

11

YEARS
OF
NAPPIES

SIMONE PHILLIPS

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CHOOSING TO LIVE
INTENTIONALLY

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The stories in this book reflect the author's recollection of events. Some names, locations and identifying characteristics have been changed to protect the privacy of those depicted. Dialogue has been recreated from memory.

Bloodline

I was born on 3 May 1984 and I am one of the five children in our family. I am from a strict, Christian family where we attended church services habitually and the Christian values were built into each of us as children.

Ours was not a family free of dysfunction; I grew up with my fair share of dysfunction, sibling rivalry, moving from one house to another, changing schools, and not being taught social or communication skills.

I do not know much about my parents' childhood, but it is fair to mention that they grew up during the apartheid era and they gave what they could

although the tide of injustice was against them. It was a system that did not give them social and economic opportunities.

One thing that is still vivid in my memory about my childhood is the death of my sister who was my brother's twin. Although I was young and couldn't fully comprehend the loss or pain, I could see the pain my mother was going through. Therefore, I experienced loss from a young age and some of the things we lost include homes, which was so traumatising because a home defines your world as a child. When you are a child, you never understand the huge changes because no one sits you down to explain things. Numerous things happened during my upbringing and the pace with which they unfolded did not afford me the time to understand and process the changes. I just had to move with the tide.

Certain people were supposed to be at the centre of my life but they were not. I never knew my dad's family or upbringing that much. I saw my grandmother probably four times in my lifetime and I don't think she even knew my name.

One thing I know without a doubt is that my dad had a heart for people. He always helped people in

need at church, in the community, and even family members. He always did it without hesitating and people loved him for this.

My mother was a prayer warrior who interceded for many people. People always called on her to pray for them and that commitment made people love her. In the church, she was also a preacher and through her sermons she led many people to salvation.

Outside our home, my parents were well respected, but at home, their relationship was frosty. I cannot remember a day when they told each other that they loved each other or showed some affection.

My relationships with my siblings were never close. We had sibling rivalry; my sister disliked me from a young age, as a result, I suffered abuse from quite a young age, but I have no idea why she resented me. She would want to beat me up at every chance she got. She was mean to me and wanted to cause me pain, whether it was physical or emotional. She always said I was my father's favourite, but I disagree. I guess because of my personality, being an affectionate person, I showed that love and affection to my dad without realising this was his love language. A love language describes how we receive love from others. It is: words of affirmation-saying

supportive things; acts of service-doing helpful things; receiving gifts-giving gifts than telling a person them that you were thinking about them; and affection-showing love was my dad's love language and he appreciated it.

I didn't know that loving my dad would result in my mother completely disliking me. She would say hurtful things to me for no reason and get me into trouble with my dad by lying to him about me resulting in me getting a beating from him. I was a child, so could never dare correct or challenge my parents; I simply kept quiet.

This tumultuous relationship with my parents made me a tomboy. It kept me away from home; the less time I was at home and in my mother's presence, the better. I was never taught about a menstruating cycle, boys, sex, cooking, cleaning, being a wife or being a mother. I remember in our home, if our parents were fighting, my mother expected us children to choose her side, and that meant you did not speak to dad for as long as she did. She taught us that it was ok to disrespect my father when she was not ok with him. I never supported this or picked a side. I considered that I was a child to both of them, as a result, my mother's dislike for me worsened. She allowed me to be rude and disrespectful toward my

dad if they were having a disagreement, but we would dare not if they were ok. I could not understand this.

The age difference between my siblings made it so difficult to forge close relationships with each other at any given age because we hardly had anything in common. My two older sisters were close because there are two years between them, so these relationships my siblings formed made me feel excluded, displaced, and not wanted.

When my brother was born, I was five and was excited because I believed I would also have a friend, but the age difference just didn't allow it although we did many things together. Five years later, when I was ten, my youngest sister was born. The age gap once again was too big for us to even try to bond. As much as my dad was closed off, he was my safety net. I would go home when I saw his yellow Caravelle bus coming down the street.

I attended three different primary schools because we moved from one house to another, but I was so happy that I attended only one high school. When I was in high school, my relationship with other family members didn't get any better. My relationship with my mother simply deteriorated and

my dad's absence didn't help matters; he was less and less at home. When my eldest sister moved out, we never saw much of her. Moreover, my second eldest sister fell pregnant at the age of nineteen, which left the house cold. All these developments made me to feel displaced and unwanted.

I started dating a guy who didn't live far from our church. We had to sneak to see and talk to each other because we both knew that my dad would kill both of us if he found out about our relationship. Having this secret affair was fun; he was an ok guy, but I was so naïve. It wasn't a smooth relationship, so we were on and off because I always heard rumours about him dating other girls.

At the age of sixteen, when I was in Grade Eleven, I started getting flattering letters from James, the father of my cousin's baby. He would hand the notes to his sister who in turn handed them to me. By the time I got his second letter, I was involved in a horrible car accident and was in hospital for almost months and missed two terms of school. I was involved in the accident during the week, a day after I had finished exams.

When the accident occurred, we were on our way from Johannesburg city centre to fetch my brother from school. In the car was my sister, who was

driving; my friend at the back seat behind the driver's seat; my niece at the back, with no seat belt, and; myself on the front passenger. A speeding car skipped a red robot and rammed into our car. Seconds before the accident, I had unclipped my seatbelt to take my one year-and-a-half-year-old niece from the back to the front because she was crying to sit with me. Amazingly, on this particular day she did not want to sit on my lap; she went straight to my feet and that saved her because the impact would have killed her.

The second she sat down, we were hit and I instantly went blank. I was told the impact was so severe that my friend who sat behind my sister who was driving was thrown out of the car and had multiple injuries. Fortunately, she did not lose her baby since she was pregnant at the time. My sister injured her chest, ribs, and fractured her ankle. The impact of the crash flung me through the windscreen and I fractured my neck in three different places. I was unconscious for a number of days and when I finally regained consciousness, I heard a doctor who stood over me saying he did not know how I had made it out of the accident alive and not paralysed. He said had I kept my seatbelt on, the impact would have snapped my neck. At the age of sixteen, I knew there was a God and that He had a plan for my life.