

Courage

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## BORN IN A JUNGLE

I was born in a grass hut in the jungle of Panama. I was the fourth born in a family of five girls and one boy. As a little girl, I can remember being hungry and having no shoes or underclothes. About two times a year, my mother went to the closest town, Las Minas. She bought material from which she made dresses for us to wear. We wore them until they were shreds. I can remember climbing trees and catching bugs. My dad made us little toys from wood and moccasins from cow hide.

People in the jungle didn't have regular jobs. They would work for each other when someone needed something done. When my dad went to work for his friends, he used the money he made to buy chicha (like moonshine) to drink instead of bringing the money home for the family. He became an alcoholic and eventually lost everything he had. He even sold our possessions to buy alcohol. My mother's adopted parents lived within a mile of us and helped as they could.

When I was about eight or nine, a woman came to the jungle from a small village and said she was my aunt. She asked to take me to live with her. My mom said she could take one of her daughters because it would help her. She told my mom she would send me to school. Really she was no relation and was just looking for a servant. She sent me to school, but I could go only when I wasn't busy taking care of her or her store. I walked about three miles to the school. She didn't help me with my schoolwork and treated me mean. The other kids at school called me a "chola" which means a poor person from the jungle. I remember they made fun of me and didn't want to play with me. The woman I lived with abused me physically and made me take her homemade tamales throughout the neighborhood selling them door to door. She

said, "Don't come back until they are all gone." I was very unhappy. It was so hot, and I had no shoes.

I stayed with her three or four years. One day she sent me out to sell tamales. It was hot, and I was very tired of being her "slave." The tamales sold for 25¢ each. I figured out how much money I should get for the tray of tamales, took that amount out of the cash register in the store, and then went out and gave the tamales away. My "aunt" had told me not to come back until I had sold all of them, and that's what I did.

One of our regular customers saw how I was being treated, so she helped me make a plan for running away. It was very scary for me. I went to bed one night as usual, but I stayed awake and waited for the bus that came by at 1:00 A.M. She advised me to put a veil on my face. I took the bus to Central Avenue in Panama City where I met the customer's friend. She took me to live in her home in the Canal Zone. I was a maid for her and helped take care of her kids, but I was treated well. I stayed with her about four years. The only thing that I was thinking about was survival.

At this time I still didn't know how old I was. We never celebrated birthdays in the jungle. When I was about four, my mother took the day-long walk with me to the little town of Las Minas in the jungle to have me baptized at the Catholic church. She must have remembered the day of my birth to tell the priest at the church, but she never told me. In the jungle we were more concerned with just making it through each day than with celebrations.

I must have been around sixteen when I decided to go off on my own. I left the woman in the Canal Zone, got a job in a bar in Panama City, and rented an apartment. It wasn't long before I was pregnant. I became a single, unwed mother. Life was very hard for me and my son Jorge. When he was three, I met a wonderful man from the United States who was in the

Air Force. We married and lived on base. In order to get married I had to have a birth certificate. We took a trip back to Las Minas where I had been baptized, and they still had the record in the priest's small office. That's when I found out that I was twenty-one years old.

My husband, Joe Lofink, adopted Jorge soon after we were married. Three years later we came to the United States and set up our home in Thornport, Ohio. We were married twelve years. After our divorce I got a job with Bundy as a production specialist. I met Greg Peck, and we eventually married. Jorge is now married, also, and has two boys. He is a construction worker. In 2007 my job ended when the factory was closed and moved to Mexico. With no formal education and bad health, I once again had to find a way to survive. Bundy arranged for all of their employees to go to training through One Stop to help us find work. As part of my training, I was sent to the Perry County ABLE class. This has provided me more formal education than I have ever had in my life. I am grateful to be in the United States where you have the opportunity to get an education and become someone. I am very happy that my son had the chance that I didn't have and am very proud of my two grandsons.

