rich spend their leisure time and dollars chasing bliss – family relationships, a world of fantasy, and the bounties of a good life – joy of joys, right in my back yard. It was bound to rub off.

When population shockwaves rippled through the city, and famous celebrities like Johnny Carson and Jack Linkletter added more fame to our town, I busied myself learning my ABCs and colors, preparing for what I just knew was going to be just a lovely, grand life. I also knew from those very early days, somewhere out there, a magnificent Prince Charming was growing up and dreaming about meeting me. I don't know how these dreams begin, but so many of us girls seem to have them, I figured they must be genetic, because I can't remember a time when that dream wasn't in there pulsing.

Orange County isn't a big place, but it holds a massive amount of people and in the midst of all that, I was growing up.

"Mommy, how do you know God has a plan for me? There are so many people, how does he even know me?" My mother, and later my teachers, went balmy trying to come up with my hundreds of questions, but hey, questions are in my nature and I like finding out the answers. I also like discovering who's treading water and who really knows what he's talking about! I became really keen at that one.

"So, does Jesus still wear a dress or does he wear a tank tops and shorts now that it's summer?" "Why don't the chips melt in chocolate chip cookies?" "If you shake the dust off the rag, doesn't it just blow back into the house?" "Why do some of the kids read so slowly at school?" "Is whistling really brazen? My teacher says it's brazen. What is brazen?"

An eager child's mind can be both a delight and a torment to a parent and my curious mentality coupled with outspokenness drove xxxl and xxx into some serious head scratching while at the same time they were delighted by my brightness.

xxx and xxx fit perfectly into the affluent, working class of Orange County and they worked hard to provide a grand environment for me and my brother complete with a fine home where cleanliness was next to godliness, and where godliness was tantamount to sainthood, more's the pity.

Although I was the eldest in their marriage, my dad, xxx, had been married once before and I had an older half sister named xxxx, and boy, was she! Fortunately xxx lived south of us in San Diego county, so I wasn't confronted much by the fact that she was mean and wasn't likeable because she'd been massively indulged. I guess in a way, we both got to be daddy's little girl, serially.

I was one of those "first children" and I really believe the shrinks are right: it does affect your personality. I showed the quality of being an independent, natural leader. I know they say some first born kids are aggressive, but not me; I'm a people pleaser who's reliable and conscientious but get out of my way if you don't do things to a "T" because I teethed on accuracy.

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All this made my grade school teachers like me because hard work was no stranger to me and we'll get to that soon enough. So I did well in school and I made everyone happy including me. I adore school. I mean, learning something new every day is one grand adventure, don't you think? And the more esoteric, the better. I have a gadget on my Home Page now called *Useless Knowledge* and it just delights me. Want a sample?

*Peter de Jager was the world's foremost expert on the Y2K problem, which many believed would cause computer systems to collapse because their software would mistake the double zeroes of 2000 to mean 1900. He wrote the "Doomsday 2000" article that initially publicized the problem, then spent the 1990s helping companies all over the world fix their computers. When at midnight, January 1, 2000, planes did not fall from the sky, de Jager was angrily accused of setting the hysterical stage for billions of dollars to be wasted.*

Come on now, don't you find that entertaining? Ah ha! Maybe you're a first child, too.

My mom worked my butt off early on. I think she was disappointed that I'd been a girl. "Are you sure it's a girl?" she asked the doctor twice. Boy, did I love hearing that story retold! I can remember being put to the task of scrubbing arm pit stains in blouses. Yuk! There was a vital resentment between me and my mother so we weren't the closest

My precious, darling, baby brother xxx was one of my first loves and I adored his sweetness as only a fifteen-month little girl can. He turned out to be a complete whiz at computers and building website. Who'd a thought it? For my little girl relationship, he was simply a love and a delight and I got to big sister him, helping my mom with taking-care-of-the-baby chores.

I guess it was that plethora of chores so early in my life, and my genuine love for pleasing my mom, that allowed me to help her as much as I did when I was in the third grade. Oh, I was still a little girl, still wore darling clothes, still needed help with my curly hair in the morning, but when my world was shattered over mom's accident, I guess the only thing I could see to do was step in there and help her.

Who allowed her to heal so she could move forward in her life? Me, of course. The poor woman had to eat my eight-year-old cooking, and frankly, I haven't improved much in the intervening years. I didn't feel really close to my mom, but after the accident, she needed to be taken care of and so, uber responsible me, I stepped up to the plate and managed the household.

