

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Sometimes I can still hear Liver barking, or see the construction workers building new homes, and smell the barbecue wafting from the neighbors Viking grill. Sometimes when I see little children playing I see Mark and I climbing trees and getting ourselves into trouble. It's weird how memories live on forever. No matter how old you get, it seems like the oldest memories return, even when you don't want them to.

I was born August 19, 1979 to the proud parents, John and Susan Winters. I was there first born. They decided to name me Jeremy. The earliest memory I have was when I was around three or four years old. At that time we were living in a two bedroom apartment. My mom was a stay at home mom, only because my parents didn't have the money for preschool or a babysitter. My dad was working for a telephone company and going to law school. The thing I remember the most was that we didn't have much. Any time I saw something on the television and would ask for it, my mother would respond, we really don't have the money for that, but just you wait. Once your daddy graduates and gets a job we will have all the money in the world. It wasn't until I was five that he finally graduated. I remember going to the graduation. I watched my father get his diploma. My mother was extremely happy; she was also three months pregnant with my baby sister. After he graduated and passed the bar it took him about five months to secure a job with a law firm. We still didn't have much at first, but as time went by my dad would bring surprises home. I remember a day in October it was right before Halloween, he brought home a new station wagon; he said he knew we would need it with the new baby coming. By then my mom was eight months pregnant and ready to deliver (something she would always say). At this time I remember seeing less of my father. He would work from eight in the morning until seven at night and by the time he came home was so tired. He would play with me and talk to me for a little while, but it wasn't like before. My mother would always explain to me that that was the way it had to be, that lawyers had to work a lot. She would try to make me feel better by saying it was a good thing because it meant that daddy would be able to buy me whatever I wanted, but I didn't care at that moment, I just wanted my dad. I used to pray at night that my dad

would lose his job and that we would go back to the way things used to be. I didn't care at that time that it meant being middle class or cutting corners or not getting everything I wanted, but those prayers never worked. However, things did get better. As the days went on my father saved up enough money for us to move, but we didn't move until after Sarah was born, my sister. She was born on November 22, 1984. It was about two months later that we started to pack. On March 5, 1985 we officially moved into our new home. It was huge; it had four bedrooms, two and a half bathrooms, a dining room, kitchen, living room, a den, a laundry room, basement, two-car garage, and an attic. It was a far distance a way from where we used to live, but my dad said it was cheaper to live there. I didn't understand it, but I did like the house. It was in a complex called Crystal Fountain. I will never forget that name. It's where most if not all my memories are. It's where I grew up and met all my friends. The complex was still new. At the time we moved there were houses still being built. Including our home there were nine homes in the development. The thing I remember the most about Crystal Fountain were the people who lived in the houses.

Verma Jean Thompson was the first one to come welcome us to the development. She was known as Momma Jean. She was like the mother of the neighborhood and just about everyone respected her, some were just afraid of her. Everyone knew not to mess with her, get in her way, or even get on her bad side. She had a way of making you think twice before speaking to her, because you never wanted to say the wrong thing to her. She spoke her mind and always made sure you knew her opinion. She said things as she saw them and she never cared whether or not you were offended. Sometimes it seemed like she said things to offend. She was an old school mother. She didn't care who your parents were, if she saw you misbehaving she would spank you in a minute. Overall she was a nice person to be around; she liked her peace and quiet. If it got too loud she'd be out of her house to quiet down the neighborhood. I don't know how old she was because she always looked very young, but I knew she was old. She lived alone. Her children were grown and married with children. She was widowed and if you got the chance to sit with her on her porch she would always tell stories about her husband. Everyone would go over to her house to visit, especially to seek out advice. She would welcome anyone,

as she would say; who is decent minded and knows how to respect themselves. Her children would visit on Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, and during her birthday. I remember those times, because she would have so many people coming over to her house. She had four children, eight grandchildren, three sisters, four brothers, and a whole slew of aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, and cousins coming into town. Mama Jean was the one I remember the most.

Kenneth and Barbara Standards, the vacationers, lived across the street. They were barely home. They were retired and all of their children had moved out so they would vacation for weeks. Once they returned they would usually share their pictures and memorabilia with the neighborhood. It seems like they went everywhere, they would travel to Florida, Hawaii, England, Italy, Israel, China, and so many other places, and they would always bring home gifts and trinkets from their travels. They were in their mid 50's and it seems like their life just had started. Their children would visit for the holidays as well. They had three children and four grandchildren. Their youngest son Christopher would visit more often, in fact he would baby sit my sister and I sometimes.

Edward Hill was another neighbor who was rarely home. He was the only one who had the guts to disrespect Mama Jean. Mama Jean disliked him very much. Well, the whole neighborhood wasn't too fond of him. He would be away from home days on end because of his job, to this day I don't know what he did for a living. However, he had a dog, Liver. Liver would bark loudly, and for long period of times, pretty much trying to get the attention of Edward, who wasn't home. Every time Edward would finally return home, everyone in the neighborhood would tell him he shouldn't have a pet if he wasn't going to be home to care for it. He would ignore their comments and continue about his day. Mama Jean and he were always arguing. Edward used to always say he would hate to have to come home because he knew Mama Jean would be in his face. He would be home for about a week or two before leaving again for weeks. One time he left and didn't return for two months. Everyone would enjoy his return because we all knew that as the only time his dog would be the quietest.

Another friendly neighbor and the patriarch of the community was William McCarter. We lovingly called him Papa Bill. He was 88 years old and a veteran of both

World Wars. He would tell stories about the service and the other wars he witnessed. He was actually against war and fighting and would always say no matter how many wars or battles you fight you can never win. He was fun to be around because his stories were intriguing and he would always have chocolate to share.

Another neighbor living in Crystal, believe or not was Zelda Zeal. She was another not at home on a regular basis. She would live in her home for the seasons she wasn't in Hollywood making a film. Thankfully for her and for us the paparazzi didn't know she had a home in Crystal Fountain. She lived a peaceful life in Crystal thanks to Mama Jean. Mama Jean made sure no one in the neighborhood would hassle her for pictures or autographs. She would, however, sign something for you, but Mama Jean made sure Zelda got her peace and quiet.

Then there were the Matthew's. I remember them just as much as I remember Mama Jean, because their son Mark was a close friend of mine. Robert and Linda Matthew's is their name. I spent many days and nights in their house. Mark and I would spend the night at each others' home many times on the weekends and especially during the summer.

The Pearson's were another family I knew pretty well. Peter and Regina had two children, Michael and Camille. Camille was my age we would play together along with Mark and Kathryn.

Kathryn Bisco was the last of the nine, Daniel and Cassandra were owners of a near by drugstore, Bisco's Family Drug Store. We used to hang out there a lot and we would help around the store sometimes.

At this we were the nine families living in Crystal Fountain. As time moved on more homes were built and more families move in. We all witnessed people moving in, moving out, great trauma, and amusing times.

CHAPTER TWO

1985-1986

Moving into Crystal Fountain was fun. During the move my parents took me to Franklin McCooper Elementary School to sign me up for first grade. Although, I didn't start school until September of 1985 she thought it would be good to get an early start. During the months March through June it was kind of lonely. The only kids my age in the area were all in kindergarten. My mother decided not to enroll me being that the school year was almost over, plus she said she could teach me the same things. Mark, Kathryn, and Camille were all in the afternoon classes so I had no one to play with until they came home. Every now and then I would go over to Mark's house in the morning, but for the most part I staid at home until 3 in the afternoon. Once Mark would come home he would tell all about what he learned and did in class. He would bring his projects home and show me the different things they had made. Kathryn would take me to her house and she would help make my own projects. And sometimes we would play school and Camille would be the teacher. Camille would pretty much teach everything their teacher taught them. It was pretty cool because I was getting the same teaching as them, but I never stepped foot into the school. Once school was over times got better. The four of us didn't do much during the summer other than the basics. We would ride our bikes in the neighborhood and sometimes out of the neighborhood. When we would travel out of the neighborhood Mark would take us to some of the strangest places. He said when he would be in the car with his parents he would see places he wanted to go. One time he took us to this wooded area with swamp like lakes. He said he saw someone walking back to the area one day and wanted to see for himself what it was. It wasn't much to see. Most of the time Mark and I spent the time at his house playing Atari or we would sit and watch them as they built new homes in the development. We both had fun watching the construction site, but Mark was more fascinated than I. He would always say; I'm going to be doing that one day. Sometimes the four of us would ride our bikes to the park or find something to occupy the time. The summer ended soon and I was entering my first year in public school.

September 1985: I started my first year in McCooper with confidence thanks to Mark, Kathryn, and Camille. Not only did they teach me the lessons they learned in kindergarten, they talked to me about school and what it was like and about meeting new friends. Everything they said about the school made me even the more excited to go. The four of us pretty much did everything together; we walked to school together, played together, and studied together. Mark and I, however, were closer. Mark was the first one I met in the Crystal development. I was happy to go to school, however, the one thing Mark and the ladies left out was the lack of friends we would have. The kids in school were either nice to us or mean. For the most part they were jealous. Everyone knew what it meant to live in Crystal Fountain. It was a development full of luxurious houses. Just to say you live in Crystal Fountain meant that your family was very wealthy. I actually didn't feel so good talking about living in Crystal, because I knew we still didn't have much. All we had was everything we brought over from our apartment and we still had furniture that needed to be purchased.

My first grade teacher's name was Mrs. Nestor. She was the only black teacher in the school. It made Mark feel good, because at the time he was the only black student in the class. The school itself had very few black students and not too many other races. It was a predominately white school and neighborhood. Mrs. Nestor was a very kind teacher and it was easy to learn from her. Mark and I were in her class together, while Kathryn and Camille were in another class, Ms. Diver was her name. The only time we ever got to spend time together was at gym, lunch, and recess. There was this other time, I remember the two first grade classes got together to do a play for the school. I don't remember the name of it, but it had to do with holidays, their seasons and the seasons' weather. I remember Mark and I being New Year's Day. The four of us were very tight because we didn't socialize that much in school. Most of the students didn't talk to us because they thought we were spoiled rich kids. There was this one kid who really hated us, Bilfred Ruddy, everyone called him Freddy. He was the class bully, well, to us anyway. He would tell everyone stories about us and everyone would believe them. However, there were two kids who didn't like Bilfred and for that sake would talk to us, just to make him upset. Elizabeth and Thomas would sit with us during lunch and talk to

us. At first they did it just to make Freddy upset, but after they got to know us they realized we were just a bunch of silly kids, like themselves. They would frequent the Crystal neighborhood, when their parents would allow it. My first year in school was not that bad, it ended pretty quickly, and the summer months came in.

