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### **My Life and My Life Changers**

My parents met at BYU. My father was from Hyde Park and was raised with four brothers on a farm. My mother was from Provo and was raised with three sisters and a lot of dysfunction. They dated for a year and were married in the Salt Lake Temple. By the time they had me they had purchased a house and had two daughters. My sisters, Teresa and Sue, are six and four years older than me and I was the last child in the family. I found a card my dad had given my mother when I was born and it said “girls are better anyway.” Clearly he wanted a boy.

I was raised in a small home in Murray. My father worked at a chemical company as a salesman until it went out of business and then he worked as a recruiter for the National Guard. My mother stayed home until I was in the seventh grade. She got a part time job with the local newspaper, typesetting the news. I was happy she was home when I was young and even happier that she wasn't when I started high school

We were a fairly typical Mormon family. Most of our activities revolved around the church and my best friends were in my “ward.” My sisters were very obedient and my parents believed earnestly in the Mormon teachings. I on the other hand was always a bit of a rebel. I didn't respect authority and I was loud and obnoxious everywhere I went. Nothing mattered more to me than having all of the attention.

My friends have always been fiercely important to me. I always felt a little disconnected from my family but my friends felt like home. By the time I reached high school there were ten

or so girls that I considered my family. I was never alone. I didn't make a decision without consulting with my friends. My family became less important to me as my friends became my whole world.

When I was a sophomore in High School my very obedient sister Teresa fell in love with a non-Mormon man. No one saw this coming and it flipped my parents out. My mother began to take sleeping pills and basically checked out. My father worried about my mother and so no one noticed that I was heading down a very wild path. While my sister was dating a non-Mormon my friends and I began to drink. We encouraged each other and we drank excessively. For almost two years my parents were unaware of what I was doing. Whether I would have become as wild as I did with their monitoring, I will never know. My sister got married and my parents calmed down. Then they noticed me and they got very strict. I just rebelled harder. My parents were incensed at my behavior and would often get physical out of frustration. I drank more. My group of friends expanded and it included boys. I broke every value that mattered to them. I had not figured out what was important to me at this point but any of my self-esteem was based on my friends and my boyfriends. Somehow my friends and I all survived our very dangerous behavior and we all were able to graduate.

After high school my friends and I chose different colleges to attend. My parents would only help me if I chose BYU so I rebelled and went to the University of Utah. I went for a year and a half before my sister offered me a job at her company. It was an engineering firm that was cleaning up the floods of 1984. They sent engineers from their corporate office in California. When the floods were cleaned up I was offered a job in California. I took the job and two of my friends and I headed west. My parents were very happy for me. In hindsight I believe it was because they could not control me. I was still drinking, cavorting and not going to church and I

was an embarrassment to them. California gave me the opportunity to achieve my identity. Up to this point I had forsaken everything that was important to my parents but that was based on rebellion and not based on any of my own values. In California I didn't have to rebel. I had a job and responsibilities and I made my own choices. While I continued to drink I wasn't as out of control. I was still very immature but I was beginning to understand that there were consequences to my actions.

After a year I became homesick. I don't know why or for who I was homesick but I just wanted to be in Utah so we moved home. I got a full-time job and rented an apartment. My relationship with my parents was still strained but it was slowly improving.

I continued to hang out with my friends and because we were 21 we started to bar hop. I met my husband, Dale, on a Tuesday Ladies Night at Reggie's Rockin R. After our first date we were never apart. I was dating a couple of other boys at this time and I thought I had been in love before but with Dale there was never a question. We got engaged six weeks after we met and were married six months later. Dale was like no one I had ever known. He had been raised Mormon as well in a very dysfunctional family He did not believe in the Mormon religion but he had strong values and he wasn't a rebel. He wasn't co-dependent and didn't have to look to others for his self-esteem as I did. I told my parents some lie about where we met and they truly loved Dale. They were disappointed that we didn't get married in the Temple but they assumed we eventually would. I think I probably thought that as well

We went to Florida for our honeymoon and I became pregnant while we were there. When I found out I was pregnant alcohol became very unimportant. It had been such a huge part of my life for 7 years but stopping drinking was one of the easiest things Dale and I had ever

done. Our first child was born nine months and two days after we were married. Madison was the most beautiful baby and the connection was immediate. Garrison was born two and a half years later and he was the sweetest little boy I had ever seen. He had a scratchy voice and he loved his sister. Hayden came two and a half years later. He was the easiest baby and was the perfect caboose to our family.

Dale and I had not really planned how we would parent. We were extremely unprepared when our children were born but we knew we loved them and wanted the best for them. We grew together and both agreed that we wanted to respect our children and allow them to be the people they were meant to be. Because we had both come from very strict households we decided to offer more flexibility to our kids. This authoritative parenting worked very well for us. Our kids were delightful and honest and sweet.

While my kids were young I felt like they might need some sort of religion in their life. I would occasionally take them to the Mormon Church and I didn't enjoy it but I thought it was the right thing to do. We tried other churches as well but nothing felt right. Then one day I had an epiphany. Religion was not necessary for my family. My kids needed to see us be honest and hard-working and kind. I called my mother and told her I was not going to raise my family in any religion. I knew I needed to start being honest with everyone about everything and that is where it started. Both of our families were devastated and they pushed us for years to come back to church. They pressured my kids very hard as well. However, as my children grew and showed how exceptional they are our families backed off.

I love being a mother. My kids and husband are the best parts of my life. My children were very involved in school and sports. They allowed Dale and me to participate in everything

with them. Dale coached sports teams and I was PTSA president. I helped my daughter run for school government offices and I cheered on my sons as they won debate tournaments. My identity was definitely wrapped up tightly with everything my kids were doing.

When Madison was a junior in high school a neighbor invited me to a beginning running group she was starting. I had never run and I was fifty pounds overweight. This lovely woman, Cheryl, worked with the four beginners that were there for four months and helped us complete our first 5K. I dropped twenty pounds immediately and I was hooked. I have run in hundreds of races since then. The most monumental was a half-marathon I ran with Madison through Central Park. We ran 13 miles through freezing cold rain. In my life I have never pushed myself that hard. Ever. I will always be grateful to Cheryl for allowing me to see what I am capable of. At 40-years old I felt reborn.

Running could not have come at a better time for me because around that time the nest started emptying. Madison went off to college and then to Amsterdam eventually ending up in New York City. Garrison headed to Oklahoma and is now living in New York as well. My whole purpose had been wrapped up in my kids and now I had no purpose. Running helped but I needed more. That is when I enrolled at the Community College.

I realize every day that I have been lucky in my life. So many of the choices I made as a young, immature girl could have had devastating results. I'm also aware that meeting and marrying a man from a bar could end badly. Marrying Dale was the best decision I have ever made. He taught me how to be true to myself as well as how to love unconditionally. My children taught me how to be selfless and to work hard. And now that I respect myself and have established my strong values my parents respect me as well.