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I am a mother who loves her children unconditionally. At least, that's what I set out to do those many years ago. Where does such a throbbing, dynamic focus come from in one as young as I was when I had my first child? And then how does such a young girl hold to this standard for all her subsequent children? I think it comes from wanting to be loved unconditionally myself, that's where, because a person's ability to love is shaped by their experience of being loved or from the absence of being loved. I will share with you how I was loved.

I suspect that telling my story will be shocking to many among my friends and family, and yet if my grandchildren are to benefit from the mistakes I made, I fell honor-bound to tell the entire story without sensitivity filtering in order to share the understanding I came to through the grace of God's goodness and the experiences he gave me to live through. His unconditional love was the shoulder I cried on as I learned. I want to extend that same unconditional love for you by being an example of how telling the truth, admitting to mistakes, can turn pain into great glory.

Psalm 139: 13-16 is a particularly soothing balm to my soul. These verses tell me that God's own character goes into the creation of every person. His character makes each one of us special. The verses tell me that I should have as much respect for myself and for others as my Creator does. It is this realization that both prevented me from telling my story and prompted me to do so when the time was right.

I do not wish to disrespect anyone who's part of my story. In particular, I don't want to disrespect my mom, because I only know bits and pieces of her story. I don't want to judge her harshly. And yet I think that exposing the secrets of my growing up years will be sensed as "harsh." I don't know that my mother set out to be harsh. I only know that is how I sensed her behavior from my little girl mind. My intention in writing now is not to point a finger of blame, but merely to tell a story so that I can share the understanding I've gained by all my experiences and perhaps be an example of a life led in God's grace and protection to all who read this.

My mom was the middle child of five. Her name was Agnes. Her father was the town doctor; her mom, the nurse. This was considered highly acceptable by the standards of that day, but my mom didn't like the small town mind set. As a teenager, she was both beautiful and rebellious. Her behavior with her high school sweetheart, Fritz, kept the gossips' tongues flickering with fresh stories. My mom hated this gossiping. She wanted to live where her frolicking wouldn't be so obvious, and that is why she moved to California after high school graduation.

Train travel alone was forbidden, so young women like my mother had to be met at each station by another woman called a Traveler's Aide. Aides helped young women, refugees, defense workers, and member of the U.S. armed forces. These Aide's would wait on the platform as trains arrived to meet travelers at over 168 stations here in the United States, chaperone them to protect their virtue, and make sure they were fed, clothed and sheltered in the event of an overnight stay.

My mom was a Party Girl. She dedicated herself fully to partying, and that left me the child of an absentee mother. Emotionally, she was gone much of the time. Physically, she was gone all of the time unless the party was at our apartment, and then she was only there for her friends. When she was at home, her intolerance of my little girl's growing up curiosities made my questions a source of irritation for her.

I learned very early in life to keep a low profile, to ask few questions, to toe the mark, and to obey without question. I also learned that my opinion and my dreams didn't matter. Only hers did. My mother was married four times in her search for herself. She was skilled in the art of taking men from other women. My childhood literally was about being seen but not being heard, as the old adage says. I did not feel special to anyone in those days.

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To her great benefit, though, I have to tell you that I'm quite proud to recognize that my mom had a great and courageous spirit, beyond what women in her era had the spunk to show forth. She was a rebel woman with an independent spirit. She had the courage to leave home as a single woman at a very early age. That was unheard of in her era and that very same behavior was seen as sinful in mine.

My mom did maintain her friendship with XXX over fifty years. Each of them married someone else. Each of their spouses died. XXX was the one person in my life who made me feel a little bit special, but he was not meant to be my daddy. My mom refused to go back to that small town scene in XXX, and XXX wanted to remain on his farm and care for his mother and his daughters. No California for him.

My father was quite a bit older than my mother – 21 years older! I don't remember too much about him because he died at age 42 of a sudden heart attack. I don't think he and I bonded much due to my absence of memories about him and due to the fact that my tender young age was three when he died. I learned a bit about him from my mother, my grandmother and my aunts. My dad was already married when he met my mom, but he really wanted children, so he divorced his wife who did not want children.

There doesn't seem to be much social stigma attached to being divorced in 2008. Back then, it was anathema – it indicated failure, shame and embarrassment. On top of being divorced, my dear dad was a Mason! Horrors to my Catholic grandmother. She was very vocal about her disapproval of my mother's choice of husband.

My dad was a salesman for XXX. My mother said that he was "tall, dark, and handsome" but that was the only compliment about him I ever heard. I guess he was a bit quirky. My mother's photo album and high school scrapbook had people cut out of the pictures. When I asked my mother why, she said that when I was two years old, she'd taken me to Iowa to be a flower girl in my Aunt XXX's wedding. While we were gone, my father found the books and cut my mother's high school boyfriend out of every picture. I find it hard to imagine that kind of immature jealousy in a 40 year old man.