Summer 1986: My second summer in Crystal was kind of strange. The past summers I was used to spending it with my dad. He would take days off from work, and because he wasn't in school he would take me to the park or sometimes to a baseball game, but this summer he spent a lot of time at work. I spent most of this summer with Mark and his dad. Many things happened during this summer, but there were three things that I remember the most.

The first thing I remember was in June when summer vacation first began. The first thing Robert, Mark's dad, took us to see was *Maria's Troupe*. This was my first time going to a theater. Mark's cousin had the title roll. She was really good. We saw it at the James Doyle Theatre. At the end of the show we got to go back stage. Robert introduced me to his sister, Kelly, and his niece, Victoria, the star of the show. She did a great job in the show. Her character was so intimidating that by the time I went back stage I was afraid of her. However, by the time I met her I realized she was just acting. She was a beautiful and warm person. We also got to meet the rest of the cast and some of the crew members. I felt so special, like I was invited to the VIP section. After the show we went to this diner called Lovely's to celebrate the night with Victoria. Some of the cast and crew members came out. Mark and I were the youngest, I kind of felt out of place, but we both agreed that we felt like we had something to brag about once we returned home.

In July I spent Independence Day with Mark and his dad. Robert took us to a parade just out of town. It was wonderful. We were out there for about three hours, but it seemed much quicker than that. They had dancers, floats, veterans, pageant queens, the mayor and governor was on a float, small town celebrities, and much more. I was so happy that I had got the chance to see this. Two things I remember the most about the parade were the GymnasTops and the veterans float. The GymnasTops were a gymnastic dance company. The flips, twirls, and turns they did were amazing; I almost thought they

were going to hurt themselves. They did some also throw and catch each other moves, and pyramids, it was just awesome. The other thing was the veterans float. I remember it because I saw Papa Bill on the float. Robert knew he would be on there, but he didn't tell us. He said it was his surprise. When the float came by Robert asked us if we saw anyone we recognized. I looked hard and I saw him waving, Mark yelled out, it's Papa Bill. I looked and realized it was Papa Bill. Mark and I waved back at him. After the parade we went back home to Peter and Regina's house, Camille's parents, they had a barbeque in their backyard and everyone in the neighborhood was invited. It was fun. My parents were there the whole time. Once I got back I told them about the GymnasTops and Papa Bill being on the float. I spent about a couple of hours their and then Robert took Mark, Kathryn, Camille, and I to see fireworks. We went to Stapple Park where they had a special concert going on. They had local singers and at the end of the concert they had this breathtaking fireworks show. All the colors in the world were in the sky that night. I enjoyed that day very much. It was one of my happiest childhood moments.

In August, Robert took Mark and me camping. This was my first time camping and I was a little nervous. When Mark told me we would be out in the woods amongst bears and snakes I thought to myself that can't be safe. Robert told me not to worry though he said just as long as you don't provoke the animals they wouldn't attack. It didn't calm my nerves though, just the thought of being in the presence of wild animals had me scared. I mean, they don't call them wild for nothing. We went to this camp site in another state. It was about a three hour ride and once we got there I was both excited and scared. Robert picked out a site for us and it seemed pretty cool. I didn't see or hear anything strange. Robert said that the animals usually don't come out to the camp sites, so I was a little bit calmer. We were there for three days. It was weird sleeping outside in a camping bag. The first day we were there Robert took us hiking on a trail. I was nervous at first because I thought we would have to climb some mountain, but it was just a little trail. We actually saw some wild animals, we saw dears, elks, moose, and we saw a bear. They weren't a threat too us though. Robert told us any time we saw an animal to just stay calm and don't run. He said if you don't seem like a threat to them they

wouldn't attack. He was right. We were able to finish the trail without any problems. After the hike Robert took us back to the campsite where we ate sandwiches that were prepared by Mark's mom. The second day was just as fun. We went canoeing and fishing. It was my first time canoeing and fishing. I didn't catch anything, but Robert did, he caught five fish, three big ones and two small ones. After we were done we went back to the campsite and Robert prepared them for us to eat. Robert was a great cook. He knew how to do everything right with fish. The third and last day Mark and I went swimming for a little while before packing up to leave. When I got back home I told my parents all about the camping trip. I'm not too sure, but I think my father was a little jealous of me spending so much time with Robert. Although he never said anything, I had that feeling being that he started to work less and began to take me places. Sometimes he would invite Mark along too. It seems like he was competing with Robert. I really don't know, but it was nice to spend time with my dad again.

Autumn 1986: The summer vacation was pretty fun, but like all summers it came to an end and I was starting another year at McCooper. September rolled in and I started my second year at McCooper. My teacher was Ms. Peterson. Kathryn and I were in the same class this year. Mark and Camille had Ms. Rite. It was weird starting the school year without Mark in my class, but I got used to it. Elizabeth was in the same class as Mark, and she still wasn't afraid of Freddy. She would talk to the four of all time, and she would sit at our table during lunch. Sometimes I thought she was doing more so to make Freddy angry. However, it was a nice feeling to know there was one person in our class who was not following the bandwagon. During this year Mark started karate lessons and everything he learned he would come to my house and teach me. I had asked my mom if she would allow me to enroll, but she didn't like the idea of karate. She said that it promoted violence. I told Mark, and he just said, it was okay, he said he didn't mind teaching me everything he learned.

My family and I went out for Halloween that year. It was one of the few times we went together for Halloween, dad was usually working. I dressed up like a pirate that year. We also went to the community center, which held parties for all the major holidays. They had games, a magician, food, and candy, everything a child could want.

In November Priscilla, Kathryn's sister was born.

Another thing I remember that happened in November of 1986 (I remember because it was the week before Thanksgiving) was the incident between Mama Jean and Edward. He had come back home from work and Mama Jean came to his house. I don't know exactly what she said, but I remember at some point I heard yelling, screaming and cursing. It had the whole neighborhood at Edward's house. My mother told me to stay and watch the baby as she went over to Edward's. Pretty much Mama Jean went over to his house to let him know about his dog. She told him to get rid of it and he fought back. Once the neighbors went over, they all pretty much was on Mama Jean's side. He started crying, saying the whole world was against him. He then slammed the door and they all pretty much walked away except Mama Jean. She knocked on the door for a little bit before leaving. I watched the entire thing from my window.

Thanksgiving was pretty cool. My mother's parents came to visit. They were the first relatives to visit us in Crystal. We still were just moving in. Another thing that happened that year was over the Christmas holiday. This was the first year that I witnessed Mama Jean's family come into Crystal Fountain. She has eight grandchildren, three of which were my age, Isaac, Jackie, and Raymond. Mark introduced us and every time they would visit Mark, Camille, Kathryn, and I would invite them to play with us. We were very enthused to have kids our age around us. We would also play with Andre and Andrew, they were the grandchildren of Kenneth and Barbara; they were identical twins. I can remember waiting for Christmas each year, not for the presents, but simply to see everyone. After so many years together we became friends, and although we only saw each other during the holidays, we still were close friends. I would write them at times and once technology stepped up, I began to call, even email them.

Then there was New Year's Eve. I spent it with Christopher, Kenneth and Barbara's son; he babysat me and my sister. My parents went to a party given by the law firm my dad worked for. It was fun because Christopher allowed me to stay up until midnight. We watch the Dick Clark special and watched the ball drop. I kept saying that I wish I could go to New York and be there and Chris kept saying that one New Year's Eve he would take me.

1987: So, the holidays were over, the New Year came in and I went back to school. It was kind of weird because I was encountering a new experience each month.

January was enjoyable; it was the first time the other students started talking to the Crystal Crew (which is what they called us). We had realized that the only reason why they weren't talking to us as because they were afraid to do so in front of Freddy. Freddy was out of school for two weeks, he was suspended. The first days back to school he had gotten himself into trouble. He pretty much terrorized Thomas. He pushed him into the boy's room, told Thomas to stop talking to us (The Crystal Crew), and then he beat him around a bit. Once Freddy returned, slowly, but surely everyone stopped talking to us again, including Thomas. However, Elizabeth never stopped, we told her not to because we were afraid for her, but she didn't fear Freddy.

February was another weird month. It was the week after Valentine's Day, we all left the school from what we thought was a fire drill, but in fact it was a real fire. Well, it wasn't a fire. Smoke detectors went off in the boy's room. Three fifth graders were in the bathroom smoking. One of them brought the cigarettes from home and started smoking in the boy's room. It set off the alarm and the boys were suspended for a week.

Then there was March, which was pretty cool. It marked our first year at Crystal Fountain. Mother set up a celebration dinner, which dad missed, due to work. I never saw mother that upset before. Dad came home around ten that night. She allowed me to stay up until he came home. Once he got home she told me to hug him and then go to bed. I went to bed thinking they were going to fight, but nothing happened. Mother barely talked to him for three whole days. And when she did, she spoke in fragments and short sentences. You could tell she was upset. Daddy bought home flowers, chocolates, and jewelry in hopes of redemption. It wasn't until he took her out to dinner to Lovely's to celebrate the one year anniversary that she finally forgave him. Chris came over that day to baby sit. At that point he pretty much became our babysitter. I didn't understand why he was always around at first, because I thought he had moved out of his parent's house. He explained to me that he was house-sitting for his parents while they were away. They were in Italy that year. I remember because when they came back they brought back gifts for the whole neighborhood. They brought me back a box of Pelino

almond confetti, which are sugar coated almonds. They were uniquely tasty. My parents got a wall plaque that said *Casa Bella*, which means Beautiful house. Barbara said she brought it for them as a one year anniversary present. My mother was so pleased, she started to cry. She kept saying she couldn't believe that they remembered. Kenneth and Barbara were kind of like Santa. When they came home they visited each house bearing gifts. They usually stayed home about one to two weeks before packing up and traveling to another place.

