

My Childhood Adventures

Whenever I think about my life, I wonder how I managed to come out somewhat normal. This is the story of Susan, the third born to Ginny and Joe. I wasn't a surprise. I followed a miscarriage and completed my mom's dream of a family. After me, she got her tubes tied and she went on to be the perfect wife, mom, sister, and friend. Until she wasn't. At three my parents started to fight and by four they were divorced. To keep me away from the drama and because I was already reading books, I started private Kindergarten that year. Sometimes no one would pick me up. Everyone was too busy doing their own thing to remember something as simple as their daughter. My mom left during Hurricane Alicia during a time when we had no electricity. Dad sat in the orange chair and stared out the window for two days with me on his lap. It was a week I think before the lights came back on, so we ate eggs from the fireplace.

Soon, Dad started dating someone we liked talking to on the phone named Colorado Kathy. She seemed nice, but we never met her. Before my mom could marry the man she cheated with, my dad had married another Cathy he dated while she was in high school. Interestingly, he took both her and my mom to their proms. She lived in Michigan where mom and dad grew up and she had two kids; a boy and a girl. Tony was 12 and Jenny was just 6 weeks older than me, but a grade lower since I started early. We quickly moved from Houston to Grandma White's house and lived there for a few months until we found a house for the seven of us.

It was never blissful. It seems there were problems from the start. Tony did not seem to like being part of the family. He wanted to be away from us as much as possible with his cousin Mike. He started doing things my parents didn't like and went to rehab. We had to go to Alanon meetings which mostly meant we played hide and seek. Jenny and I had become inseparable by then, and would continue to be.

She was my best friend, but she wasn't exactly nice to me. Sometimes she wouldn't talk to me for days just to be mean. My parents expected a lot of me when it came to Jennifer. I was not older, but I was smarter. Jenny was the PRETTY one and I was the SMART one. I made sure Jenny got up on time, got dressed, got on the bus, and got to school. I helped her with her homework and helped her not get in trouble. Jenny did not like to listen, and later on was diagnosed with ADD.

My parents were very much in love with each other and not very in love with their children. They both worked long days and were gone before we woke up most mornings. The bus would get us to and from school and we spent weekends with grandparents or Aunt Vicki. The times with our extended family would prove to be some of my favorite memories.

When I was six, we had a disgusting boy babysitter who had something very wrong with him. He was fifteen and lived down the street. My brothers hated him and told my parents to not go out on their dates and leave me and Jenny with him, but they didn't care and did it anyway. There were some awful things that happened there that probably hurt me more than I understood or can understand now. We went to counseling to talk about it, but I think we were

too little and the counselor was too inept to help. It was just a weird situation for everyone to actually be in, and eventually life just resumed normally. We never had another boy babysitter.

Tony eventually moved out and would never come back home. He went to live with Grandpa and Grandma, but he was usually just out when we went to visit. Paul, who was 6 years older than me, stayed busy with sports and airplanes so for the next few years it was just us three little girls; Lisa was ten and Jenny and I seven. Paul, Lisa, and I fly to visit our "real mom" and Chris every summer for a month and then see mom when she came home to Michigan to visit for Christmas week.

While things seemed to settle down on one side of my world, the other side was changing rapidly. Chris had never been married, and longed for a family of his own. My mom was in love with him and wanted to give him that as well. So, she had her tubal reversed and they began trying for a baby. Elizabeth was born when I was eight years old. Her name means "God's Promise". It was hard for 8 year old Susan to understand how her mom could just clean the slate and start over, but there was nothing that could be done about the situation. Her mom's life seemed to appear perfect to her as she peered in from the outside during visits.

Chris had a good job and they lived in a nicely appointed and comfortable home. Mom got to stay home and would spend the summer entertaining the kids. Supper was ready at 5:30 every night and we would read a chapter out of a book each day. Sometimes I would ask my mom to rock me and pretend to fall asleep. It wasn't often I ever got her to myself.

Mom stayed in touch through phone calls and would sometimes send a themed box for holidays. It seemed weird to be so far away from your own mom. Everyone seemed surprised to see my dad and step mom were raising us, and it never felt like I could quite level up to Jennifer who was now adopted by our dad.

Mom eventually got pregnant with another child after Elizabeth, but we really didn't get to see her during that pregnancy. We eventually heard she never got to bring that baby home. Details were few and scattered, but it seems she was term and went for a routine visit and the heart beat could not be found. She would labor and bury that baby in the same duration of time. My little heart broke for her; I knew even then my words would be an inadequate consolation. I found a card to send, and we never spoke of the baby again.