Another tale about my dad is about an incident that got retold when mom was buried black and gloomy in one of her drunken, lonely times. I was in nursery school and my father came to get me. I didn't give the teacher enough of a sense that I recognized him, so the school wouldn't release me to him. The school called my mother to verify that indeed, it was my father. She was humiliated and he was embarrassed by my behavior. I remember being made to feel terribly guilty. I was somewhere between age two and three, hardly of an age to be sensitive to this kind of thing. Again, not special.

When I was three years old, my father died while he was on a sales trip for his company in XXX, CA. He had asked my mom to go with him on that trip, but she'd refused. That set up a great reason for remorse in her mind after he died suddenly. She would drink, cry long into the night, and listen to 78 rpm records of "their songs." I would find her on the mornings that followed these sad binges lying on the floor surrounded by her martini glass, her ashtray and the 78 records. She always left the olive in the glass and I have no idea why.

This scenario was revisited throughout my growing up years and at the end of every failed relationship. My mother felt that if she'd gone with my dad, she could have saved him. And if she saved him, why none of the tragedies that followed would have even happened. Adding to her grief was the appearance of my dad's ex-wife at his funeral. From my little girl perspective, I don't recall much compassion from my mother's family, but I do recall this phrase that got flung at us repeatedly: "There is nobody better than a dead husband." That is so grim.

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I suppose since I'm an adult now that I can understand how frightening it might have been to be left alone at age 24 with a child to raise. Being a single mother in the 1950s in itself was different and rare, because intact families with both a mom and a dad were the norm.

After my dad died, my mother had to go to work. She never achieved much in the workaday world because then, it was a male dominant environment. Even though she had to count every penny, she got us by. Our apartment was always clean and neatly furnished and sometimes, to make those dollars stretch, we shared the apartment with a roommate.

She had an extremely active social life in the early days after my dad died. Her co-workers would gather nightly at our apartment for Happy Hour. Her friends called her the *Merry Widow*, and truly, her life did evolve around her career, her many men. Alcoholism was the glue that held all that together and then there was three-year-old me. Between 1945 when I was born and 1968, I watched my mom take away other women's men, marry them and then get four divorces. I had instability as a sauce on every meal.

My mom would frequently say "Little Pips have big ears." I didn't know what a Little Pip was, but I knew that I was one. That and the "seen but not heard" phrase certainly didn't make me feel special.

After my dad died, I changed nursery school and a blanket of dread is wrapped around my shoulders as I recall it, because I hated being at the new school, XXXXXXXX School in XXXXX. I spent interminably long hours at that school. I ate breakfast there as well as lunch, but the thing I hated most was that I was always the last one to be picked by at day's end. I stayed at that school from age three to age eight. The other kids made fun of me because I sucked my thumb and all I wanted was to belong and feel special.

I made a fatal mistake in the third grade or I'm sure I'd have been in that school longer. I was leaning against the fence watching the other kids tell jokes to our teacher, Mrs. Glass. Each one would take his turn, and then everyone would laugh together. Oh, I wanted to be a part of that! So, I joined the group, cautiously raised my hand and asked if I could tell a joke.

I launched into the joke that had gotten the biggest guffaws at my mother's Happy Hour party the night before. "Mrs. Glass, would you rather be a golf ball or an egg?" She thought about that for a while, most likely trying to figure out the answer, but I'd stumped her. Finally, she said "I guess I'd rather be an egg than a golf ball." "Oh! You'd rather be laid than played with!"

I was flabbergasted when that joke didn't get the gales of laughter it had the previous night. Instead, Mrs. Glass grabbed me by the arm and marched me right into the Principal's office. It was the beginning of the end of my days at XXXXXXXX school. This is when the saying about "little pips" became more popular at my house.

I spent my summers with my grandparents in XXX. Those were sweet, sunny days. I felt loved there. Every year during elementary school, my mother took me to LAX on the last day of school. I boarded a flight on TWA, alone, and flew to Kansas City. I wasn't afraid and the stewardesses were very kind to me. They would walk me over to my connecting flight on Braniff Airlines and my grandma would meet me in XXXXXXXX.

I believe that God's own character went into my creation and that alone made me special, regardless of whether I felt special at my mother's hands or not. I had to work to recognize that truth however. It was worth all the work it took, and part of the recognition that I'd been made special by God is the reason I wanted so strongly to share this story with you.