Nothing much happened in April. Robert took Mark and me to see another play with Victoria in it. This time it was at the Albert Brighton Arts Center. Vicky had the supporting role in *Queen Donna*. Just like the last time I saw her, she was wonderful. She has such a presence on stage that is indescribable.

May was a wonderful month for me simply because it meant that summer vacation was near. My dad took Mark and me to a local baseball game that month. It was pretty cool. One of the players hit the ball out of the park and some man next to us caught it. Mark looked at him and told him how cool it was that he caught it. The man smiled at him and then handed him the ball. Mark was so happy and shocked, so was I, so was my dad. Mark asked him why he was giving it to him and the man told him because he had a whole bunch of them at home. At the end of the game the man took us to the field and he had the player sign the ball for Mark. We later found out that he was the father of one the players. Robert got Mark a case to put the ball in, which Mark kept on his dresser.

Finally June rolled in and school was just about over, I couldn't believe my second year was almost done. The last thing I remember about my second grade school year was when Thomas started talking to me again. He would always make sure though that Freddy wasn't looking. It was only for a couple of days, but it was the start of some crazy things to happen. The school year ended and I started summer vacation. I didn't do much in June. Daniel, Kathryn's father got a pool in their backyard, so we pretty much went swimming everyday in June of that year. July was pretty fun. Robert took us to the parade again for Independence Day. The week after my dad took Mark, Kathryn, Camille, and I to a carnival held at a catholic church. It was entertaining; there were

rides, games, cotton candy, food, and vendors. August wasn't so hot that year either, and I'm not talking about the weather. Most of the summer Mark and I just sat outside and continued to watch the houses being built.

September 1987: September showed its face again and I was back in school. This year was a year I will remember forever. It's the year that I learned a new word, not a good word either, but I'll explain that later. The school year started out normal. Elizabeth, Thomas, and I were in Mrs. Stephens' class, while Mark, Kathryn, and Camille were in Mrs. Godson's class. Although my third grade year was memorable there were three things I remember the most about that school year.

The first thing was in November. Mark told me while we were in lunch; he was so excited he barely got it out. His cousin, Vicky auditioned for a play on Broadway and got a role. She had won the roll of Janet in *Kidsical, the Musical*. I was so happy for her, she definitely deserved it.

The next event that comes to memory is the new word that I learned. It was in February of 1988, I remember the month and year so vivid. It was during recess at school and Thomas, Mark, and I were playing catch. Out of no where Freddy comes over and pushes Thomas. Thomas gets up and asked what he did that for. Freddy got really angry and told Thomas he wasn't supposed to be playing with us. Mark got upset and threw the ball at Freddy and told him to leave us alone. Freddy threw the ball back and Mark caught it. Freddy wasn't too thrilled about that. He walked away and we thought that was the end of him. However, he came back with another ball and threw it at Mark without any warning. It hit Mark in the face and Mark fell down. Freddy went over to him, spit on him and said, and I quote, "Don't you ever do that again, you nigger." He walked away and one of the lunch aids saw him and took him. She grabbed him and took him to the principal's office. I didn't know what a nigger was, but Freddy got in more trouble for saying that word then throwing the ball and spitting. He got three weeks suspension and when he returned he had to stay after school for another two weeks for detention. When I got home and told my mom all about it she explained to me about the word and what it meant and the history in it. Mark wasn't himself for about a week. I would talk to him and try to cheer him up, but it didn't work. The whole month

(February), was kind of weird, because that was supposed to be a celebration time for the blacks, but during that time in our school it was just dim.

March arrived and at home it was celebration time according to mom (move-in anniversary), however, at school the stigma of what happened still lingered. Things started to get back to normal by April.

The third thing I remember about that school year was May. It was my first time taking part in a gymnastic show. The third, fourth, and fifth graders put on a big gym show. Each level had something different to do. The third graders did a parachute show. I can still remember playing with the big colorful parachute in gym class. The four of us used to try to make the same affect at home with a blanket, but it just wasn't the same. The fun part was throwing the balls on the parachute and walking around and under. That was my third grade year. Of course the thing that had the most impact on me was the "n" word moment. After seeing the affect it had on Mark, it made me make sure that I try my best to never hurt anyone's feelings.

The most I remember about the summer of 1988 was being invited to Zelda Zeal's house. The four of us were invited over Ms. Zeal's house. She was in the neighborhood on a small vacation and Camille convinced her dad to ask Zelda if we could come over for a visit. The four of us along with Camille's brother, Michael went over her house in July. We were able to see her Golden Globe and her Tony award. She was very nice to us and humble. She showed us pictures she had taken with other celebrities she had worked with. We spent about four hours with her. She also showed us some videos she had made during the shooting of her scenes. We got to see behind the scenes look, and footage of her and other actors playing games during their off time. It was neat to see celebrities playing around like regular people. I had a whole new respect for her and celebrities after that visit. Another thing that happened was Funtastic Kingdom opened. It was the first theme park ever to open around our neighborhood and I was very excited. My father was supposed to take me that summer, but his job got in the way. Well, the summer ended and soon I was a fourth grader.

CHAPTER THREE

September came in and everything was the same. The four of us were secluded. We pretty much had gotten used to it. Elizabeth was still hanging out with us and Thomas would talk to us on rare occasions. It wasn't until February of the next year that things began to change.

In October Freddy went around the class spooking people out with his horror costume during the Halloween season. He kept an eye on Thomas. The one thing I never noticed is that he never bothered Elizabeth; I guess it was because she was a girl, or maybe he knew what I didn't know about Elizabeth.

In November he started spreading rumors around the class about the four of us. Each week it was something new. Thomas would come to us and tell us what he was hearing. One week Mark was the son of an ex-con who was on the most wanted list. The next week I was rumored to be an orphan. The following week he would say something about Kathryn or Camille and it went on for a while.

December came in and it was not a good month. In December Freddy slowly and passively started threatening Elizabeth. He would give her the eye, and send her threatening notes and sign it with a fictitious name as if we didn't know it was him. It wasn't until January that he started saying things to her in class. She told us that he told her if she didn't stop hanging out with the snobby, spoiled, rich kids he would torment her. We told her we didn't mind if she stopped seeing us, but she insisted she wasn't afraid of him.

Now to detour away from Freddy for a little bit, back at home things were the same. Mom and dad did the same Christmas stuff that they always did. Everything went as planned as usual for Christmas. I made my list as always and dropped it in the red box at the post office. Christmas Eve came and that's when it happened. I went to bed early so that I could get up to see what Santa brought me. In the middle of the night a thump woke me up and I wasn't sure what it was. My initial thought was I was dreaming, and then I thought it might be Santa. I then went back to sleep knowing I would have to be sleeping in order for Santa to leave me anything, but my curiosity got the best of me and I got out of bed and went downstairs and much to my surprise I saw my parents setting up

everything. I asked them what was going on and my mother sat me down and explained everything to me. I was crushed; to think all this time I believed in a lie. I didn't understand it. I had trusted my parents all this time and for what. I didn't talk to them for about three days. Of course I ran over to Mark's house a couple of days later and he told me he already knew Santa wasn't real. He said his parents never told him about Santa. He said once he heard about him in school he went home to ask his parents and they told him the truth. I was devastated. It was at that time that I made the wish most children make, to have someone else's parents. I wanted Mark's. Not only did he have a cool father, but his parents didn't lie to him. Slowly, but surely I got over it and I forgave my parents. Once I started talking to them again I asked them about the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy and they both admitted it wasn't true. I didn't understand why adults thought it would be okay to tell those lies to children, but I vowed then and there that I would never tell my kids about Santa or any other lies.

Well, December ended and 1989 arrived. I went back to school to Freddy's annoying behavior. He kept terrorizing everyone as he normally did. It wasn't until February that the most craziest and funny thing happened. We were in the lunch room and Freddy walked over to our table and told Elizabeth and Thomas to sit somewhere else. Thomas got up and Elizabeth told him to sit down. Freddy picked him up and Elizabeth stood up and told Freddy to walk away. Freddy let go of Thomas and looked Elizabeth in her eye and said, "You're nothing but a bitch and nigger lover." He walked away and that's when it all happened. Elizabeth got up calmly; she then stood in the aisle and stared at Freddy as he walked away. She then ran, jumped, (it look like a crazy leaped), and tackled Freddy to the floor. She then started punching and slapping him and it was outrageous. It was completely unexpected and everyone ran towards them and started screaming, "FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT." Of course the lunch aids came over and stopped it. Freddy was bleeding all over. Both of them got sent to the principal's office. Elizabeth got two weeks suspension. When she came back she told us how upset and disappointed her parents were. Freddy got a week suspension for using the "n" word again. He was out for three weeks though healing from the wounds Liz gave him. It was quiet again without him in school and when he returned no one feared him

thanks to Elizabeth. In fact, I think he was so ashamed and embarrassed that he kept to himself for the rest of the year. After that incident the four of us weren't secluded amongst ourselves anymore, the students began to talk to us regularly. Some of them even had the manners to apologize to us.

Another memory that comes to mind was the birth of Jacob, Mark's brother, in March. Mark was happy to get a brother. After Priscilla was born he was the only one between the four of us without a sibling. He would always say he couldn't wait to have a sibling like we did. Jacob looked exactly like Mark, so much a like that they could have been twins. Then there was the homecoming of Edward. It was a blessed event as we were happy that Liver was able to go inside and stop barking. After Edward returned home nothing much else happened. It was about three months left to the school year and the four of us was just getting used to the new school. It was the old school, but with the students talking to us it felt like a new school. The school year ended and it was back to summer vacation.

The summer of 1989 was splendid. By that year six new houses were built and four more families moved in.

The first family that moved in were the Carsons. They consisted of Joseph and Heidi and their children, Jason, 16, Valerie, 13, and Kevin, 11.

The second family was the Chang Family, David and Laura and their twins Brian and Brianna, 10.

The third family, well he wasn't a family. Gregory Kenilworth, a doctor, was a single man at the time.

