

Chapter 4

Running Away From Home

I had developed a vivid, wild imagination during my childhood that kept me afloat through emotional storms. When I couldn't cope with my situation at home or school, I would just swallow whatever emotions I had at the time (however scary or sad they were) and wait until I was alone to unleash them by pretending that I was a different person with a happier life.

Sometimes I was a heroic person, which seemed ironic since I couldn't even save myself. I was beaten from time to time with a wooden bread paddle that mother kept in plain sight at the pantry door, she would always remind me that it was right there within arms reach. I was always being punished whether I did things right or wrong. Nothing was ever right, no matter what I did. There was never a kind word said to me like "good girl" or "I am proud of you" It was only given directions.

In school I lied to the very few people I was able to get close to. I would tell them that my parents died. I was too embarrassed to show anyone my real life, which consisted of nothing but anxiety and loneliness.

I finally found some peace at a local church. Though I told no one how I was feeling, I still I found comfort there.

One day in Sunday school, the teacher was reading about a man named Job. His life was recorded in this book called the Bible.

As the teacher read to the class, Job's life came alive to me. I could feel all of his sufferings, loss and confusion as he asked God why such things were happening to him. When the teacher read Job 6:2-3, a revelation of how I was feeling was being read to me from this book. it read:

Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed,
and my calamity laid in the balances together!
For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea:
therefore my words are swallowed up.

Though this man had been dead for many years, I understood how he felt through his story. After this particular Sunday I was compelled to learn more about the Bible and God, so I tried to attend all of the Sunday school services that I could. I was overwhelmed with the desire to be with these people, because they were kind to me and smiled at me, I wanted to be with them so much I was desperate for their attention, so much so that one day I lied to my parents and told them that I went to volleyball practice when instead I went to a pizza party that the church was having.

Not only did I lie about where I had been, but I was also late coming home. Little did I know that my parents checked up on me, because they knew how much I wanted to go to this function and how disinterested I was about volleyball practice. As soon as I walked through the door I was bombarded with questions.

My step father waved his watch a fraction of an inch from my face.

Ray: Where were you, and what time does my watch say?

Where were you supposed to be? Answer me, damn it!

The shouting seemed never-ending. Being an atheist, Ray found no reason for my intense interest in church to begin with.

Me: I don't know, I don't know, I don't know. I'm sorry.

Ray had been drinking that day, just like all the days leading up to that moment. Mother walked into the kitchen as she always did. Clean something, make something, just to do something with her anxiety, so she wouldn't have to acknowledge what was being done to me in the other room.

She disappeared, though I knew she was nearby. I could hear the rattling of the pots, pans and dishes. I screamed in my mind as soon as he grabbed hold of my left wrist. I clenched my teeth as soon as I saw him raise the paddle up in the air with his right hand.

I can't describe the spanking, though I remember sharp pain and him hitting the palm of my right hand as I would wedge it between the paddle and my body. I was beginning to get dizzy and I could no longer think. I screamed out for God to help me. "GOD"

The paddle stopped in midair as if an Angel had grabbed his wrist. It seemed as though God had just been waiting for me to scream His name before intervening.

Once Ray loosened his grip, I ran upstairs to my room. There with his eyes wide open stood Steven. I immediately hugged him.

Something inside of me said RUN RUN RUN Get out of your house RUN. And so I kept trying running away until I got away.

Me: Everything's going to be okay, I love you, but I'm leaving.

Steven: Where are you going?

Me: I don't know, I just have to get out of here.

I gave him one last hug, hesitating to leave him there. I jumped out of the two-story window and into the snow bank below. I then climbed over the wooden fence that surrounded the house and ran straight to our neighbor's house.

Neighbor: Can I help you?

Me: Please don't make me go home, I don't know what to do.

Neighbor: What's the problem?

Me: I just don't want to go back home.

I knew that if I went back after attempting to run away, that I would surely get beaten. The neighbor called the police.