Within a year, my mom had her fifth child-a Junior. Christopher was born in February when I was 11 years old. His hair was white, and he was the cutest baby I had ever seen. My mom was so happy and I was happy for her, all the while being sad for myself. Things didn't seem right, but I couldn't figure out how they ever could be. I just stuck to myself and entertained my thoughts with adventures in our forest, books, art, music, and poetry. If things weren't right in the real world, I would escape in fantasy.

Lisa, my oldest sister, became a problem for Cathy, my step mom during that time. She was coming into her own and there was some friction. For these reasons, she got to go live with my

mom in Texas. I didn't see her very much after that except when I got to go visit for the Summer or Christmas. This was the first of many changes that would soon make my life feel like a row of Dominoes, if it hadn't already felt like that.

My dad got offered a new job and as I entered the 7th grade we moved to a suburb of Milwaukee and started school. I liked the school, made friends quickly, and was a cheerleader. I felt like I was thriving and really finding my groove. I spent a lot of time with my best friend Missy and her mom who was a hair stylist. They both loved hair and make up and so did I. It was so nice to feel like I fit in somewhere and learn more about subjects I enjoyed but couldn't study in school!

After a year of living in Wisconsin my dad got another job offer and decided to move to Indianapolis. It wasn't up for discussion and we just got up one day and moved to a new house on the North side. I don't think my parents knew that in the city it didn't matter where you lived; inner city youth were bussed to all campuses to make them appear demographically similar in an appeal for fairness and opportunity for all. This meant living in a nicer neighborhood did not mean your child attended a nicer school. This meant in Indianapolis, gangs were present at all of the high school as well as multiple races. As an 8th grader, I entered a completely foreign concept of a city. This is the same year I would turn 13 and my only Grandpa would die of Lung Cancer.

At 14 I entered high school, leaving Jennifer alone in Junior High. My step mom quit working and was home when we got home from school. We were the only two left-Paul had stayed back in Michigan and graduated from Niles while living at my Grandma's. Tony now had a job and a house and Lisa was living with my mom but it was not going great-she was pregnant at 17. Year 14 was one of the hardest of my life. I didn't fit in at school. No one was nice to me. Jenny didn't go to my school. I hated everything and everyone. I listened to music to try to help find the words to my feelings which I could not decipher or articulate anymore. I felt so lost and so alone and so sad.

Everyone was so mean and I just could not figure out a way to be happy when so much was happening. Toward the end of the year I started to feel better and skipped school with a boy named John. That turned out to be a pretty bad idea because John's friend held a gun to my head and tried to rape me. I told him to just go ahead and shoot me because he wasn't going to rape me-and he stopped. It surprised me that I was that tough-and John who watched the whole thing happen, I think in disbelief, took me home and dropped me off. He was murdered the next week, so we never got to talk about it. The day of the funeral, his friend apologized to me, but it really didn't matter to me much. I cared about very little. I wasn't sleeping. I was barely eating. My mom was on my case all the time. My real mom was always busy with Lisa, Chris, or Liz while trying to keep her husband happy despite the tension created by Lisa's choices. My dad was absent and when he was around he had nothing to say.

I did everything I could to fit in. I stopped answering questions in class. I didn't talk and just listened to what people had to say. I avoided eye contact in the hall and just tried to blend in as

much as possible and go unnoticed because that was better than being the butt of the joke. I started taking pills my parents made me take and talking to a professional I didn't want to talk to. My sleep worsened because of the pills, but my mom just kept thinking I was on drugs and fighting with me. I started having sex and smoking cigarettes just to get a break from it all and feel good or try to for just a minute or more. I was in pure survival mode.

This went on for another year-I ended up kicked out and in a girls home with Jennifer, but the state made my parents decide if they wanted us or we needed to go to Foster care. They chose to take us back. Things were quiet and my dad announced he wanted to take me to a Family Reunion! I was excited to get some alone time with my dad. We drove about six hours to Central Michigan and I got out of the car-I turned around and he had left without a Goodbye. I mingled with family I didn't know very well at all and ended up learning that my dad had decided I was going to move to Iowa to live with my aunt and uncle. The only issue with this was I didn't want to and he hadn't discussed this with my real mom.