Lastly, were Nathaniel and Brenda Hopskin and their son Jordan, 2. It was nice to have more people in the neighborhood and share our traditions with them. Mark made fast friends with Kevin, Brian, and Brianna. He then introduced them to us. We told them about school and Elizabeth and Freddy. We told them about Christmas at Mama Jean's, and that annoying Liver, and Zelda. We told them they couldn't tell anyone about Zelda. We took them over to Papa Bill's house and he welcomed them with his famous chocolates. We pretty much spent the rest of the summer with the new guys and we made sure that they were comfortable. We didn't want them to have to feel secluded or left out

like we did. I also new what it was like to be new in the neighborhood so I tried my best to make them feel at ease. I think it worked. The last thing we did for the summer was see Victoria in another play. She played Doreen in *Doreen and the Ushers*. Robert invited the whole neighborhood. My dad and I went, while my mom staid home with Sarah. Kathryn went with her dad and Camille's mother came with her. The whole Chang family went and Kevin and Valerie came with their mom. It was a fun evening and I was so happy to see Vicky. Every time I saw her she looked better. As crazy as it sounds I had a little crush on her. I wasn't aware of what it was at the time, but I had a little infatuation for her. Every time Robert told me we were going to see her I lit up. The crush ended around the time I was fifteen and I started getting interested in girls my own age.

1989-1990 Like the years before the summer had ended and I was back in school. Going back to school was different for me because I knew that there would be more "Crystal crew" students going. I guess it didn't matter since Freddy wasn't bullying anyone, but it was nice to have more kids in my neighborhood in class with me. The fifth grade was pretty cool because I knew it was my last year at McCooper Elementary. Brianna and Mark were in my class that year. Kevin was a year ahead of us, while the rest of the crew was in another class together. My teacher was Mr. Knightly. He was my second male teacher. My fourth grade teacher Mr. Larson was my first. Like most elementary schools male teachers were rare. It was nice to see a father figure in the classroom. Four things I remember the most about the school year were the holiday concert, the janitor incident, the gymnastic show, and graduation.

The first thing was the holiday concert. It was kind of a bitter sweet moment. In our music class we were rehearsing songs for the holiday concert. One day in class the music teacher, Mrs. Firenzo held singing auditions for solos. I was afraid to audition because I had a little stage freight, so I decided not to. Once the auditions were over I kind of regretted it. Once I went home that day I mentioned to my mother about the concert and she asked if I was getting a solo. I told her no and she was disappointed. I went to school the next day and asked Mrs. Firenzo if she would allow me a solo, but she

said it was too late. I was a bit upset at myself. The night of the concert came and I got over the fact I didn't have a solo, but I did think every now and then what would have happened if I would have just auditioned. The concert was fun and it is one of my favorite memories of fifth grade.

Another memory I have of fifth grade is the janitor incident. It was around March of 1990. I remember because everyone was making fuss about the new decade coming in. Anyways, it was the year that one of the janitors of the school, Radford Flenings got caught molesting a student. It was all over the newspapers and television. They kept the identity of the student hidden, but word got out around school and we found out who it was. Believe it or not it was Freddy. In fact, it was said that Radford was doing this since Freddy was in the second grade. We also found out that it was the real reason why he beat up Thomas. According to Thomas, he walked in the bathroom and saw Freddy and the janitor. The janitor left and Freddy beat him and the only way he stopped was Thomas had to promise never to tell what he saw. After a couple of months students started to talk and once Freddy found out everyone knew what happened he began to bully people again (only the ones who would talk about him). He got suspended twice during the months of March and April. After hearing story after story and even talking to Freddy, I couldn't understand why he would let someone do something like that to him. As unbelievable as it sounds, yes, I actually talked to him. It was during a lunch break. He was sitting at a table by himself. Even after everything he had did to me I felt bad for him. I walked over to him and asked him if he was okay. He told me to leave him alone, but I didn't. I told him that I wasn't over there to make fun of him, but instead I was sitting next to him to make him feel better. Sooner or later we started to talk and he began to tell me some of the things that happened. I'd asked him why he allowed it, but he couldn't give a straight answer. He later got upset with me and told me to leave or he would hurt me. I don't think I was afraid of him, but I did respect his wishes. By the time May rolled in his parents moved out of town and Freddy was no longer a threat to anyone at the school. During the time period of Freddy bullying everyone police officers, social workers, and psychologists came into our classrooms and talked to us about what happened. They pretty much had a talk about sexual abuse and how if it should happen to

us that we should tell someone. Those times in fifth grade are a time I won't forget, I hated that time though, because I always felt uncomfortable. I was glad not only when it ended, but when Freddy left. It was like a new beginning for me and the rest of the class.

Another fond memory was the gymnastic show. I didn't do much in it this year, but there was one thing I did that I enjoyed. It is called tinikling, which is a Filipino folk dance. It is very energetic and I was glad to take part in it.

Then, of course the other moment I remember was my graduation. It was not like most graduations. We had a Hawaiian themed party and at the end of the night we graduated. They called our name in alphabetical order and that was that. Family and friends were invited at the end of the night. It was fun, exciting, and a little nerve-racking because it meant the end of elementary. I remember the fifth grade teachers telling us middle school is more difficult and you have to take it more serious. I was afraid because I didn't think I could survive it. However, I knew I had to go.

1990: The summer came in and the first thing I did was go camping. Christopher took Mark, Brian, Camille, and I camping a week after school ended. None of the other kids in the neighborhood wanted to go. We had a lot of fun and Christopher took us horseback riding before we left the campsite.

During the month of July I got to spend more time with the new kids in the neighborhood. Mark and I took them around the neighborhood to show them where everything was, we spent a lot of time at Bisco's. We also spent some time at Papa Bill's house. That was the summer where I learned a lot about Papa Bill. He showed us his pictures and plaques from the wars he fought in. He told us he was in both World Wars and how afraid he was of dying and also killing other people. He also mentioned how he witnessed the Korean, and the Vietnam War. He was strongly against it, and even shared his disgust about the Iran-Iraq War. He said he never understood the concept of war; he mentioned no matter how many wars he was in or saw they never solved any problems. He would always say if war was the answer there would be no more wars. He also told us about the after effects of war and the veterans that were physically and mentally injured. I remember sitting and listening to his stories, fascinated by this man. It felt like he had witnessed everything, as if he knew everything about everything. He would show us

photo albums and old coins and newspapers from the late 1800's and early 1900's. He collected many things from the time he was a boy up until now. He also told us stories about his late wife, whom died of lung cancer. I learned so much about Papa Bill in the summer of 1990. It was kind of ironic or maybe coincidence, I'm not sure, but after spending time with Papa Bill and learning about war and how he felt about the war, it was two months later that Desert Storm began. I remember that time pretty well. Of course it was all over the news and the teachers were asking us questions in class. I think the thing I remember the most about Desert Storm was the song *From a Distance*. It said everything Papa Bill said to us, it was like it was inspired by him. I wasn't sure when or how the war would end, but I prayed that war would never return.

This summer also brought back Kenneth and Barbara Standards. They returned in the month of July from Paris, France. They were supposed to leave for Israel in August, but they postponed their trip due to the war. Before the summer ended two more homes were sold and two more houses were completed.

Phylicia Page and her daughter Destiny, 16 moved in and Ronald and Winifred Bridges as well. This summer ended pretty quickly. I was supposed to go to Funtastic Kingdom this summer, but of course my dad's job got in the way again. He promised me each month we would go, but we never did. Besides the broken promises the summer was nice.

CHAPTER FOUR

Albert Einstein Middle School was bigger than McCooper. As soon as I walked in I was nervous about getting lost. I walked in the halls fascinated of how big the school was. The classes were much different than in Elementary and there were more students, much more. I spent my first year in middle school away from my neighbors. Thomas was the only one I knew from McCooper that was in my classes. The only time I got to see them was at lunch time. It wasn't that bad though, I was able to meet new people. Einstein was actually better because the students didn't know or care that we were from Crystal, so we didn't have any jealousy following us around. And we didn't have to worry about bullies, other than the eighth graders who thought they were superior to us. My first year in the middle school was an exciting time; I joined the chorus and took part in the Christmas concert my first year.

At home; my mother got my sister a cat for her sixth birthday. Ever since she was four she cried about wanting a cat, but my parents didn't think she was old enough to care for one. My father got her a stuffed animal and told her if she takes care of it as if it was a real cat he would decide whether or not to get her one. She treated that stuffed thing like a person; she was determined to get a cat. I must say that cat was really cute, and it liked me. It was a Bengal and it was pretty. My sister did a good job taking care of it, she would walk it like a dog, and she named it Sandy. The neighborhood adored Sandy and would come over sometimes just to see her.

December was a fun time because I got to see Isaac, Jackie, Raymond, Andre and Andrew again. It was one of the few times that they would visit. It was fun to not only play with them, but to talk to them about the latest "whatever" was going on. I spent the New Year's Eve with Christopher again. He babysat my sister and I, while my parent's went to the same office party they've been going to year after year. He had promised to take me to New York again that year, and I started to believe him. The winter break was over and another year came in.

1991 was a year hard to forget. It was in February that the war was over. I remember going over to Papa Bill's house a lot during this time. I didn't know much about war and didn't understand a lot of it. I would visit his house and ask questions. He

would answer them and also tell me what he thought should happen. He was very wise and a lot of things he said I really didn't completely understand until I got older. I went back to school and at this point I was used to middle school. All my fears were gone and I was ready for the seventh grade. My sixth grade year was also the year that I became sad.

In April, Elizabeth moved out of state. I really liked Elizabeth, not only was she a great friend she was just a fun person to be around. I think because of everything she did for us (The Crystal Crew), while we were at McCooper, is the reason why I missed her so much. I kept in touch though; we were pen-pals for a long time.

The last thing I remember about that school year was Edward leaving town again. Everyone in the neighborhood hated the fact he was leaving again. Mama Jean had a talk with him (a nice one this time), to no avail. Edward's favorite line was, "mind your business; no one is going to tell me how to raise my dog." Mama Jean would return with "Well, you ain't raisin' the damn thing." Edward left on that note leaving Liver alone.