*~Eneida L. Peck*

## MY STORY

My name is Mattie E. Linscott. I was born on Nov. 1, 1978, to Eli and Susan Slabaugh in Mt. Eaton, Ohio. I have four older brothers, five older sisters, and one younger brother. I started school when I was five, but after two months the school board said I was too young, even though I did better than the other kids that started the same time. My parents took me out of school, but my sister Katie home schooled me that year. I ended up having to take first grade again at school.

I went to a one-room schoolhouse with 50 other students. It wasn't always fun because in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade an older kid who sat behind me kept poking me with his pencil. I told the teacher, but nothing was done. Within a few months I was swollen under my arms. I had to go to the doctor. The doctor took two cups of infection from under my arms because of the poison from the lead in the pencil.

A few years later, in the end of June, my stomach hurt. My mom made me crawl down the stairs headfirst. This was supposed to make the fluids in my appendix empty. The next day they took me to the hospital to find out what was wrong. The doctor said it was appendicitis and they would have to operate. I was a scared little ten-year-old when I had to go to the hospital for the operation. I was in the hospital for three days. After the operation, it took me quite a while to get strong. I had to relearn how to walk.

After 6<sup>th</sup> grade my parents moved everyone to Shreve, Ohio. My mom home schooled my brother and me. She had other chores she wanted me to do, like baking bread, mopping floors, or something that kept me from my schoolwork. I quit trying because it was too hard to do school work and do house work. My education came to a halt.

Mom said it was time for me to go to work, so I started work at the orchard with my sisters MaryAnn and Amanda. Mom kept the money I made because until you are 21 you have to give your parents any money for giving you a place to stay and for raising you. Our boss at the orchard started the day with a Bible Study. That was my introduction to the Word of God in English. I really enjoyed this.

My sister MaryAnn started to go to a Bible study on Wednesday nights to learn more about God. I tagged along a few times. Going to Bible study was against the Amish culture, so when my mom found out about our excursions there she wanted to stop us. Her remedy was to move our family to my brother's house, which was about 15 miles away to distance us from this evil. The whole church was at our house early, before daylight, to move us to his house.

That day, I decided that I did not want to stay in the Amish church. I made plans to leave for good. I was 15 and a half years old. As my family was packing, I hid my boxes of clothes in the attic. After dark I grabbed my things and crawled out the window to escape. I walked to Shreve Lake, around a mile away, on the dark warm summer night. I was scared but also felt relieved that I would not have to live in such a strict environment any more.

For a couple of weeks I lived with my sister Amanda at my cousin's house, an old chicken coup that was fixed into a home. Then I moved in with my sister MaryAnn and her husband for a couple of months. My mom found out I was there. She was going to make me move back home because she thought I was too young to be away from home. Before she arrived I called my sister Amanda, and she picked me up. I lived with her for about a month. I worked as a housekeeper at a restaurant in Shreve in the evenings. I didn't like some of the things that were happening there, like drugs, and I feared for my safety.

I wanted to go to the same church as my sister MaryAnn and her family. I moved in with Tim and Jennifer Miller, who were friends from MaryAnn's church. I grew spiritually. I met others my age. I also was the "big sister" to the Miller children. In my family home there were no hugs and goodnights, but living with the Millers there were. If I was away from them at bedtime, I came home to find a note telling me goodnight and some words of praise. I felt such a part of this family. They gave me birthday parties and treated me so great.

I met the man who won my heart through my cousins. When I was eighteen Mike and I got married. His eight-year-old son Mikey came to live with us. We soon began our own family of two more boys. I thought everything was okay between Mike and me, but things with Mikey were shaky. Mikey was doing a lot of complaining to his grandma that he was being made to do things he didn't want to do, and he made up stories that were untrue. He also threatened my life and our boys on several occasions. Things got out of control the longer he was there. He stole, lied, and was violent.