I went to Iowa and I hated it. The people hung out in a Sherman Williams parking lot for fun. It was nothing like anything I was used to, and I stuck out like a sore thumb. I couldn't believe I was trapped in this town, and the family I was living with wanted to change my last name. I would cry at night and wonder what Jenny was doing and why she got to stay home. I quickly found a phone I could use to call my mom and we made a plan. I went to the airport to board a plane to see my best friend who I had stayed in contact with from Wisconsin. Missy and her mom picked me up from the airport. After staying a couple of days in Wisconsin with Missy I boarded a plane to Texas and lived with my mom for the next few years.

It wasn't easy living in Texas, but it wasn't bad either. My real mom was actually a normal person and didn't scream and yell and pick fights with me. She didn't periodically lose her mind and kick me out of the hospital. She got to stay home with the kids during the week and sometimes worked on the weekend. I had a lot of freedom to do things, but it was hard to find friends because my school was so big. We didn't seem to have any gangs and there was always something to do, but I was afraid to do them alone. I missed Jenny and wished I had someone like her to hang out with. I met Randy a few months after I moved through a mutual friend and we hung out every day. We fought a lot-I was never perfect enough-and he would break up with me just to see how I would react. Looking back he was actually very ugly to me, but I was desperate for companionship. Eventually, I decided I wanted more than Randy but before I could leave him, I found out I was pregnant and felt like God had chosen my path for me. We were married a few months later in a cool October ceremony.

Getting married and having a baby didn't mean things got easier like I thought it might. Things actually got harder for a multitude of reasons. I wanted desperately to make this square peg fit in a round hole, and sometimes I could actually see the potential we held for greatness. Randy just never wanted to be great. He was happy serving his own agenda and making sure I did the same. I didn't realize it at the time, but I had become isolated from my friends and family with threats and implications that I could be harmed in any scenario that did not involve Randy. We

went on to have 2 more kids. After 13 years of marriage when things were finally settling down so we could settle in Randy decided to stop working as a mechanic and become a police officer. He enrolled in the academy and took his 401K out to finance his education. He became an officer in a year and then couldn't find a job anywhere close to where we lived. He heard a place 5 hours away was hiring and left me and the kids to follow his dreams. 3 months later we followed along and enrolled the kids in Perryton schools.

Perryton was very different from the Dallas suburbs. It was a town of 10000 and had everything Randy and I wanted. It was very much like the towns we grew up in and we found it charming. It had over thirty churches and the closest Walmart was 45 minutes away. The people were friendly and the town was booming with oil money. They had a 3A football team and the school spirit could be felt in the air.

For the next five years we settled into a routine and the kids seemed to thrive. They were active in sports and other activities. They made friends and life seemed to finally be peaceful. I enjoyed being a mother more than any other role in life I could have imagined. I was with them alone quite a bit because Randy and I worked opposite shifts. Nursing began to take more priority in life and the kids had become more independent. I went back to school with the aspiration to get my Master's in Nursing.

Going from a Certificate to a Master's was quite an undertaking, and living in a rural community made it a little harder to achieve. The internet had grown alongside of me, and distance learning made more for more opportunity. I quickly achieved my first goal of RN, went on to get my Bachelors, and continued forward on the path to Nurse Practitioner.

As I became more focused and driven, my husband also thrived in his new career. He had become Sargeant which came with a welcome pay raise. He was still working nights, and he spent more and more time on his work phone. I began to hear rumors about him from people around town. And eventually on the way home from a vacation, I found out the truth. He had used his time away to develop feelings for someone else. My entire world seemed to shatter before my eyes.

I believed "Family is Everything", but as I began to look inward, I realized the harsh reality that my heart would never be the same and that I could not live in a loveless marriage. I felt my kids deserved to see me happy. The yelling, throwing things, breaking furniture, isolation, and control were not at all what I wanted them to continue to see. Tension at home was at an all time high and it was time to decide the next steps.

I met Tripps a long time before I started my Nurse Prac program. He was a quiet sort. He kept his head down and just went to work in any environment I saw him in. Everyone loved when he was on call because they knew the situation would be handled swiftly, effectively, and systematically. The patients with the best outcomes were the ones he was involved with. I had also heard that he had a son die while he was on duty in a car accident and I had seen how empathetic he was, especially when children were involved. I asked him if he would mentor me

because he seemed to love to teach and he knew more than anyone I could have dreamt up. He agreed and I started working alongside him in August of 2019.

My oldest graduated high school and went off to Tyler the same Summer. I tried to distract myself from my sadness, loneliness, and fear of the future by staying busy with my friends. We went out and had fun every chance we had and I enjoyed forgetting about how ugly the world was and just listening to music and laughing with my friends. I started to drink more and more.