Officer: What seems to be the trouble here?

Me: I don't want to go home.

For some reason I just couldn't put into words why I didn't want to be there. Everything was just so confusing. I felt bad, and things were not getting any better.

Officer: We have to take you home and speak to your parents.

The police officers thanked the neighbor for his concern and off we went.

The police escorted me to their car and drove around the block to my house.

The police officer sitting in the passengers seat turned to me.

Officer: Is there anything else you want to say to us before we talk to your parents?

I just shook my head, I didn't know what to say, I couldn't speak the fear took over my mind. The police officers and I got out of the car and walked up to the front door. My mother opened the door, and Ray stood directly behind her.

Police: We need to speak to your parents alone.

Mother then instructed me to go to my room. I looked back at the officers, and one of them nodded his head in approval. It scared me to walk past my parents, because I knew as soon as the police left, I was going to be vulnerable to my their rage for putting them in such a position. Much to my

surprise, however, once the police left, nothing happened. Mother just told me to go to bed.

As time went on, I developed a deep hatred for my stepfather. It got to a point where I would fantasize about different ways of killing him. I was still a child I was only 14 years old. I didn't even know the concept of murder, yet I found myself contemplating it over and over again. I just wanted him to stop hurting me.

When he would hurt me emotionally or physically it would just deepen my desire to kill him. I had no love for him, only animosity. When I wasn't thinking about blowing his head right off his shoulders, I was making plans to run away. Steven and I even discussed the possibility of running away. I got to know a couple of neighborhood boys, who were also going through anguish with their parents. They were two brothers – Spencer who was about my age, and Doug, who was a little younger than Steven. I would constantly tell Spencer how much I wanted to leave home because I was so unhappy there.

One Saturday, Spencer showed us a forest right outside of town. We walked deep into the forest. We spent the entire day making plans to stay there forever. I wanted us to build a shelter out of branches. None of us had the tools to cut down the limbs, and none of us really knew what we were doing.

I was so disappointed when our efforts failed. I thought this was the break I had been waiting for, but I was wrong. It gradually began to get darker and colder outside.

Steven: Let's go home, Michelle. Let's go home. Mom and Dad are going to get worried.

He said it with such conviction that I found myself running home with tears of fear in my eyes. Reality set in. I kept a tight grip on Steven's hand, and we ran as fast as we could, without looking back to see if Spencer and Doug were following us. I was too busy worrying about saving my hide. When Steven and I got home, we didn't get into trouble. I guess our timing was perfect. As always, I found myself thanking God each time I didn't get spanked.

One morning while sitting in the bus on the way to school, I had a heart-to-heart talk with Steven.

Me: I have to get out of the house I'm going crazy.

His eyes started to fill with tears.

Steven: But I don't want you to go. Don't go, please. I need you at home, Michelle, please.

He had this nervous look on his face.

Me: I love you so much, but I have to leave because I'm going crazy.

I put my arm around him. Tears were running down his face. I just held him for the remainder of the ride. Even though I knew that leaving home was the necessary thing to do in order to retain my sanity, I could have never been prepared for the emotional consequences that would follow my decision.

Once the bus got to school, I hugged him goodbye for the last time and told him that I loved him. I was 14 years old, and he was 10. My heart was racing in anticipation for what I was about to do. As soon as I got into my classroom, I told my art teacher

Mr. Snow that I would kill myself if he didn't help me leave home. He took me into the principal's office immediately.

Teacher: Now, Michelle, tell Mr. Green (the principal) what you just told me.

Me: I'd rather die than go back home!

All he did was shake his head, and smile at me.

Mr. Green: What's the problem at home? What could be that bad?

I just looked down and shrugged my shoulders.

Mr. Green: I know someone you can talk with who can help you straighten this

Whole thing out.

The principal drove me to a therapist whose office was nearby. The whole way there, he kept reassuring me that everything was going to be just fine. I thought to myself, "This man doesn't even know what's going on. How can he possibly know that everything is going to be all right?" The therapist greeted us with a smile.