Summer 1991 is a year that I shall never forget. I know I've been saying that often, but it was this year that my life changed forever. I had started the summer out at Zelda's house. She had come home for a short time and Mark and I took the new kids over to meet her. It was after that when everything happened. My father was at work, of course, and my mother was with Sarah at her dance recital rehearsals. Christopher came over to baby sit and everything was fine. So I thought. Christopher had brought over his Nintendo and some cool new games. We spent most of the day in front of the TV playing video games. After a while he said he was getting hot and he took his shirt off. He later asked me if I was hot and I told him I didn't think so. He started playing again and I thought everything was fine. At some point he stopped playing and told me to play by myself. As I was playing I noticed he was rubbing his stomach. He asked me if I had ever walked around the house naked. I laughed and told him no and he then asked me if I wanted to. I paused and said I didn't know. He told me he's done it before and thought it was liberating. He asked me if I knew what that meant and I told him no. He said it meant to be free from all fears. I wasn't sure what exactly he meant, but he then asked me if I wanted to get naked with him. I was afraid because I wasn't comfortable. He told

me there was nothing to worry about and that it was okay. Now, I had spent some time with Chris during the past years and I trusted him. Even though there was an inner voice telling me it was wrong, I couldn't understand why Christopher could be do anything wrong so I took off my shirt. He looked at me and said that I was beautiful. He then asked me how I felt. I told him I didn't know. He then asked me if I was afraid, and I told him no, however, I was. He said it was good that I wasn't afraid, and that I had nothing to be afraid about. He then took off his pants and I could see his penis through his underwear. It was erect, I wasn't sure what that meant, but my fear grew stronger. Because I hesitated he asked me if I was going to take mine off. I smiled and did so. He then took me and began to rub me. At that point I knew what he was doing was wrong. As he was rubbing me I was remembering everything the cops told us in the fifth grade after the janitor incident, but I couldn't stop him. I wanted to, but I was too afraid. He then took my underwear off and he began to stroke my penis. I wanted to tell him no, I wanted to yell it, but as much as I wanted him to stop there was a part of me enjoying what he was doing. I was actually feeling good from him and it was then that I realized why Freddy allowed the janitor to do those things to him for so long. It wasn't so much of fear, but the pleasure of it is what kept me quiet. After some time Chris took his underwear off and put my hand on his penis and told me to do the same thing. Before it was all over he taught me about masturbation. That day was the first time that I had masturbated. Of course he told me never to tell anyone, that although he did nothing wrong, he didn't think they would understand. Now, I knew that I should have told, they told me so in the fifth grade, but I was afraid. I wasn't afraid of Christopher, or my parents, but afraid that if I told it would have to end, and I wasn't sure if I wanted it to. I spent the rest of the summer thinking about Chris. He had baby sat me one more time during that summer, but we didn't do anything.

The last memory about that summer was Sarah's first dance recital. Camille was in it as well; both of them went to the same dance school near Bisco's. The summer ended and I was happy to start seventh grade.

Seventh grade was a year of firsts for me. The first and most exciting thing I remember about seventh grade was the school musical. Mark and I auditioned for the school musical and both got in. Mark was in the school musical last year and told me how much fun it was, so I decided to audition with him. Mark got a supporting roll, and I got a speaking roll. That year we did *Saint Louis Dreams*. We would stay after school to rehearse for the show and we had so much fun. Sometimes we would be in the music room learning a new song or on stage learning lines and blocking scenes we were in. Mark did a really good job, I think he got the acting bug from his cousin, who came and saw the show. She said I did a wonderful job, I think I blushed. My parents were kind of shock, I don't think they expected me to be an actor. Although I did have fun I knew it wasn't something that would stick. I only auditioned because Mark did, he kind of persuaded me to and I did, and I was happy that I did. I had a lot of fun and it was new experience that I won't forget.

Another first was seeing the Nutcracker Ballet. My music teacher had a class trip to see it and I signed up. I enjoyed it and was glad I got the chance to see it.

Another thing I remember about this year was it was the year my mom got a job. She decided that since the both of us were in school during the day she would get a part time job. She worked as a receptionist at a dentist's office. It was another first because I had to start fending for myself. I had to make my own lunch and prepare my breakfast. It was also when my mother started to teach me how to do laundry and iron my clothing. Now, I realize how natural it was whether or not she had a job, but at the time it was major. As silly as it sounds I thought my mother would be there for me to always do things like that, so when it ended it was scary. I got through it though. Due to bleach accidents I ruined a couple of my clothing at first, but I managed.

One thing I didn't understand was why my parents didn't trust me. I was able to do my own laundry, clean my room, and even iron my clothes, but I still (according to both my parents) wasn't old enough to stay home alone. Chris started babysitting more.

My mother spent more time at work and time driving Sarah to her dance recitals. My dad wouldn't come home until seven at night, sometimes later. So, Chris and I were home alone. He wouldn't always play with me, but some days he would. I actually anticipated it, I was happy when he would. I was getting used to it and I was enjoying it. And at the same time I was feeling guilty and a shamed of myself because I knew I wasn't supposed to be doing that.

My seventh grade year was also the year that I went to a drag race for the first time. Joseph, Kevin's dad was a huge NASCAR fan. He took Kevin, Mark, Brian, and I to a race out of town. It was exciting and different from an old fashion baseball game. Before leaving Joseph brought a bunch of items, saying they were for collecting only. When we got home he invited us over to see his collection. He took us to his basement and it was like a race track down there. Everything was race car memorabilia, shirts, toy cars, cups & mugs, posters, collector's cards, and he even had a race track, it wasn't real, but it was bigger then a toy race track. Edward also returned home that year. His dog was quiet for the time he was there. That year brought many firsts for me and although things happened that I wish did not during that year it still was a good year.

Another summer vacation arrived and I was excited. One of the first things I did was go on a trip with the Chang family. David and Laura took Kathryn and I (as well as their children) to a cultural theme charity. It was organized by the National Charity for Education. They raise funds for educational organizations. The charity had many booths and tables where you could purchase items. Each booth had a theme from a culture (i.e. African, Irish, Italian, Japanese, etc.). Laura was in charge of the Chinese table. She worked at a Private school who was apart of the organization (NCE). Laura had to stay at the table, so David took us around to the other tables. It was interesting. Not only did they have items for sale, but they had brochures and flyers that had information about each cultural. I learned a lot that I did not know about different traditions and customs in other countries. We were there around 8AM because Laura had to be there to set up. The charity began at 9AM. To our surprise David took us out while Laura staid. It was about noon when we left. He took us to Funtastic Kingdom. I couldn't believe my eyes when we pulled up to the park. David wouldn't tell us where we were going, he just drove. It

was amazing. It was a bitter sweet moment though. I enjoyed myself, every second that I was there, but I thought to myself, my first time here was supposed to be with my dad. We spent about four hours there. The rides were amazing, they had huge roller coasters, crazy rides, fast rides, kiddy rides, dizzy rides, sitting, rides, standing rides, bumper cars, and so much more. The games were funtastic, I won a toy car, Kathryn won a stuffed animal, and the twins won a whole slew of things. It was like they were pros at every game we went to. They also had two theaters where you could watch thirty minute performances. One of them was for kids, it was called Cartoons on stage, they had people dressed up like cartoon characters and they did a half-hour sing and dance show. The other show was more catered to adults. It was a musical revue of famous songs from the 1960's and 1970's. We also went into this cool building that was kind of like the planetarium, except it was much cooler. It made it seem like you were in a rocket at first flying to outer space and then after flying they made it seem like you were walking and you saw the stars and other planets and it took you on a tour of all nine planets. It was awesome. The whole time there I kept thinking I wish my father was here. After we left we returned to the charity to pick up Laura. She was just about ready. It was about four-thirty and they were ending the charity. They were making their last minute sells and also cleaning up. We helped with the clean up and then once we were done we headed home. The day was so fun-filled, I wanted to go home and tell my parents all about it, but I didn't. I was afraid my father might be upset if he knew I had went to Funtastic for the first time without him, so, I only told them about the charity. It was about a week or two later that I finally told him. He was actually happy for me, which was a relief for me. He then told me that one day he and I would go, but it didn't mean anything to me. At that point I had already gone and wasn't hanging on to his promises anymore.

The thing I remember the most about July of 1992 was the pageant. Phylcia Page, one of the new neighbors, invited the neighborhood to support her daughter, Destiny, at a local beauty pageant. My mom took Sarah and me. Mark and his mom went, Camille and Kathryn went with the Carson family and Mama Jean came as well. It was like any regular beauty pageant, they had the bathing suit contest, formal gown contest, talent show, Q&A, etc, etc, etc. Believe it or not Destiny won the title; she won a

\$4,000 college scholarship as well as a bunch of other prizes.

This summer also brought about a new experience with Chris. Up until now we were just masturbating with each other, but things soon changed. My mom wasn't home a lot due to Sarah's dance recital rehearsals, and of course my dad was at work. Chris would come over often to baby sit and it was during one of his stays with me that he taught me oral sex. It started out as regular; he would take his shirt off and expect me to do the same. Once we were naked he asked me if I knew what oral sex was and I said no. He told me and asked if I wanted to try it. I shrugged my shoulders and he just smiled. He got up and he sat next to me and before you know it he was doing it to me. I can't describe how good it felt. I didn't want it to end. He continued until I ejaculated, and then he told me to do the same to him. I did and it dated my first time with another man. I was twelve at the time. It was two weeks before my birthday and I was now addicted to Chris. According to my fifth grade teachers this was not supposed to be happening to me, but I couldn't stop it. Well, I could, but I didn't want to. That was that summer in a nutshell. Time was moving quickly and I was growing older. School was starting soon and it marked my last year in middle school. I wasn't afraid of moving on to high school. Because I made such an easy transition from elementary to middle school I figured making the transition to high school wouldn't be so hard. So, I started middle school making sure I made the best of my last year.

Eighth grade was enjoyable simply because I knew it was my last year. I was actually very happy to start high school, so, I enjoyed getting finished with the last year.

In October Mark's sister, Ashley was born. That was the last birth for the Matthews family. In November we spent thanksgiving eve at Ronald and Winifred's house. They had a huge thanksgiving party and invited the whole neighborhood. Of course as always we spent Christmas Eve at Mama Jean's house and the New Year's Eve with Chris. Another thing I remember about the eighth grade is Mark getting the leading roll of the school musical. The school did *Jerry's Lollipop Shop*. He was amazing in the title roll. I was amazed at how well he did. I wasn't in the show this year. I decided that even though I had fun, performing was not for me. I wasn't that good at it. I decided to try-out for the soccer team. It was my first year trying-out. I practiced a lot at home and

started watching soccer games on TV. I made it. I didn't play much, but when I did I was good. I was trying to find myself. The middle school didn't have many sports. The only other sports were wrestling and basketball.