Mike said his Grandma needed his help to move one Sunday. He took the kids while I went on to church. When I arrived back home I was horrified that my husband left with everything. He had taken our sons, Jesse and Thomas, with him. They were only 6 and 3. I was left with only a couch, a bed, and books. I felt like a piece of discarded trash. He took everything that was of value to me, my kids, himself and he just left me. The trailer roof fell down a couple days after he left after a heavy rain storm. The next week, the furnace gave out. It was cold on those fall days in Ohio. I had my kitchen stove to keep me warm until it quit working within a few days. I felt so desperate. My world fell apart.

I was alone for at least two months. My boys were the only thing that kept me alive for a while. I loved them, and I knew

they needed me. Then Mike asked me to get back together. I didn't trust him, but I wanted my boys, and with the living conditions at the trailer I knew he wouldn't let the boys live there, so I made the decision to move in with him. He insisted that I get a job, so I found an ad in the paper to deliver newspapers. I was hired a couple days later. I worked delivering papers in the wee hours of the morning seven days a week. I still deliver papers four years later.

Things were no better with my stepson, who was now 15. He continued his disrespect, lies, and stealing. His violence scared me. He shoved me to the ground, but Mike insisted I drop the charges. It was always Mikey over me. I stayed in this situation because I found out I was pregnant. I hid this from Mike until around my fifth month. At first he wasn't very happy about it, but because it was a girl, he was accepting and he calmed down. Things were a little better, but Mikey was still in the picture. Finally about two years later Mike and Mikey had a fight. Mike made Mikey move out. Things have been so much better for our family.

Mike wanted Thomas to be in a preschool. I was interested in pursuing my GED and went to The Gault Family Learning Center to find a way to get my GED and get Thomas into a preschool. I met Bonnie Sander who sent me to "Families Learning Together Preschool". We began in September 2005. Anastasia was born on Nov.29, 2005. We enjoy FLT so much. We learn here. I enjoy my tutors. It is like a big family. I get so much support. I've been here with my big FLT family for 4 years...and I'm finally about to receive my GED now!

*~Mattie Linscott*

## C-H-A-N-G-E

- C** is for the **constant** up-hill battle to bring this nation together.
- H** is having the **heart** and determination to take on such a task.
- A** is for the **admiration** from others to stand on at all times.
- N** is the **need** for a better society.
- G** is for the **gift** of the task in order to bring this nation through.
- E** is for the victorious **end**, which is the evidence of the change we need to unite this great nation.

~Micaela Strickland

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## MY DREAM OF HAPPINESS

May 24, 2008. My throat is dry, my knees are shaking. I'm grinning with anxiousness at my three testing teachers, not knowing what will happen in the next few minutes. I just know this will be a disaster—like every time when I have an oral test. I couldn't sleep the night before because I was so nervous. My adrenaline was zapped before it could have helped me in my graduation test. I see in the eyes of my teachers that I'm looking terrible with black rings around my eyes. Terrified, I start to speak...

3 months later: "You're crazy," Tobias, a classmate, told me. I knew that he thought I wasn't tough enough for the United States. But I'm here right now, aren't I? (I'm an Au Pair, working for an American family and taking care of their child for one year.) It was not like I decided on a whim to go abroad. There was always the wish deep inside me to go to another country for one year or more. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, people have come to America to live the American Dream—to have their freedom, whatever freedom meant to them (success, happiness, religious freedom, etc.). It's the same for me. The small difference is that I want to have achieved confidence when I go back to Germany and start from there to fulfill my goals. It's not that I'm dreaming of a life as a nanny. There are different reasons why I came to the United States: learn the language, meet new people, travel around, and learn many things about different cultures. To me, the most important goal is to improve my self-confidence. Maybe after the Au Pair year I will finally know what I want to do?

