

INTRODUCTION

How Did a Baptist Girl from Texas
End Up as a Single Mom?

*Before you were conceived I wanted you;
Before you were born I loved you;
Before you were here an hour I would die for you;
This is the miracle of life.*

—MAUREEN HAWKINS

Wow! If you could see the way I look right now . . . like an author who's been intimately immersed in the writing of her book. My hair, which is currently red and short, is spiking up everywhere, and my glasses are blurry from so many smudge marks. My house has been obliterated by research. Books are stacked in hallways and pathways, and paperwork is piled in every nook and cranny. This has all occurred, of course, as I have nurtured my daughter: driven her two hours to and from school every day, accompanied her to extracurricular activities, been lunch-bunch mom and third-grade musical chairman, fixed her meals, helped with homework . . . well, you get the picture.

This book has been my professional baby for about as many months as it takes to gestate a real one. I dare say pregnancy and

childbirth were a cakewalk compared to this. The publishing process has been arduous and painstaking, but it has also been immensely fascinating and rewarding. I am eternally grateful that God has given me this wonderful opportunity because, ironically, by telling these women's stories, I have been transformed. I even garnered the courage from these women to pick up and move from Texas to New York City with my daughter!

I have always experienced a gravitational pull toward biographies. I remember as a third grader, my daughter's age, sitting on the floor of my elementary school library and reading biographies—Betsy Ross, Pocahontas, Martha Washington. History was alluring to me. As an adult I have continued to be drawn to biographies, because they offer unique and invaluable insights into the way other people viewed life and met their challenges. I have relished these moments as a researcher and writer, because the work has provided the vehicle to share my own experiences, strength, and hope. As an actress, I'm called to be the mouthpiece for the screenwriter's words. This time the words are my own.

MY JOURNEY

I am a single mother, and every day I thank God for my beautiful, sweet gift, my little girl, Juliette. After God, of course, my devotion is unreservedly to her. I've often reflected, *How did a Baptist girl from Texas end up as a single mother?* My pregnancy, however, was the most miraculous event of my life. I would read to her in the womb, play Mozart, and pray with her. I even felt the joy when she kicked, literally, to the music of a Broadway show.

As my pregnancy progressed, however, it became increasingly evident that my journey as a mother was to be a singular event. One day I predicted that my daughter's father would not be there when our baby was born. He responded by holding me tightly and saying that, yes, he would be there. I knew in my heart he would not. Call it women's intuition, but I knew. This is not how I envisioned the drama of my life, the joy of bringing a child into the world, but life presented itself to me in this way. Yet I have thanked God every day

that I'm a mother, even if a single mother, because God has blessed me with sweet Juliette. And I have never, for one moment, doubted that God designed Juliette to be born, no matter the circumstances. God wanted Juliette to be here. God sees eternity in perspective.

How did I do it? How *do* I do it? My faith. My faith has been my foundation. From pregnancy to present day, with immense joys, I have also walked through judgment and fear. I've been knocked down, had to reach for the hand of God, dusted myself off, and gotten back up again. During these times, I've had only Him to rely on for guidance and for coping with the complex and varied challenges of motherhood—spiritually, emotionally, financially, physically. If my life had been picture perfect then I might not have reached out to God the way that I have ardently and consistently done. Consequently, I have enjoyed a rich friendship with God, and so has my daughter. God has taught me to hold my head high. I'm on my knees in praise every morning and every night. God is great.

MY MISSION

There's one thing I believe fervently, and that is that 90 percent of single mothers never intended to be single mothers. Most young girls, as they daydream about the day when they will have children, rarely say, "When I grow up I want to have a child and raise the child without the father." Or, "When I grow up I want to get a divorce and raise my children all by myself." It rarely happens.

I wrote this book to inspire these women. I wrote it so that single mothers of today would not feel alone, troubled, burdened, shamed, or depressed. When the concept of this book—single mothers of history—first came to me, I was concerned that I wouldn't be able to find enough single mothers in history or enough information to render a worthwhile book. Boy, was I wrong! I was stunned by the number of single mothers through the wide span of the centuries. We may think single motherhood is a modern phenomenon, but it's not.

The definitions of single motherhood are quite complex. Throughout the annals of history a woman could have been a single mother as a concubine, a widow, a divorcée, due to constraints of

society or war, or by sheer choice. Today these definitions still apply. A woman may be a single mother who lives with the father, or she may not live with the father. Single mothers may experience manageable relations or unmanageable relations with the father. Single mothers may be entirely on their own with *no* presence of the father. The age range is also wide, then and now. Single mothers range from teenagers to the forties to grandmothers raising children as single mothers.

The U.S. Census Bureau data published in 2004 reports that approximately 43 percent of women raising children are single mothers; this number is likely higher today. 51 percent of women in America are not married.¹ The wisdom that the women of this book impart to us is that we are not alone. Women have been doing it for centuries and through tragic circumstances in social environments that, for the most part, pale to any we could encounter today.

As I spent many months with the women in this book, I feel as if God opened windows for me to peer inside their lives. Rays of light and inspiration emanated from the pages. It's as if these women came alive and sat beside me as I told their stories; sometimes I think they did. I wept with them, laughed with them, echoed their sentiments, and rallied them to victory. I would marvel at how timely their issues were, how they mirrored mine. These women rose from the ashes like a phoenix and became glorious stewards of their wounds. They were remarkable, brilliant, and brave.

As I researched and documented them, a trend emerged. These women were not just single mothers who championed their children. They were women who changed history. They didn't set out to change history. They did it by merely trying to survive with dignity, faith, and compassion. In the process they left their indelible marks on history. I found their choices in life to be uplifting, inspiring, and amazingly modern, no matter the era. These women not only had a message about motherhood, they had a message about life. They propelled the issues of their particular battles into progressive movements. They took their children with them on this passage of passion, and they were transformed as well. These women didn't just raise their children; they raised their nations. As a result, I became genuinely enthu-

siastic about my destiny in life as a mother and a woman—if they can do it, I can too!

I researched a great many women, but I chose twelve who model great virtues: determination, dignity, love, hope, spirit, morals, grace, forgiveness, character, stewardship, and justice. Primarily, though, the ones I chose were women of great faith, because faith is everything in my view. Faith in God is the primary purpose in our lives—to serve and honor Him. And I believe faith is an absolute, unquestionable necessity for children. It gives their lives meaning and purpose. It shapes their characters and perspectives as future humanitarians, citizens, and children of God. Thus, all of these single mothers radiate faith and signify hope.

These courageous women span seventeen centuries. They embraced the birth of Christianity, ruled countries, endured wars, birthed a country, withstood torments of slavery, pioneered west, and battled the inequities of men's and women's rights. They range from an Augusta of Rome, to a queen of France, a medieval feminist, a trailblazer, a visionary, a devout humanitarian, the first female printer, a revolutionary icon, a slave mother, pioneer mothers, and a single mother who was the first woman to be admitted to the bar of the United States Supreme Court and officially run for the office of president of the United States. (No, it was not Hillary Clinton.)

Their range is wide but the bond is close. They were mothers, single mothers, women—beautiful, spirited, intelligent, witty, sensual, strong, and devout. These single mothers succeeded in life, in spite of life. They championed their children and changed history, because they walked into the winds of destiny holding their heads high.

Janine Turner

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

—PHILIPPIANS 4:13