

# Life's Beginnings



## CHILDHOOD DAYDREAMS

What is your earliest childhood memory? Was it playing with your favorite G.I. Joe or Ninja Turtles on the floor of your first bedroom? Was it riding down the driveway on your bike without training wheels for the first time? Or maybe you remember jumping into a crystal clear swimming pool on a hot summer day.

One of my earliest memories was when I was about eight years old. On a cool summer day you could always find me in the back yard beside the pine trees on my old, rusty swing set protected by the canopy of leaves next to the dog house and the recently built tree house at the edge of the woods. I always chose the same swing hanging from the red and blue striped frame in between the monkey bars and teeter-totter. With the cool, refreshing summer air rushing through my red, curly hair, I would swing back and forth for hours and hours, listening to the squeaks in the rusty chains and enjoying the sweet smell of freshly cut grass.

With the warm summer sun on my face, I would put my imagination to work. Immediately my swing would turn into the starship from the movie *Star Wars*. Sometimes I was racing down the L.A. streets in a 1994 Dodge Viper with the brains blown out sitting on 20" spinners. For some strange reason the most fun and imaginative time I can remember was those carefree summer afternoons spending four to six hours swinging, lost in a daydream.

~ *Dusty Shriner*

## I WANTED A BIKE

November 19, 1960, was my twelfth birthday. I asked for a new red bike. My parents both worked, and I had no sisters or brothers, so I was really hoping to get a new bike that year.

My dad worked with pottery in Roseville, and he had been there for a long time. In May of 1960, my dad got sick and went to the doctor. The doctor told my dad that he had liver cancer and would have six months to live. He kept working until he started getting sick at work, so he quit.

My mom worked at a store in Zanesville. She had to keep working to pay the bills, but it was hard for her with dad getting worse. She thought she was going to have to quit her job to take care of him, but my grandmother came to stay with us and help take care of her son.

On November 3, 1960, just sixteen days before my birthday, my dad got real sick. It had been six months to the day when the doctor told him about his liver cancer. My grandmother told me to go to school, and if I was needed at home, someone would come to get me. It was about noon that day when my aunt came to school after me. She said my mom needed me at home. When I got there, I found out that my dad had died. My mom and grandmother were in the living room crying, and I just wanted out of there, so I ran out the back door. I just wanted to be alone for awhile.

That night after everyone had gone home, I said to my mom that I probably wouldn't get my bike for my birthday now. She told me that my dad had her put the bike in layaway two weeks before he died. I missed my dad a lot and was very upset, but I know he was as happy about my new bike as I was on my birthday. I asked for a red bike, but I got

a green one, but the color didn't matter. I was so happy. I kept my bike for a long time.

Sometimes I think about things that happened when I was young and my dad; my bike always comes to my mind. It was one birthday I'll always remember.

~ *Charlene Rhodes*

### BARBIE'S NEW DO

When I was about four, I gave myself a haircut because I wanted to make my Barbie doll's hair longer. I got out the scissors and started cutting my hair from the underneath. When I thought I had enough of my own hair, I started to glue my hair to Barbie. Once I realized it wasn't working, I panicked. Not only was some of my hair missing, but also my Barbie's hair was full of glue. What a mess I had made! So I decided to throw all my hair and the doll behind my dresser.

About a week later, my mom decided to clean my room. "Uh-oh!" I thought. When she pulled out the dresser, she found my mess. She picked my hair up in handfuls and picked up my doll and asked, "What did you do?" As innocently as I could, I said, "I tried to make my doll's hair longer." All she could do was laugh. To this day she teases me about it.

~ *Melissa Martin*

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF BEING A PARENT?

Being a parent is a lot of work. As parents we have to watch everything we do and say in front of our children, because kids are like sponges. They do what they see us as parents do. Being a good role model can help parents want to be better people in the eyes of their own children.

Being a parent has been scary, exciting, and joyful all at the same time. I have one daughter who is 10 years old. I had my daughter when I was only 18, and she really opened my eyes and helped me grow up. But if I had to do it again, I would.

One of my favorite memories of her growing up was potty training. We worked at it for so long and I never thought she would do it. Finally, one morning I heard her wake up and sit on the potty. She was so proud of herself!

I also enjoyed teaching her shapes and colors. She loved to learn different things when I made it fun for her. She is still that way. Now that she's 10, she's getting more independent. I'm starting to feel a little less needed, but she still needs me when it matters.

Being a parent has its good times and sometimes bad or sad times. I know when she goes off to college or gets married, I won't want to let her go. But isn't that what we do as parents? We spend all this time raising kids to teach them how to make it in this scary world, with hope that they'll remember some of the advice we give them.

~ Valerie Puckett

## MY LIFE

Growing up for me was hard most of the time. I was a happy kid, but as the years went by, life just seemed to get harder. We didn't have lots of money. My dad worked every day, but the pay wasn't very good. He supported my two brothers and me. My mom stayed home to take care of us. She did not trust anyone to watch us because my older brother was very hard to handle. She was afraid that someone might mistreat us.