Now I've already been here for 18 weeks. How shall I make up my mind, when life shows me more and more opportunities every day? I have been here for just 4 months, and I have seen more places in the U.S. than most Americans could see in that short time. I have also met a lot of

interesting people. Once I talked to an astrologist who asked me what I want to do after this year. I said "I don't know. It's difficult to make a choice." And he said "No, no it's not difficult. You just have to know what your passion is." "Oh, great!" I thought. The problem with that is that I don't know what my passion is! There are many things that I like to do, but nothing I really would love to do. Also I would be unable to do everything that might interest me. Because I can't speak in front of groups and the majority of well-paid positions include this ability, right now I wouldn't be great at these jobs.

In my dreams I thought after the year I would be changed when I went back to Germany. Change of character and maturity comes without much realization. I told my mom once, after a few months working with my host child, "I'm sorry, mom, for the hard times I gave you in my childhood!" (Not that I want to compare myself with my host child in any way!) Finally, I started to think about certain things in a different way. Of course, I'm still far away from being an old, wise, gray-haired lady. That's probably why I realized pretty late that change doesn't come over night. That's not realistic for skills I need to acquire and for my big goal to have more self-confidence, which is essential for my success at work, conferences, meetings, and other life situations. It takes hard work to change. And I need to work on it every day.

The truth is: just dreaming, believing, and hoping can't make changes! It's your choice how your life is going to look, which is also part of the idea of the American Dream—to work hard and gain much. We would say in Germany: You're the smith of your own luck! Of course, this is not just about making a career. That's not my definition of happiness. Like Linda, the sister of my host dad said: "You are special and you are no big deal. At the end, all that counts are the relationships you had." To love and to be loved. What I

wanted to say and you probably know: Basic needs and happiness are very closely connected nowadays.

I want to have my own family and two kids in about 10 years, but to feel safe in times like today you need enough money! So I need to work hard to fulfill my dream of happiness. Right now not all opportunities are open for me because of my uncertainty. Maybe I will get closer to this dream after my Au Pair year, when I have lessened my fear of speaking in front of groups. Maybe you have a similar situation and think "I cannot change it. I'm different and my situation is different!" Don't give up! There is more strength in you than you think. Rod, a volunteer in my English class, would say: "Face the fears, then you get used to it." I'll keep trying, although my history isn't very motivating and because of that it's very hard for me. We must always remember that we get another chance to make it right. You never want to ask yourself when it's too late: "Why didn't I just try?" So grab it! Because in the end, what matters is that you believe in your dream of happiness.

*~Ines Mueller*

## TO MY SON IN IRAQ

You're fighting for freedom  
It's the right thing to do  
But it doesn't stop me  
From missing you.

I know you are strong  
You are a part of me  
But my baby boy  
You will always be.

I know your eyes have  
Seen more than mine  
More than most will see  
In a lifetime.

My heart goes out to you  
In that dark place  
I long to see  
Your lovely face.

Until that day I will  
Wait and wait  
I know right now  
It's up to fate.

Love,  
Mom

*~Paula Mitchell*

## IN THE EYES OF

In the eyes of our young soldiers at war... some joined the armed services to follow in their ancestors' footprints. Some of them planned to go to college. Some of them wanted to learn to fly a plane. Some of them wanted help at becoming men, and some of them just wanted to play out the army games they played as children.

Imagine the fear of a young soldier at war. One day he was being all he could be at boot camp, driving Army tanks, throwing fake grenades, and "Playing Army." Now he must fight for his life and the lives of others.

The grenades, bombs, and guns are now the real thing. Is he properly trained? Is he ready to fight in a war? Did he understand what he was doing when he signed the dotted line? How could he have understood? He's still in his teen years! Most of them had no clue that they were signing their death wish.

Embrace the pain of our young soldiers at war. The men and women, all of them young at heart, will return home never the same again. They have seen things many of us could never imagine. The prisoners of war have sustained pain, which is of a torturing nature. Visualize being a pilot, being given orders to drop bombs on Iraq, and then later to hear of the civilian casualties. Think of the guilt these soldiers must feel in their hearts, to be accountable for that much blood on their hands. Nobody really wins in a war. Everybody loses. Lives are changed forever.

*~Karen Flick*