I was excelling in Nursing and expanding my knowledge exponentially. Nothing else was going right. My kids were older now and needed very little from me. I felt like an ATM more than a mom. It was difficult and stressful to deal with them as teenagers. I wasn't sure I was ever doing a good job; I certainly had very little by way of example. I had read a lot of parenting books but none about teenagers. I think because they weren't written; no one knows what to do with that age!

It was Oct. 2020 before I realized I had completely and forever fallen in love with Tripps. I couldn't tell him that I thought it was the most amazing human I'd ever met. I had watched him heal so many people both emergently and through education and prevention. I had seen the skill of his strong hands as they repaired tissue or excised disease. He was so precise and never shaken; qualities I truly admired. The way he told stories would pull you in and you would forget anyone else was around. He taught you in words that created pictures in your mind, helping me to remember complex operations the body and medications perform to maintain function. I never knew the whole time he was teaching me to heal others, he was healing my heart. Not until the end was very near did I realize this-and I panicked at the thought of not having him as part of my life.

At the end of October my clinicals ended. I went on to take my Boards. That day was the last day I would be with Randy. We fought over lunch and he said some really ugly, awful things to me. Instead of waiting for me to take the test like we had discussed, he left me stranded at the testing center without my cellphone. I found out almost immediately that I passed and called Tripps in tears to share my news. His response was "of course you did."

I moved out of the house and in with a friend. The divorce was filed and I graduated with my Masters in Nursing in December. I started working in the ER as a Nurse Practitioner in Jan of 2020. Tripps was suffering horribly with his health and I thought he might die. Literally, he was septic and not getting better. He was still working, but he was not the same. He had very little energy and nothing left to spare. I prayed he would get well very soon.

In March of 2020, COVID finally hit our rural community. Tripps had completed 6 weeks of IV antibiotics and had a surgery to help his condition. He was getting better just in time for the biggest fight I had ever seen in Healthcare. I had no idea what lay ahead the next 3 years in politics and medicine. It impacted the entire globe in ways no one could have predicted. I continued to work in the ER, as my divorce got pushed further and further back because the court system was not seeing civil courses to help reduce the spread of COVID. Tripps was

getting better and better and it was good to see him return to the same fun loving friend I had known. I moved to my own Duplex and bought a puppy-Scout. My kids weren't seeing me much even though I stayed two blocks away so they could. Their dad had convinced them I was contaminated and they would give him COVID and he would die because of his Diabetes. He was still eating fast food and drinking Dr. Peppers at this point, but my kids didn't understand and wanted to protect their dad. So, Scout became my sole companion and she would comfort me as I sat on my hands on the couch and cried about the people I couldn't help.

Eventually, I moved to Amarillo to get away from the small town politics and start a job that didn't deal with death everyday. I kept in touch with Tripps and once we were both divorced, we started dating. Life with him was spectacular in so many ways. I experienced a happiness and fulfillment I had never had before. He made me feel safe and took my feelings into consideration. He learned to read my mind and we became inseparable. Randy got fired from his job for conduct unbecoming of an officer and eventually married one of his girlfriends he met on the side of the road. They moved 30 minutes away from Perryton where he could find a job.

Tripps and I married in February of 2024 alone on a mountain top. The ceremony and our love was something out of a fairy tale and continued on past the Honeymoon. We lived together in Amarillo 50 percent of the time for one year before we decided we needed to be together every night and every morning. We bought a house in Perryton and I went to work for the hospital. Life seemed like it had finally worked out and everything would be alright.

We spent time with the kids on a regular basis and Aidan ended up living with his sister Alyson after we moved. Six months later he shot himself and died. I will never forget walking up to the scene and seeing Alyson and Devon crying. The way they held me and just broke apart made my soul ache in ways it never had; not even when I thought Randy broke me. I had been sober for a few months by that time, and knew this would bring about a challenge that would be hard to not use as an excuse to completely lose myself. This time, I had the support of Tripps.

The funeral was awful and terrible and quite easily the hardest process of my life. If I've learned anything growing up it is to get back up. And I just keep getting up every day. I make sure I make my bed, and brush my teeth, get dressed and go to work. I make sure not to drink even a little or to fool myself into thinking I can. I make sure to be kind to everyone because you never know. And I especially make sure to let people I love know it. I can't wait to see what beautiful thing happens next.