

# **The Importance of Being Your Authentic Self**

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## ARTIST STATEMENT

NAME OF AUTHOR: Aleathea G. Higginbottom

*The Importance of Being Your Authentic Self* was discovered while taking a Research class. The assignment was to draft a paper in whatever genre chosen to deliver the written piece. After praying and meditating on what to write for that assignment, the desire was to write something truly authentic, impactful, and author the paper in a creative way. The delivery of choice was an essay which would be little less formal. The revelation of the theme for the paper came with two words – authentic self.

Traveling on the path of becoming authentic has been evolving for some years now. The path began with discovering personal identity, purpose, before marriage, divorce, kids growing up, and becoming an empty nester. The self-identity was wrapped up in being a wife, mother, and serving others in ministry. These were all wonderful things and allowed the most glorious adventures and blessings, but the question was, how does life look from this point? Because of getting married right out of high school, the core-person was not developed as an individual.

After meeting many empty nesters, baby boomers, and those who have also felt a tug from their soul crying for a different type of expression in life and impression on the world. There was so much in common.

A quote from *Women "Living Well After Fifty"* shares insight on how time changes things :

Most of us don't have time to think about 'Who Am I?' until we become empty-nesters, or we retire from our careers and have time to focus on ourselves. (Loncaric)

My oldest son said something to me which made me think about this season in my life. I was redecorating my home one room at a time, because a few rooms still looked much like they did when my children lived there. I painted all of the walls in the house, changed out a few knick knacks, painted pictures to hang on my walls, bought new furniture, turned one extra bedroom into a studio, the other a workshop, and painted my kitchen cabinets. When my son saw what I did, he said. "mom, this looks like you, each room has its own character/voice. At this point the house should look nothing like it did when we lived here. It is all you now." After he said that to me, it was like a light bulb coming on and I could see what I was supposed to do with my life moving forward. I did not realize I was still holding onto my children in a sense. I raised them in that house where there are lots of memories, but letting go was definitely required to move to the next phase of life.

I suffered a great deal of abuse and abandonment growing up, which caused my focus to change from what I wanted in life as a person to what I did not have and needed as a child. The real me was muted, and a different person came to life in order to survive. I remember crying and praying as a child to have my own family to love. I do not regret having my family, but that original person who was muted was destined to show up sooner or later.

I retrieved this quote from Psych Central online. The article is about discovering your true self. This quote is exactly what I was saying about how abuse caused me to mute my true self and take a different role, personality so to speak in order to deal with my surroundings.

It is often the case that children who grew up in chaotic, unstable environments find some semblance of identity and emotional security by taking on one or more family roles, such as the *hero*, *the scapegoat*, *the rebel*, *the caretaker*, or *the clown*. But in unconsciously disconnecting from our true self in order to emotionally survive, we may later find ourselves as adults people-pleasing others and hiding behind a facade, with no idea how to express and live our truth. (“10 Strategies for Discovering and Living as Your True Self”)

So here I am today, living my life authentically me, the original me. The artist, the writer, and with more to come, the whole person. I could not have done any of this with out God the Father being wonderfully Himself.

According to Varga and Guignon,

The term ‘authentic’ is used either in the strong sense of being, “of undisputed origin or authorship,” or in a weaker sense of being “faithful to an original” or a “reliable, accurate representation.” To say that something is authentic is to say that it is what it professes to be, or what it is reputed to be, in origin or authorship. (Varga and Guignon)

I absolutely love the latter part of this definition, “to say that it is what it professes to be, or what it is reputed to be, in origin or authorship” (Varga and Guignon). The latter part of the

definition deals with origin, where it originally came from or started, which is exactly what being ones authentic self is. Being who a person was originally before real life, before parents intervened, before pressure interrupted, before opinions mattered, when innocence was law, before pain was dominate, and having the right to choose was truth.