We didn't have a car most of the time. When we did get a car, it would last maybe a few months. Then it would break down, and we didn't have money to fix it up. My dad had to ask people to give him a ride to work and home. We walked to the store to get our food and personal items. My parents didn't even have enough money to buy us clothes. We wore hand-me-downs from a friend of my mother. Her friend had three boys, so most of my elementary days of school, I wore boys' clothes. Lots of times they were too big, but that's all we had.

My mom was depressed most of our lives. She would have liked to buy us nice things and take us to a movie or even to a nice restaurant, but it was impossible. But she always made sure that we had a place to live and we never went hungry. Watching my mom and dad struggle their whole lives was hard.

When I started school, the other kids always picked on me because we couldn't afford to buy clothes. I didn't fit in at all. They called me names everyday throughout my school years. By the time I was in my sophomore year, I just started giving up. I didn't care anymore about myself. Life had been a struggle from day one. I figured what was the use of trying.



I started working at 16, so I could get things for my mom. I didn't want to see Mom beg for anything, and I wanted to buy myself some nice clothes. I thought buying nice clothes would make things a little easier for me in school. I thought finally I would fit in. But it was too late for me. People already had their opinions about me. They just didn't like me, and I didn't even like myself anymore.

I dropped out of school at 18 and worked full time. Six months later I got pregnant with my first son, Matt. His dad was in college and he wasn't ready to be a dad, so he took off. I raised Matt by myself, with the help of my parents. Three months later I met Roger. I thought maybe my life would start getting better because someone loved my son and me. He asked me to marry him, and I said yes. I got pregnant with my second son, Chris, before we could get married. Soon after that Roger decided he didn't want to be around for us. I then was stuck raising two children on my own.

We didn't have anything. I had to work three jobs in order to have a place to live with my boys. We had no car, no phone, and I had no friends. I had my mom and dad. I was on welfare so we could have food and medical coverage. I then met Noah's dad. I thought he was going to be good for us. Be he wasn't; he was on drugs. And that wasn't good for my children to be around. So I told him he had to go. I would do it alone.

I was depressed and started drinking a lot after my third son came along. That went on for about a year. Things were so hard, and I wanted to give up, but I couldn't because of the boys. They only had me to depend on. I turned to God to help us. I started working hard for them and me. I built myself up, met a wonderful man, and I couldn't ask for a better life now.

So no matter how hard your life is, never give up.  
There is a better life out there. But it takes hard work to get  
where you need to be. It's your choice.

*~ Kelley Kerper*

### MY LIFE THEN AND NOW

My family had seven kids plus my parent – 5 girls and 2 boys. We lived in the country with a big back yard, and we got our water from a cistern. In the country, a lot of the neighbors grew their own vegetables and fruit, and my mother would buy from them. She made us kids break up half-runners every weekend in the summer before we could go outside and play. Back then, we had to make up our own games because we never had a lot of toys. So all the kids would come to our house and we would play “cops and robbers,” jump rope, or climb a tree. There was a creek across the road that sometimes we were allowed to play in. I remember one day I got my foot cut on a piece of glass, and I told my mother a fish bit me! I remember on Friday nights my parents would get a babysitter so they could go to the grocery store. They would always bring home a big watermelon and after we would eat some of it, my sister and I would take the seeds out back and plant them, hoping we would grow our own watermelon.

One day, my parents decided to move to the city. It was different because there was a lot of cars and noise. Every morning we got up for school, ate breakfast, and got dressed. Then I stood on a chair to do the dishes and put them away before we left for school. In the city, my mother always took us to church, and that was a lot of fun. There was a time when one of us was talking in church, and my mom would whisper all of our names until she got to the right one. She said when we got home she was going to spank us. We would all say the other one was talking, so she spanked all of us so she would be sure to get the right one! Again, in the city, we had to make up our own games to play, so we played hide and seek, four-square, and hop-scotch.

When it was time for Christmas, we would put up a silver tree, and we had a light with four colors that would shine on the tree. Right before Christmas, my mother would buy fruit, candy, and nuts and put them in brown paper bags for our church to give to kids. For Christmas presents, we either got a doll, a coat, or a watch. Today, kids get everything on their list. We never had a lot of toys, but we had a lot of love and laughter in the house.

School was hard for me. When I was born, the cord was around my neck so it made me have speech problems. In the country, we had to catch the bus to go to school. I didn't like the bus because I would get motion sick and the other kids made fun of me. In the city, we moved right across the street from the school so we could walk. My older brother was the only one who could understand what I was saying when I talked. In school I had to take speech lessons.

After about three years in the city, we moved again. From the new house, we had to walk about a mile to the school bus. I remember a lot of hills and a big dog that would always chase us. Every day I would save something from lunch to give to the dog so I could get back home. I remember going to junior high school and my mother made us wear dresses all the time, so the kids made fun of us. My older sister would roll her skirt up so it would be short, but of course, I was afraid to do that. So not only did they make fun of me because of my speech but also because of my clothes. I used to cry all the time and would hardly take part in the school room.