Eddie: Hi, Mr. Green. How are you doing?

Mr. Green: Fine, just fine.

Eddie: This must be Michelle. Hi, My name is Eddie. How are you doing?

Me: I don't know.

She walked toward her office.

Eddie: Come on, Michelle. Let's go inside and talk.

She then waved goodbye to the principal.

Eddie: We'll be just fine, I'll talk to you later.

He nodded and got back into his car. She and I went into her office. I was so nervous.

Eddie: What are you feeling?

She motioned for me to sit down next to her on the couch. All I did for a few moments after that was sit there and cry.

Me: I can't explain how I feel, things are happening in my home that aren't right, I can't take it. Please help me.

Eddie: What kind of things?

I wanted to tell her what was happening. If my step father felt like having sex with me he would, if he felt like beating me he would, if my mother felt like insulting me she would, if she felt like smacking me she would just reach right over and smack me. If they felt like threatening to beat me they would just to see the anxiety in my face, sometimes they would hit me, sometimes they wouldn't. sometimes I would be sent out side, other times I was placed in a corner for hours, they treated me how ever they wanted to, I was never treated with respect or talked to with love, only insults and punishment, but as a scared thirteen year old all I could say was.

Me: I need to stay out of my house, please, I feel crazy.

Eddie: What's going on in your home?

Me: I can't. I just can't explain it.

She was so patient with me that I instantly liked her. Eddie took out some markers and a pad of paper and laid them down on her desk.

Marge: Come over here, Michelle. I want you to draw your family for me.

She then motioned for me to sit down at her desk. I was reluctant but did it anyway. I sat there and stared at a blank sheet of paper.

Eddie: Take your time.

I couldn't believe how patient she was. After a while, I began to draw. I first drew a picture of Steven holding a baseball bat in the middle of the picture. And in the background, in the upper-left corner, I drew my parents together, but I drew them very small. Why I chose to draw the picture that way is beyond me, and what message she derived from the picture I'll never know. But some how she got the message, because I never had to go back

home.

As she and I were wrapping up our conversation, there was a knock on the door. When Eddie opened the door, I caught a glimpse of my mother standing in the hallway.

Me: It's my mother. Oh God, I'm in trouble!

Panic rushed through my body. Eddie turned to me.

Eddie: I'll be right back, Michelle.

Then she closed the door behind her all these horrifying thoughts ran through my mind. My stepfather's going to spank me as soon as Mother tells him what a bad girl I've been, for telling what is happening at home.

The argument in the hallway broke my concentration as it grew louder. I could hear the anxiety in my mother's voice, but couldn't quite make out what she was saying. It seemed like the counselor was gone forever.

Finally, she came back in the office alone.

Me: My mother left?

Eddie: Yes, she's gone.

Me: Was she mad?

Eddie: Everything is going to be just fine. You're going to be placed in a foster home tonight after you speak with your caseworker, Rob.

I didn't understand what was going to happen, I was just grateful that I was finally getting out of my crazy situation.

I knew my life would never be the same again after I went to court. The court hearing was to decide whether I would remain in my parents' custody or be given over to the state.

Rob: Do you understand that this is a custody hearing? What you say here from now on determines where you live.

I thought to myself, oh my God, I just want someone to listen to me. I just want to be loved, I don't want to hurt anymore. I'm not ready for this question, I need help.

The decision was made after only one question.

Judge: Do you want to live with your parents?

Me: No. I don't want to go home.

Then the drop of the judge's gavel. My mother didn't wait to break down, but instead ran after us into the hallway, screaming as the tears ran down her face.

Mother: Why are you taking my daughter away from me? How can you do this? Michelle, how could you do this to me?

A big part of my sanity died that day. My heart laid there on the floor as reality set in. It was the first time in my life that I had to do something unthinkable. I didn't know that everything had boiled down to this. I felt as if I was dead and yet still dying.