

## Alice #55

We all have a story....the life we have lived, the circumstances that surrounded our birth, our childhood, our growing into adults, etc. but we are more than just our stories. We are precious souls. So as I share my story, the underlying thread that will appear is value; the value of each one of us.

I began many years ago in city overseas, in a hospital that no longer stands. But within the walls of that medical facility I was born far too early, requiring immediate blood transfusions, monitoring, and incubation as a high risk infant, with little chance of surviving. Of course I did survive to tell the tale and was sent home to a severely volatile, abusive and dangerous environment. Early events embedded fear, shame and terror into my small frame; including cowering behind chairs as a 3 year old, yet so desperately wanting to help - while my mother was beaten bloody by my father regularly. We lived in fear. We lived in poverty. We survived.

This was the norm and although my mother was kind and loving to me, I never knew when I would be grabbed by the hair and thrown across the room, cursed vulgarly, threatened, bullied or sexually abused. This was life and yet my sister and I still managed to play, laugh and be children daily with one another. I even wrote poetry and remember my first poem at 7 years old entitled, *Sorrow*, for truly that was my heart. By the time I was 11, my mother lapsed into a nervous breakdown from which she never recovered fully, with numerous relapses many times a year. She was institutionalised and I remember as a 12 year old visiting her behind locked, steel doors, wanting with all my heart, to have my mother back and just as desperately wanting to leave the cold, solid grounds where we sat together on a small bench.

Once I reached adulthood, I found men became my sedative. I wore my shame as bravado, pretending I was the conqueror, not the conquered. Marrying young, divorcing nearly as young, I knew nothing about loyalty, commitment, real love or 'death do us part' vows. Shuffling through a series of relationships, nothing sedated the pain as I had hoped.

In fact all these liaisons amplified my despair, even ending in rape at least once and by definition perhaps multiple times as I placed myself repeatedly in unsafe environments, closing my eyes literally and clenching my teeth until it was over. Underneath all of this I knew there was more to life than just suffering and chasing false hopes. Although I was very attractive as a young woman and therefore could hide my hurt and shame under a cloak of beauty, this only led to more heartache with the wrong men, in the wrong place, at the wrong time. I also was drawn into every type of therapy one could imagine, hoping something would finally work. And although there was insight and understanding and even at times a release from some of the pressure, nothing ever liberated.

It was as fleeting as the men I clung to. I also searched for one I knew was there. Not the man of my dreams but the God of all TRUTH. I investigated every religion and 'ism' I could find; seeking HIM. Somehow though, men still became my compass for many more years. I was fooled by them, temporarily chased by them, and left them or was left by them; whoever got there first.

In the midst of all the partner trading, I came to Australia with one of the victim/tormentors, only to realise the gravity of the mistake 10,000 miles from home. There was nowhere to return to as my mother had died 2 years earlier in the hospital, and my father and I were, let us say, on less than speaking terms. He sadly died three months after I arrived in Australia. This story would be a tragedy except, except for this....in Australia, as my

patterns continued to repeat, I came to an impasse. I was pregnant. I wanted this baby with all my heart and although not married and the father unwilling to accommodate such an arrangement, I persevered with the pregnancy. I had 3 years before aborted my baby when in this same situation. The agony, the sorrow, the heaviness of that loss would never be mine again, I vowed. I had prayed as I knew there was a God although I had not yet come to faith in Jesus Christ. I begged God for another chance to have a baby during the entire previous three years.

He gave that to me and I would this time bear a very healthy, well cooked (10 days late) 9.2 lbs. baby. But things were still quite messy and untenable in a number of ways; which I am not at liberty to discuss. So I cried out, actually stropilly, and sassily demanded God do something! I gave the Creator of the Universe, of all the galaxies, of all creation, an ultimatum, either make something loving happen (my idea of course was another man), or I was moving to another state - for that was my M.O. (discomfort caused migration, usually to far distances).

Well, the Lord delivered a very different Man than I had expected. And in a little cottage, in a little town on a little island I met the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Giver of Life, the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ, the Son of GOD. It was not a religious experience, or a religion, or a comfortable little belief system to which I came to believe in, but God Himself, the Lover of my soul; the one who bled and died for me. The one who, no matter how foolish, how mistaken, how hurt and shame-filled I was, took me into His arms and made me whole. I only needed to admit I needed HIM. The same One who was willing to take all of humanity's anguish, hate, hurt, pride and sin and become sin who knew no sin. When I came to understand, not in my intellect, which I had so highly regarded for years, but in my heart that God the Father had in fact separated Himself from God the Son, not because He had to, but because He wanted to for my and all of humanity's sake; I knew no other GOD would die in my place, would suffer the anguish of not just a crucifixion, but of separation, God torn asunder from God. My heart soared and I fell in love, so to speak, with the One who made me, died for me and now lives in me.

Being a Christian does not mean you never make a mistake, or fall for old habits and patterns. It is always a choice. Well, 4 years later, after coming to faith in Jesus, I thought I had met the one right for me; a man who claimed to be a Christian and although there were a number of red flags, I ignored them because I wanted this man; so I convinced myself otherwise. During the honeymoon, it all became blatantly clear that I had married an abuser. I lived for several years in a domestically abusive marriage, where as a Christian I tried to remain, not wanting to disappoint God, not wanting to be weak, because I truly loved this man; and year after year praying things would change until one day the Lord Himself, told me I must leave.

When I argued with Him, He made it clear that obedience to HIM was love and was I going to obey or argue. So my child and I had to prepare for the hardest of decisions and subsequent departure plans. It took more than three years of recovery to finally breathe again. But in that time, I have ministered to many worldwide, for nothing is wasted in Him.

God has shown me how to love others with His heart and is changing me day by day, transforming me by His power and grace. In my lifelong love affair with God, He continues to hone and carve me in ways I could never have imagined. I travel to faraway places now, not to run, but to serve the least of these; those suffering and hurting.

God also inspires me to write poetry (one book published and another on its way) to encourage and strengthen those who read the poems. When I meet people now, no one would guess my background; not because it is so well hidden, but because I am a new creation in Christ and know the truth of a living redemption.