I believe much of society has been programmed to simply be workers instead of truly living on purpose. The American dream is to get the education, money, car, house, family, have kids, and they repeat. What about being one's authentic self? Does the authentic self-want the big house and the fancy car? What about a simple life living in a house on the beach, painting, or teaching others how to surf because of their love for water and sunshine? What about buying a Suburban and taking one's family across the country? What about living in a small house with a huge garden in the back? The possibilities are endless. But humans get busy, and many times stop listening to the soul until the voice of illness screams enough, lets change directions. Sadly, some people never had that opportunity. (Silvers)

I know that each season in life brings a new vision or desire to do more or something else. For those who really did not have the opportunity to develop their true selves, from what I am seeing and reading about the authentic/original person; the original plan and personality will knock at the souls door sooner or later. Personally, I do not believe it is just a midlife crisis.

A clip from an article by Christine Wehrmeier entitled, "*Midlife Crisis or Awakening?*" This clip poses the question as to whether a person is having a midlife crisis or is actually waking up to authenticity.

We might often have a sneaking suspicion that there is more to who we are than just the labels and masks we wear in the world. But during a crisis, it's as though our souls start crying out for our attention, trying to remind us that we are so much more than that. If you don't listen, you might start to find that your emotions start behaving like a baby throwing their toys out of a pram. You can begin to feel such inner turmoil that you cannot quite explain, especially if to all outward appearances, you have everything that one might expect to have to be happy. You might be successful in your career and have all the things one might strive to attain in one's lifetime and yet feel totally empty. (Wehrmeier)

This article is fascinating. She says that there is nothing wrong with a person when they start feeling unrest and begin to examine life's existence as it is. This sounds similar to, if not the same as the authentic person awakening and trying to make a personal appearance.

In the same article, (Wehrmeier) gave a list of symptoms of crisis/awakening:

**Possible symptoms of a crisis/awakening:**

- Feelings of deep frustration, anger, confusion, emptiness, disillusionment, dissatisfaction, anxiety and/or longing
- A sense that something is missing in your life
- Sensing there must be a greater meaning or purpose to your life
- Wanting to make big changes in your life but not knowing what
- Feeling trapped by your circumstances
- Seeking constant distraction
- Restlessness
- Becoming ungrounded



- Feeling like the rug has been pulled out from underneath you and questioning everything that has been, and is, important to you
- Feeling conflicted between heart and mind, stuck, or lost
- A potential sense of urgency to get on with things
- Trying to understand who you really are
- Losing interest in certain areas of your life while taking a sudden interest in new things that might surprise yourself and others (Wehrmeier)

I absolutely love this quote as well from Wehrmeier's article. It speaks volumes of truth in my opinion and according to all of the research I have done on authenticity. Wehrmeier says:

What so many people are frightened to accept is that our hearts are our inner compass, designed to guide us through life. Many of us spend most of our lives ignoring our hearts, instead listening to what everyone tells us what we should do and think. We will use reason and logic to the detriment of finding true meaning and fulfillment. When we don't listen to our hearts, sometimes they have to kick up a right old fuss to get our attention. That's when we find ourselves in turmoil.

(Wehrmeier)

The vision for this paper is to encourage others through the references, expert advice, and my story, to dive into the realm of self-discovery and be the best version of the authentic self-possible or allow those beautiful pixels of gifted expression to shine through that have been pushed back or forgotten. There is a freedom that authenticity brings that cannot be described. I am not saying that I have completely achieved it all, but what I have discovered thus far I want to share with others.

This paper may not be for everyone, but I am praying that it will encourage those who, like me, got lost in trauma, other's expectations, pressure, and life's circumstances. But the wonder of reading allows the reader to glean something from everything. There are many references, and quotes from professionals, that establish a firm foundation for my thesis on being one's authentic self.

The Word of God refers to being authentic, truthful, when it comes to serving and worshipping Him.

Jesus says this in the Word:

<sup>24</sup> God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

*(The Bible KJV)*

### Human Spirit – What is it?

1. Intellect/Conscience – Thought life and thinking processes.
2. Intuition - Feelings
3. Fellowship – Relationship and worship.

Worshiping God in spirit and in truth means being transparent and honest as we worship Him (glorify Him in our daily living), acknowledge Him (ask for his guidance and presence in everything), build a relationship with Him (be open with Him and put no other gods before Him, not even ourselves).