The one thing I remember about soccer is Philip Rock. He was one of the greatest soccer players between all of us and he was one of the reasons why we won so many games. One day after practice he asked me if I wanted to come over his house one day. I agreed and about a week or two later I went over his house to hang out. I don't know what he saw in me or what he read, but apparently he was bold enough to do what he did. He was very masculine and a ladies' man, so I was shocked to find out what he wanted with me. We were playing Sega and before you know it he took his shirt off. He asked me if I was hot and I said no. I was confused, because I had a feeling of where it was going, but I wasn't sure because I thought for sure he was straight. To make a long story short before I left the two of us had oral sex. The sexual relationship between us continued until the eleventh grade. To this day I am not sure why we stopped, but we did. So, that was pretty much my eighth grade year, my last year in middle school. Graduation was pretty cool. It was kind of long. Kathryn was the valedictorian, she wrote a great speech. It was pretty cool to see her up there giving the graduation speech. The whole experience was exciting knowing that the next time I go to school I would be in high school.

The summer of 1993 started off really cool. My father surprised me and took me to a baseball game. He took off from work and it was just the two of us. It was a great time. It felt like old times. I was never happier then I was when I was with my dad. The next week he took all of us, my mom, Sarah, and me to Funtastic Kingdom. I had so much fun. Even more fun then when David took us. We pretty much did the same things, but I think because I was with my dad, that's what made it more fun. The summer was full of surprises, we went fishing, horse back riding, he took Sarah and me to a carnival and he also took Mark and me to a local soccer game. I think he was trying to encourage me when he took us to the soccer game, but I knew I wasn't going to continue soccer. In fact, by the time I got into high school and saw the wide variety of sports I decided to do something different. But anyways, that summer was the best and the last

one like it. Dad did take me out during the other summers, but not as much as this summer. It was also in the summer of '93 that Gregory Kenilworth and Phylcia Page started dating. They came to Robert's Independence Day barbeque together, holding hands. No one asked them, but we pretty much all assumed they were together. July brought about a new experience for me.

I spent a couple of more times with Chris alone. We did the normal; however, one day he introduced me to intercourse. He pretty much asked me questions and before you knew it, I was bending over for him. I trusted Chris and I liked him, I think that's why I continued to do those things with him. He made it seem like it was okay even though I knew it was wrong. I had spent so much time with him that it was normal for me to do what he asked. It was my first time and I was in pain, but I got used to it.

Other than my first sexual experience this summer brought a death. It all started with me and Mark at my house playing video games. Sarah was worried because Sandy, her cat hadn't returned for her lunch. Sarah would let Sandy out and Sandy would return by herself when she was ready to eat. She would return around the same time everyday like clock work. However on this one day in August Sandy did not return. So, my mom allowed Sarah to go out and look for her. Everything was fine until about five minutes later. Out of no where we hear this loud screech. It scared me half to death, Mark jumped as well, and it set off, Liver, that stupid barking dog. My mother came out of her room and asked us what the noise was, we both shrugged. She then asked where Sarah was, she wanted to know if she had returned with the cat, we both shrugged again. She then decided to go outside and look for her. Mark and I followed her and what we saw next was crazy. We saw some of the neighbors surrounding something, but we weren't sure what it was. They were pretty far away from where we were so we just kept walking until we got closer. Finally we approached and Mama Jean looked at my mom and said, oh, thank God you're here. Mama Jean guided my mom to what everyone was looking at and she saw Sarah on the ground. My mother yelled, oh my gosh is she okay. Mama Jean said there's nothing wrong with her. As soon as Mama Jean said that Sarah popped her head and yelled, how dare you say that? She's dead, Sandy's dead. Sarah then lay back on Sandy and cried. She started speaking, someone killed her, she was hit by a car, I

can tell, which one of you meanies killed my Sandy. She was good to all of you, I swear, if I find out who did this I am going to get in a car and run you over. She then lay back down on Sandy and cried. It was like a scene out of West Side Story. I knew at that moment that God did not bless me with the talent of performing, but he did bless my sister. I mean the drama that poured out of her was amazing. The funny thing though was that she was serious. She really loved Sandy and she was heart-broken over the fact that someone ran her over and didn't care to stop. I told her that maybe whoever killed her didn't realize they did it. That comment did not comfort her. In fact, it made her even angrier. At that point my mother picked Sarah up and tried to walk her home. Sarah started falling out telling my mom to leave her alone, that she wanted to stay with Sandy. My mother trying to get her up stated, "You must get up and we have to get you clean, Sandy is very dangerous. Now, that she is dead she carries diseases and you mustn't be around her. I'm going to call animal service and get them to pick her up." Sarah jumped up and yelled, "No, I want to give her the proper burial. She deserves the proper burial." My mother finally got her to get in the house. The rest of the neighbors went back to their homes, not sure how to respond to my sister's performance. A week later the whole neighborhood was in our backyard as we held a home going service for Sandy. Mark and Brianna prepared a song, and Camille and Kathryn prepared a dance. My dad did the eulogy and I read the cat's bio, which Sarah wrote. As crazy as it seems this really happened. I think the neighbors chipped in because they were all guilty. Believe it or not, no one actually knew how Sandy died and they all thought there was a chance that either one of them could have done it. So, in guilt they all showed up to the funeral. We buried her in our backyard and Sarah had Michael, Camille's brother to build a tombstone. It was sad and silly moment all in one. The funeral ended with everyone conversing while my sister went to her room, she staid there for about a week, only exiting to eat. After the week she showed her face, but she didn't talk much. It was about Octoberish that she finally was her self again. That was pretty much the end of that summer. Cool times with dad, first times with Chris, and crazy times with Sarah is how it ended.

CHAPTER FIVE

So, September arrived and I attended my first day at Richard Freehand High School. My first day was exciting knowing that this was my first year of my last years in public schooling. I spent the first months getting used to a new environment. The school was much bigger than Einstein Middle School. One thing I remember about high school was trying to find something that I could do after school. My dad told me that getting involved with after school activities was great for college applications. Theater and soccer were out so I had to look hard. I looked at all of the sports and the only thing I knew that looked the easiest was track. I thought to myself, all I have to do is run. I tried out and got in my freshman year. Track was a little harder than it looked, but the more I trained the more I enjoyed it. I staid in track all four years and even won some awards. As for the rest of the crew Mark auditioned for the school musical and he was ensemble in *Freeze*. Thomas joined the chess team, Camille became a cheerleader, and Kathryn was apart of the student counsel. Brian and Brianna joined the baseball and softball team and were the reasons why our school teams won.

One thing I remember about my freshman year was the chemistry lab accident. One day in class the fire alarm goes off and as usual we evacuated. The next day we found out that there was an accident in one of the junior's chemistry class. They were doing an experiment and one of the students did not follow the instructions too well. Everything was okay, but they made a big deal out of it in the newspapers.

By the time January came in I had joined Future Business Leaders of America, and The Sign Language Club, but most of my energy was in track. I had started to train at home. I would run for miles, usually never having a destination, just running. At sometimes I felt like I was running away from something. I wasn't sure what it was, but that's what it felt like.

This year also brought about another annoying season of the never ending barking Liver. Edward left the town again, but not before another argument with Mama Jean. As always it ended with Edward leaving and Mama Jean yelling at his car as it drove off to wherever.

A happier memory is when Gregory Kenilworth, one of the newer neighbors took a couple of us to see a basketball game. He owned a box seat and it was amazing seating up there. My dad, Mark and his dad, along with Jacob, Michael, and I were there. It was awesome having room service and we were able to order anything we wanted. My dad told me not to get carried away, but Gregory told us not to worry. He said because he donated much money to the arena a lot of it was free. Although, I had lived the rich life, this was even better. I felt like my family and I were poor compared to Gregory. One thing I remember about sitting in that box was talking to Greg. I found out some interesting things about him. Not only was he a doctor, but his father was too. He said he was engaged, but his finance broke his heart. He told me he found her in bed with another man. He started talking about how he couldn't trust another woman again. He then started asking me questions about girls. I told him that I was interested in girls and he advised me to wait and not to grow up so fast. When I think about girls during that time, my freshman year was a confusing time for me. I started to notice girls. I didn't think that I could ever be interested in girls being that I enjoyed the time I spent with Chris.

Danielle Richardson was the "girl next door." She was pretty, popular and everyone liked her. She was the kind of girl every girl wanted to be and every guy wanted to be with. I had a big time crush on her. Every time I saw her it felt like magic. I had butterflies inside and at times I could barely speak without blushing or stumbling over my words. However, I didn't know if I could have a long term relationship with the opposite sex and still desire physical relationships with the same. I spent the school year going after Danielle and keeping my life with Chris a secret.

The summer of 1994 brought great sadness and happiness all at the same time. The summer started out with another death.

At the age of 98 Papa Bill died. It was a bitter sweet moment. I know he was in a better place and feeling better, but I knew that I would miss visiting him. His grandchildren put the house up for sale and no one lived in it for about five months. The funeral was nice, his family was all wonderful people and the whole Crystal neighborhood was there. After the funeral we had the reception at Papa Bill's house.

Just looking at all his pictures he had still around the house made me miss him even more. I mourned him for the months of June and July. I just couldn't get over his death. For some silly reason I thought he would live forever.

It wasn't until August when I got a letter from Elizabeth that my happiness slowly returned. She told me in a letter that she was going to visit in August and I got so elated. I had missed me some Elizabeth and was happy to see her again. She came over during the third week of August and staid until Labor Day. She spent the night over Camille's house and we spent every day playing catch up with her. We told her about Sandy and Papa Bill and everything else that went on since she left. We even went to Funtastic Kingdom with her. We also had a huge party for her at my house. All the neighborhood kids were there. It was a weird party. We named it "We Miss Elizabeth Party." We danced and ate and enjoyed her. Just being with her those few days reminded me of how much she made me happy. I never felt as good as I did with her than I have with any other person. Of course sadness returned when she left to go back home.

