

God spared my life for a reason...

by Renee in Pennsylvania

My search for the meaning of life began at the age of 14 when drugs and alcohol became a way of life for me to cope with the years of abuse and the nightmarish memories of my past. I became a high school drop-out and ran away from home, looking for love in all the wrong places. I had been consumed body, soul and spirit by overexposure to alcohol, drugs and sexual abuse by the time I was 17.

My quest for love, attention and nurturing was not met by these extreme acts of self-destruction. I was lost in a vast ocean with no land in sight. I had no parental support or guidance. I was living in my \$100 rusty old car with none of the basic necessities to live on. I lacked security, an environment for growth, or a hope for a pleasant future. I was ashamed of my lifestyle and too proud to ask for help. Suicide became my most desired option, as an escape from this hellacious lifestyle that had consumed my existence because of the poor choices I continued to make. My companions in my death quest were the very things that once brought me a miserable type of short lived joy. These companions would also be the culprits that would aid me in my relief from emotional pain. I consumed the liter of alcohol in an attempt to ease into the beginning stage of my mission. The sleeping pills were my second step - a safeguard or an additional cushion for the last leg of the ride. When I felt numb enough from the alcohol and pills I had the courage to use the razor blade to cut my wrist from end to end. As I lay down on the floor to await my demise I begin to hallucinate. My life passes before me like home movies. Who the heck would want to film this junk? I conversed with myself for a while wondering what was taking so long. At one point I must have fallen asleep because I had a dream...so I thought. I was in spirit form looking down at my body. There was this bright light surrounding me and I felt such peace and serenity. The next thing I noticed is a gray cloud hovering over my body on the floor. I'm watching this happen, only I'm not in my body! Then a blue cloud glides into the gray cloud and they merge. There appears to be an intense struggle between the two clouds. I'm still watching, wondering, feeling no pain - I'm at peace. The gray cloud evidently loses the fight as it leaves in a swift manner while the blue cloud remains. It radiates with light and then it speaks to me softly, I am the way and the truth and the life. I have no idea how much time has passed before I wake up, back in my body.

I was feeling despair and anger that I wasn't dead and that I didn't complete my mission successfully. I can't even kill myself. What a loser! I crawled my way to the bathroom, sick to my stomach and wished I had died. As I hugged the toilet I kept hearing that voice in my head...I am the way, the truth and the life. I grabbed a wash cloth to wash my face and clean up the bloody mess on my arms.

To my amazement, the blood stains appeared to be in a dry and flaky form. I didn't want to scrub too hard as I knew there would be open cuts underneath the dry blood. I proceeded to wipe the wounded area but found no trace of trauma, cuts, or even bruises. The traumatized areas were completely healed and disclosed no evidence of my recent suicide attempt. This strange discovery left me with many questions: Where did the blood come from if I didn't cut my wrist and what the heck really happened? Did I dream this whole thing? No. There is blood in the sink too, and the razor blade has blood on it. The floor has blood stains too...Am I really dead and now dreaming that I'm alive? For a young girl of seventeen this was too much for me to comprehend so I

put it behind me and didn't think about it anymore, mostly because I had a splitting headache. I was sick for about two weeks, vomiting, sweating, fevers and cold chills. My body hurt and I was very lethargic. I really wished I had died!! I have been diagnosed as Bi-polar, depression, ADD, personality disorder, post traumatic stress and sexual abuse survivor by different doctors from the age of 19. The addiction to drugs was easy to overcome compared to the tormenting years of mental illness.

I married at age 21 and finally got insurance through my husbands job. As long as I stayed on medication, I remained fairly stable. My depression worsened after my first child was born, then my second child. I fought a good fight but after 20 years of marriage, my husband couldn't take anymore. We divorced, and I moved to Erie PA from my birth home in Florida. Erie has been good to me. I came here with nothing because what I did have, I lost. My depression was at its peak from 1999 to 2003. It started with the need for food stamps, help with utilities and I desperately needed medication. Thoughts of suicide were rising and I knew I had to get help. I was able to get on public health care and for that I am thankful beyond reason.

I Thank God for the generous people in Erie and the help I received to get back on my feet once again. I now work for the same company who helped me, part-time helping others with dual diagnoses (mental health and addictions). I believe in paying it forward and do all I can to help others get back on their feet again. You never know when relapse in mental illness will occur. It is a continual struggle and at times I fear being cut off from public assistance to maintain my meds. I cannot afford a health care plan and I am so grateful for the assistance.

It has taken many years of therapy and support groups to get where I am today. I finished school and graduated with a PhD on February 1992. It took 14 years to finish college, but I did it and now I use my experiences and my education to motivate hope and recovery in others. God spared my life for a reason and I am here today to fulfill that purpose. Do I still get depressed? Yes I do. I will always have to take medications for manic-depression and anxiety to maintain stability. But, I am happy and at peace once again. There are no more skeletons in my closet and I am not ashamed to tell my story. Life still has its ups and downs, but help and the tools to cope make those problems easier to handle. On August 5th I will have 31 years drug free!