But one day, I went to church and learned about a man in the Bible that had a speech problem also. When God told him to go and speak to people, he said, "I can't, because of my speech" and the Lord would say, "Don't worry about your speech because I will give you the words to say and they will understand." And the man did what God told him to do.

So I decided to start praying about my speech problem, and for a long time nothing changed. And then one day, people were starting to understand what I was saying. I kept praying every day. Even today, there are words that I know I have a hard time saying, but I have come a long way by the help of the Lord.

At the age of fifty, I started a new job. To work there, you need a diploma or GED. Of course, I never got one. Because all the kids at school made fun of me, I had quit. My new employers asked me to go to school for my GED and I said "yes" even though I hated school. They encouraged me to go by letting me keep my job while I get finished with school. I would like to thank my job for pushing me and having faith that I can do it. And thanks to my teachers for taking the time to teach me and trying to get me ready for the GED test. Thanks everyone!

*~ Brenda Dicus*

## THE GOLD HILL

To the north of the town where I was born, Aguacatan, are many hills with trees, animals, and a beautiful river. When I was a child of approximately 3 or 4 years old, I had an uncle; he was the oldest uncle, a poor man, and he couldn't get the money he needed to rent his traditional costume to be in the Moros Dance.

The Moros Dance is a typical dance, and they use a special costume made out of expensive materials. The masks are made of wood and are carved by men that work a long time to make beautiful faces. That year was his turn to dance at the traditional party. In April every year we celebrate the Blessed Virgin Maria La Encarnation Honor (Patrones of the Village) with a party that lasts for one week (Monday through Sunday). All of the people enjoy dancing to the Marimba music; the Marimba is a traditional instrument in Guatemala. People wear elegant dresses, see family members and friends that they haven't seen for a long time; it is a vacation week in my city.

On Sunday in April, 1980, my uncle was very sad. He left his house, because the party was going to start the next day; he went to the forest and he sat on a big stone on the bank of the San Juan River. He didn't come back home that day.

The San Juan River is a big river and was born on that hill, many years ago; it was a water well, and one day when a girl called Juana arrived to get water from that water well, she saw a full basket of beautiful flowers and gold in the middle of the water well. She wanted to reach it but the basket moved inward very slowly. She followed it and she sank into the water well; she was gone and never came back.

Later the water well converted into a big river, now called the San Juan River.

In 1995 the big river disappeared for seven minutes. All of the fish were jumping on the sand, some people were crying, others were praying. After seven minutes the big river came back. It was very strange, and that place is the main tourist attraction in my city.

My uncle was sitting and thinking there on the bank of the river, when a horseman appeared with a sword and gold clothes. He said, "Why are you sad?" My uncle said, "I'm very sad, because I couldn't get the money I needed to rent my costume." The horseman said, "Come with me; climb up onto my horse's back, but I want to tell you something. Close your eyes and do not open them until I tell you." My uncle got onto the horse's haunches, he closed his eyes, and he could hear that they were walking to the west, they were climbing the hill. He could feel when they bumped the wall of the ravine; he could hear when three horse's locks rustled. When they arrived inside the place, the horseman said, "Open your eyes now! No more sadness, no more worries and find the costume that you like."

It was a big surprise for my uncle, because the place had many beautiful things. It was inside the hill that belonged to the horseman. My uncle started to search for a costume when he found the costume he wanted. He was very happy because it was very beautiful. It had shiny ornaments on it. Then he started to search for a mask. He found one that was so beautiful; right away when he touched it, the hill thundered and he heard, "Don't touch that mask! That's the Mr. Thunder's mask." When he found everything that he wanted, the horseman said, "Let's go. Bring all of your things and engrave this in your memory. Don't tell anybody, don't accept gum, don't drink any liquor (beer) with the people during the week of the party." They left that place, which had

three locks, and he had to close his eyes again, so that he couldn't recognize the place where they had gone to get the costume. My uncle was afraid as they came down the hill. They walked between the stones and arrived at the same place where they had met. It was there, when the horseman told him to open his eyes, he realized what had happened, and he understood that he was sitting on the same bank of the river. When the horseman appeared again, he said, "Go with your friends to the party and enjoy it."

On Monday he went with his friends to the party. When my uncle arrived to dance at the party with his friends, all of the people gathered to see him. None of the dancers wore a costume like he wore; he was the best dancer dancing to the Marimba song. My grandfathers had been looking for him. They found him dancing at the party with a pretty costume. They met him there, and he told them everything that had happened to him. For the ability that he had to dance, many people started to offer cigarettes, gums and liquor to him.

In the beginning, he didn't accept anything from anybody; he danced for six days without smoking or drinking liquor. But in his happiness he forgot the warning, so on Sunday in the middle of the day, he accepted a cup of liquor. He had almost finished his drink when suddenly a whirlwind started in the middle of hundreds of people. He was raised up by the whirlwind, and he was gone. All of the people were sad and surprised. My family started to cry, to worry and began waiting for him, but he never came back.

My grandfather said that he went back to the hill where he had gone to get his costume for the Moros Dance because he had broken the rules.

~ Juan Mejia Lopez