The only other event that took place was in July with Chris. We were home alone and we had our fun together. This time, like every summer before, he introduces me to something new. He brought a camera and we took pictures of each other. For some crazy reason I thought it was cool. He explained to me how he was going to make a website with me and him. He told me if he made any money he would split it with me. I'm not sure if I completely knew what he was doing, but I agreed to take the pictures.

My second year at Freehand High I joined the Italian club. I was still involved with track. I submerged myself in it. It was like the only thing I knew that identified me. I still wasn't sure what I was or who I was. Mark was in the school musical again and also in the chorus. He asked me to join the choir with him, but I passed that year. He kept saying he wanted us to be in the choir together, one more time, before we graduated. I couldn't do it being that I was in so many other activities. He understood, but it didn't stop him from asking me to think about it for next year.

During this year Crystal Fountain was introduced to the Lyons. They were the family that moved into Papa Bill's house. Evan and Isabelle Lyons and their son Aaron, 15, were the talk of the neighborhood. I think everyone envied them. As rich as we all

were, I think they were the richest. They came in with huge screen TV's and all types of automatic electronic Jetsons type machines. Evan has a Rolls Royce, while Isabelle had a Lexus. And even though Aaron couldn't drive, they brought him a BMW for when he got his license. Everything they had with them were elaborate. They even had a professional chef, maid, and butler. I think they went too far with the personal help, but I guess they were just used to it. I know I was jealous of them, especially Aaron. He had every new gaming system and every new game and pretty much everything he wanted. I know I told him many of times of my jealousy, but he never responded, and I didn't know why until I spent the night with him.

December rolled in and I was spending Christmas at Mama Jean's and New Year's with Chris. 1995 was here and two more changes in my life occurred.

The first thing that took place was in February; Thomas moved out of state. His father accepted a better job and they moved the second week of February. It meant a better life for him, but it meant I wouldn't be able to see him anymore. Just like with Elizabeth I became his pen-pal, but it was sad to see them both leave. Thomas and Elizabeth were the only two people that I grew up with that taught me to be nice to those everyone else is being unkind to. The two people that made me feel welcomed at McCooper Elementary had left my life. They both would visit every now and then, but it wasn't the same.

My tenth grade year brought to me my first date. It was in April and I went on a date with Danielle. I finally got enough nerve to ask her out and low and behold she said yes. I took her (her brother drove us around) to Lovely's (which my father foot the bill), and she was very impressed that I was able to pay. Later I took her to a movie and then we walked in a nearby park where we talked and I had realized that I wasn't in love with her. She was beautiful and that's all she had. No offence, but she wasn't very bright and she was willing to do it on the first night. I told her that I wasn't ready (I wasn't sure if I could get it up without Chris) and she made me feel uncomfortable about saying no. The next day in school I got ridiculed for saying no. I hated her for a week and a day because I thought everything we shared was between the two of us.

April was also the month where I started a short secret relationship with James Marco. He was on the track team with me and we started a thing. We were jogging buddies during the weekend. We would wake up in the morning meet each other at a designated spot (usually the high school) and jog. Once we were done we go our separate ways. One day he asked if he could come over to my house. He came over and my mother fixed us something to eat. She then left the house with Sarah. They went with the Matthews to see Victoria in another play. I staid home with James (although, I wanted to see Vicky again). My dad was with Gregory at a basketball game. I had no intentions of doing anything with James, but everything just happened. Once we were done our “first times” suddenly emerged. I told him about Chris and he told me about his uncle. I couldn’t believe my ears, I don’t know what my reaction would be if my uncle ever did anything like that to me. But, I guess there’s no difference between him and his uncle and me and Chris. The school year was ending quickly and I couldn’t believe all the time that had passed. The summer of 1995 was here and I think was the most outrageous summer ever.

One thing I did this summer at the request of my father is I started looking into colleges. He told me that now was the time. To search and see which ones I was interested in. I started out by going to the library and simply searching all the colleges near me. I handpicked a few, but I did most of my research on my return to school.

Another thing I did that summer was go golfing for the first time. Ronald invited my dad and me to go golfing with him. Mark and his dad went the week before. It was kind of fun. It was more difficult than I had imagined.

The biggest thing that happened that summer was probably the funniest and saddest thing I ever witnessed. Let’s start from the beginning. I was at home and it was around 10PM. I was on the phone with Mark. We weren’t talking about anything in particular. We just usually at least once a weak would get on the phone a play catch up. We told each other everything (well, I didn’t, I never told him about Chris, Philip, or James). As we were talking Liver started barking again, non-stop, It was very annoying. It went on for about five minutes. Out of no where I heard three gunshots. It scared the hell out of me. I dropped the phone and ducked, not knowing what was going on. I soon

picked up the phone and asked Mark if he heard it. He told me yes and that it sounded like gunshots. I wasn't sure what to think because our neighborhood was a quiet and safe neighborhood. My first thought was a drive by or maybe some thugs came in trying to steal from the rich. I wasn't sure, but soon after my parents came in and asked if I was okay, I told them yes. At that point my father said he was going outside to see what it was. My mother then argued with him for a minute telling him it was too dangerous. After a couple of minutes my dad looked out the window and noticed some of the neighbors had gone outside. He then went out there along with my mother. She told my sister and me to stay inside. I staid inside, but I opened the window so that I could hear what was going on. Robert, Mark's dad asked everyone if anyone knew what was going on. They all agreed they were all clueless. At that point Peter, Camille's dad called the cops and the rest of them staid out there until they arrived. Cassandra, Kathryn's mom asked if anyone knew where the shots came from. Phylcia mentioned that it sounded like it came from Edward's place. At that point Kenneth went to go over to Edward's house to see. Barbara was furious and argued that the shooter could still be over there and that it was dangerous. Kenneth went over to his house anyways and because of Linda's (Mark's mom) curiosity she went over to the house with him. When they returned they both were laughing. Ronald asked them what was so funny and they could barely get it out. Finally Linda said she thought that Mama Jean killed Liver. My mom asked her how she knew. Linda said that Liver was dead and that he had three shot wounds in him. Peter asked her how she knew it was Mama Jean and Linda laughed and asked; who else could it have been? She said that Mama Jean was the only one crazy enough to kill a dog. Sooner or later the police came and because there was no proof of the shooter no one was taken to jail. Ironically, Edward returned two weeks later to find his dog missing. My mother went over to his house and explained what happened. She never mentioned Mama Jean, but he accused her. In fact, he went over to her house and started arguing with her. She never admitted to anything, but I think everyone believed she did it. It was a year later that in sadness Edward moved away. He claimed to my mother he was leaving because he was the only one hated in Crystal and that no one in the neighborhood was nice to him. My mother told him that it wasn't that no one likes him it

was that no one knew him because he was never in town long enough for anyone to get to know him. Once he left, I don't think anyone missed him being that we were used to him not being home, but I did feel sorry for him. My mother told me that she talked to him and she found out why he named his dog Liver. He got his dog after his dad died of liver cancer. He said he had the dog for five years and didn't know if he could live on without him. It was sad and funny all at the same time because I could picture Mama Jean shooting the dog. It was something the crew and I would laugh about all the time after that incident. Edward sold his house and within three months a new family moved in. Ralph and Candy Feathers and their children, Sunny, 20, and Louis, 10. That was all the excitement for that summer, other than frequenting Funtastic Kingdom with the crew. The summer was over and I was entering my junior year in high school.

CHAPTER SIX

My junior year meant school was almost over. I spent this year trying to find a college to attend. My top favorites were Tait College, Kiel University, and Zale. I hadn't made my decision yet, but I was getting there. I spent that year submerged in extra-curriculum activities. I decided to also join the choir that year. Mark kept asking and it was hard saying no to a life long friend. Although I was regretting it at first, once I started going to rehearsal I realized how much I missed singing. I also was inducted into the Italian Honor Society and the National Honor Society. My parents were so happy for me that they brought me a car. It was a used car, but it worked, that's all that matters. I also started working that year. I started working at the gym that I work-out at. I worked at the front desk and I also worked at Burger Land part-time. I did a lot that year, too much actually, by the New Year I quit Burger Land and I decided to quit the chorus. Mark was upset at first, but he was still glad we were able to do the Winter Concert together like old times.

During this year I went on my second date with Evelyn Smith. I pretty much did the same things that I did with Danielle. We dated for about three months before realizing we really did not have much in common and decided to break up. We decided to stay friends and we continued to talk to each other.

I also remember that this was the year that Chris stop coming over. My parents decided I was old enough to baby sit my sister. So, any time my parents left the house it was just Sarah and I. Sometimes my parents would allow us to invite friends over. Sarah always had two or three of her friends around. Mark was pretty much the only one who would come over. We actually had a small New Year's Eve party at our house that year. Mark, Camille, and Kathryn came over and three of Sarah's friends were there. Sarah pretty much staid in her room. The four of us pretty much played "do you remember when?" It was fun talking about the old times we had together, when all we had was each other. We vowed that we would stay in touch; to make sure even in college we stay pen-pals. To this day we write each other on occasions. The New Year rang in and I was close to graduating.

The first thing I remember about my junior year was something I have regretted to this day. It started with my mother finding out that the new neighbor Candy was going to be working with her. They started working together in December of 1995, they became fast friends. They were working with each other for about a month before they started hanging out. Candy would make frequent stops at our house and my mom was often visiting her house as well. It was about March when Candy needed a baby sitter for her son, Louis. My mother volunteered my services. I had asked her why her daughter Sunny couldn't do it and she told me she didn't know she just knew that she told Candy that I would baby sit. The night that I babysat Louis was a night I wish I could change. I went over there and Candy was the only one there. Sunny was at a basketball game with friends and Candy was meeting her husband at some benefit of the sorts. So I was left alone with Louis. I had no plans of doing anything other than babysitting him. I didn't do much of anything, but watch him play video games, it was then at some point that the moment seemed familiar to me. He then asked me if I wanted to play and I did. And as I played I got an urge to do something. I took my shirt off and I asked him if he was hot. He shrugged and continued to play. I then asked him all the questions Chris asked me and to make a long story short the night ended with me molesting him. I told him to make sure he doesn't tell anyone and I don't think he ever did. I babysat for him a couple of more times and each time I did what Chris did to me. I hated myself each time knowing what I was doing was wrong, but the feelings were strong and it seems like I couldn't stop myself. To this day I wish I could change those moments, but unfortunately I am unable to.

1996 also taught me that being jealous can be the stupidest thing you can do. During that year I spent a lot of time over Aaron's house. I would drool over everything he had. I would always tell him how much I envy his life. He never responded (in a way he did) to my remarks, instead he invited me over one day to spend the night, it was around February. I was so elated. I got to use all the electronics in his house. Most of them were voice activated. The refrigerator would open automatically, the shelves moved in and out automatically, the blender, toaster, and microwave were all voice activated. He had state of the art washer and dryer, dish washer; I mean every machine in the house was

voice activated. The television was huge and had every channel. His computer was awesome, flat screen, and very fast, it was amazing, it felt like I was living in the Jetsons times. Everything went well, until that night. It was around 1AM and I heard a thump sound. It awoke me and at the same time frightened me. I staid awake for a while to see if it would happen again and it did. I then heard the sound of something fall and break. Then I heard voices, like arguing, it started off quiet, like whispering, and then it picked up. After a while I could tell it were Evan and Isabelle (Aaron's parents) fighting. I got up and looked over at Aaron's bed, but he was sound a sleep. The noise got louder and more frequent so it was hard for me to sleep. At some point it sopped and I was able to go back to sleep. When I looked at the clock before going back to sleep it read 3:17AM. I couldn't believe it was that late, and I couldn't believe that Aaron was able to sleep through it. The next day I awoke and I didn't say anything at first. Aaron and I were playing video games and I nonchalantly asked him if he heard any noise last night. And he responded just as nonchalantly as me. He responded saying, I didn't hear anything. He paused slightly and then continued saying, but I've gotten used to it, I've learned how to sleep through it. I never said what the noise was, but he knew what I was referring to. There was a longer pause then before, before he asked me if I was still jealous. It wasn't until a couple of days later that I realized the only reason why he invited me over was to see that there was nothing to be jealous about. Yes, he had all the things in the world, but he had to live his life with his parents at each other's throats. About a week later I saw him in school and asked him how long he has had to live through that. He told me ever since he could remember. He said his parents would by each other gifts to apologize to each other, but the arguing never ended. He said he would ask them to stop fighting, but the only way they would apologize to him was by buying him something. They would be in peace for about a week before fighting again. I felt really bad for him and I felt stupid for overdoing it with the jealousy. Out of guilt I asked him if he wanted to spend a couple of nights over my house and he agreed. Some nights in secret, my parents never knew some of the times he came over. He enjoyed the peace and quiet; he kept saying he's glad that he didn't have to pretend he didn't hear anything. His parents never noticed him missing. There were some nights we would stay up late talking about life. Other than

James he was the first person I talked to about Chris. I didn't understand it though. Mark was my friend since I was six years old, and I still wasn't comfortable enough to tell him, while Aaron I only knew for about two years and I felt opened enough to tell him everything. He told me about his parents and how he spent his entire life wishing for "better parents." He told me he used to pray for them to get a divorce. We laughed and cried together during that year. I miss that time with him. There were many times that I wished that I could have those times with him again.

My junior year was a time where I searched and searched for scholarships. I sent in papers and essays to every foundation that I qualified for. Also that year I remember Mark getting a supporting roll in the school musical, *Welcome Home*. He also was involved with *Dangerous Secret*, at Keller's Community Theater. He was amazing in both productions. It was awesome to see him perform. He reminded me of his cousin. Camille was a dancer in *Welcome Home*. It was fun watching the both of them on stage. Kathryn and I went together to support them. The four of us went to celebrate at Darla's, a near by diner, similar to Lovely's, but less expensive. It was at that point that I realized that no matter how much we keep in touch that would be one of the last times we spend together. Like every other school year it quickly ended and I was enjoying summer once again.

The summer of 1996 was one of the saddest summers ever. It also brought about a happy occasion. I spent a couple of days with my dad. It wasn't until late June early July that I became the most depressed in my life. It began at night. I was sleeping and sirens coming into our neighborhood awoke me. I looked at my window and saw them heading to Aaron's house. My first thought was that Isabelle called the cops on her husband, but that wasn't the case. All I saw was Isabelle running out crying with a man on the bed the ambulance rolled away. I wasn't sure who it was until the next day. I found out that Aaron had committed suicide. He left a letter for his parents and one for me. He apologized to me and also thanked me. He said I was the only person he could ever talk to and was glad to know me, but he said he just couldn't live anymore in the conditions at home. I felt like a heavy weight was put on me and I could not lift myself up. I cried everyday, at least three times. I could barely attend the funeral, because I did not want to

see him lying dead. I was so afraid that I might lose it. Later that day the gang and I went to Darla's and they kept saying how they didn't understand how he could kill himself being that he had everything. As much as it hurt to talk about his situation I had to let them know. I told them about his parents and they became quiet them quickly. It made them see the same thing I saw. Money doesn't make you happy; it just makes you more of what you are. If you're happy, it makes you happier, but if you're sad it will make you sadder. The Lyons moved out by the next month and the house was on the market once again. The month of July was cold for me. I didn't do much of anything, but mope around. It wasn't until August that I had a little bit of light.

Gregory and Phylcia got married and the wedding was wonderful. It had me smiling for some time. The funny thing was them trying to find out whose house to live in. They decided to live in Gregory's house and they made some extra money by making Phylcia's house a bed in breakfast. It wasn't until March of the next year that we saw guests coming in out of the house. It was like living next to a hotel.

I also went to see Mark in another show. He auditioned for *Here It Is*, and got the leading roll at the Lyndon Community Theater. At then end of this summer Mark, Camille, Kathryn, Brian, Brianna, Kevin, and I went to Funtastic. Kevin was leaving for college so we decided to do something together before he left. The summer ended kind of slow, I think it was the suicide that made it so depressingly slow. However, it ended and I was soon in my last year of public schooling.

My last year in high school was of course a bitter sweet year. Finishing school was fun, but having to part from friends I knew for a long period of time was very difficult. By this time many more house were done and more people moved in the neighborhood, but because of finishing high school and preparing for college I was too consumed to pay close attention.

The only ones I remember is the Drake family moving into Papa Bill's house. Jeffrey and Tiffany Drake and their children, Kindred, 16, and Ian, 12. I remember them because they were the most outgoing families. They were the newest, but it seems like they knew all of us for a long time. They would have parties and invite everyone. I would go over only to see the house. Every time I stepped in the house memories of Papa

Bill and Aaron would flood me, so much that sometimes I would cry without knowing.

My last year in school I spent most of my time on the track team. It was during the first months of school that I got into all three of my top three. I also was offered a full track scholarship. I also spent my last year working as a trainer at the gym.

A great memory I have remember of my senior year happened on New Year's Eve. My parents went out as usual and Sarah went over a friend's house for the night. I was by myself for the first half of the night. I had told Chris the week before that I would be home alone hoping he would come over. To my surprise not only did he come over, but he took me out. I wasn't sure where he was taking me because he wouldn't tell me. He kept telling me it was a surprise and that he did not want to spoil it for me. He took me to New York, to Times Square like he always promised me. I was completely shocked, I hadn't a clue that he would actually take me. When we got there he simply said that he told me he would take me. I don't know why, but I kissed him and he kissed me back. After the ball dropped we went to a hotel and that was the last time I was with Chris. It was a fun night, a night I will never forget. Once the New Year came in I couldn't be more elated. I was so happy that college was near. The rest of the year went by pretty quickly.

During the month of March I went out one more time with another girl, Kelly Parkinson. She was pretty and everything, but again not for me. Mark excelled in the school musical this year. He had the leading male role in *Manhattan and Me*. He was accepted to Zale University and majored in Theater Performance, of course. Kathryn decided to go to a law school out of state, Walden Law, and Camille went to Tait College and majored in Business, and minored in dance. At that time I still wasn't sure where I was going. The biggest event of the year, other than graduation, was prom. I wasn't sure who to take until my mother suggested I take Elizabeth. I guess I talked about her so much that it seemed like the easy answer. I called her and she agreed to go. She had a beautiful gown and I had a tux that matched hers. I enjoyed myself to the fullest and I enjoyed being with her. The craziest thing about going to the prom with her was realizing that I was in love with her. I saw all the signs, but I ignored them. Graduation came and went (quickly, but yet it seemed so long-winded). They had a special memorial for

Aaron. Thomas and Elizabeth came to celebrate with us and in return the crew went to their graduations. We all decided to go to Funtastic one more time before college started.

The summer ended pretty quickly and I was off to Kiel University, that's right I chose Kiel. I went on the track scholarship and majored in Psychology. I wasn't sure at first what I wanted to do, but after living my life in Crystal I felt like there were children who I needed to help. So, I decided to become a counselor.

I am now 32 years old and I still keep in touch with the crew. We see each other about twice a year. I married Elizabeth and we have two children Aaron, 6 and Tiara, 2. I know how crazy it sounds that I got married (knowing what you know about Chris and I), but I knew I loved her and I came to the realization that what I had with Chris was not love. I kept it a secret until I was 25. Chris made national news. He got arrested for endangerment of a child (amongst other things). He was found in a hotel room with a thirteen year old. When they raided his house they found tons of pictures of boys. I never realized that everything he did to me he did to a number of other boys. I was never contacted (being that my pictures were probably in the bunch), or did I have to testify. The case ended with him pleading guilty and taking a plea bargain. He received ten years without parole. About a month later I decided to come clean and tell what Chris did to me and what I did to Louis. I told Elizabeth, my parents, and even the crew. It was the most difficult thing that I ever had to do, but it was liberating at the same time. My parents cried, so did Elizabeth. Mark was upset that I never told him.

I now live in the same state and I counsel abused children (of all ages). So, that was my life in Crystal as I remember it. Every now and then I visit Crystal Fountain to visit Mama Jean. She still lives there and still looks as young as ever. Mostly everyone there is completely new. Pretty much everyone moved out. The only ones left are Gregory and Phylicia and the Carson family. Every time I enter the development I can still hear Liver barking, or see the construction workers building new homes, and smell the barbecue wafting from the neighbors Viking grill. These are my memories of Crystal Fountain.

THE END