Heather Riggleman a contributor of *Crosswalk* says:

It is by our spirits that we interact with God. We pray and talk to the Lord in spirit. In his letter to the Romans, Paul states that the Holy Spirit “testifies to our spirit that we are children of God” (*The Bible KJV*), (“What Is the Difference between the Body, Soul, and Spirit?”).

There is only one life to live. No matter how many days, those days are short and precious. To live a life of just doing what has to do can be a miserable life. To get to the end of life and the biggest regret is not doing what was really wanted because of the expectations of others, is extremely hard to hear.

Resources used in this thesis will support how suppression of self can affect a person physically and mentally, as I reveal my own experiences along with others I had conversations with others, who found themselves later in life finally doing what they always wanted to do.

Philip Wijaya, a contributing writer for *Christianity Today*, authored an article entitled “*How are the Body, Soul, and Spirit Connected.*” He wrote about how our whole system is connected. What affects one area affects the others.

Science has revealed that our minds, emotions, and wills are connected to the body through our endocrine, nervous, and immune systems, in a very complex way.

Good physical health is related to emotional health. A popular classical Latin phrase *mens sana in corpore sano*, meaning “a healthy mind in a healthy body,” is often used in sporting and educational contexts to emphasize the importance of physical exercise for mental and psychological well-being.

The Bible affirms there is a strong connection between our physical, emotional, and spiritual health. For example, it is written, “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (*The Bible KJV*). This verse tells us that the conditions of our souls and spirits affect our physical health. (Wijaya)

The article is just one of many that tells the effects of being discontented, unhappy, suppressing emotions, and not being, or doing, what one is meant to.

I have lived my life and experienced the celebration of accomplishing many things. I was in ministry, outreach, teaching ministry, youth ministry, singing ministry, and more. But once things quieted down because roles began to change and shift by God’s design, I could here Father God saying, “you need to heal.”

When I heard that statement, it shook me because I knew from watching, helping, and dealing with others, how the healing journey looks. For me being in my forties at that time, there was much ground to cover, memories to surface, and soulish pain beyond thought to experience. So the journey began. As I began to heal, face the truth of my past, the authentic me began to arise and was no longer muted.

According to Konstantia Dimitriou, MA, MBPsS:

Trauma can significantly impact one's authentic self, disrupting the connection to one's true identity, values, and sense of self-worth. Empowerment and Growth: Despite the challenges, trauma can also be a catalyst for personal growth and empowerment. By acknowledging and working through the effects of trauma, individuals can develop resilience, self-awareness, and a deeper understanding of their own values and strengths. They can embrace their authentic self with

compassion, authenticity, and a sense of purpose. It is important to remember that the impact of trauma on the authentic self is complex and deeply individual.

The healing process takes time and patience. Recovering from trauma and reclaiming one's authentic self often involves therapeutic support, self-reflection, and healing processes. It may involve building resilience, re-establishing trust, exploring emotions, and challenging negative beliefs. With time, support, and self-care, individuals can reconnect with their authentic self and regain a sense of wholeness and authenticity, (“Unveiling the Impact of Trauma on the Authentic Self: Understanding the Profound Effects”)

The statement from *“Unveiling the Impact of Trauma on the Authentic Self: Understanding the Profound Effects,”* is so amazing. The journey is just like that, it was for me. There are many different situations that can affect the authentic self and cause detours away from being the true person.

The information within my thesis by experts will paint a true picture of what the authentic self is, why it is important, and spark an inner conversation on the subject.

# Critical Paper

## Redirected

Paul's journey to Rome in the Bible is an example of how life can change course for various reasons, which may result in a different outcome other than what was originally planned.

In the Book of Acts beginning with Chapter 27, the Apostle Paul was put on a boat as a prisoner along with other prisoners to sail to Rome. In Rome he would stand before Caesar Augustus and plead his case because the Jews in Jerusalem wanted to kill him for preaching Christ and the resurrection. On his way to Rome, a great storm arose which lasted many days. The strong winds and waves knocked them off course. An angel of the Lord told Paul days before that none would be lost if they stayed on the ship because he had to go to Rome and appear before Caesar.

Eventually the ship ran aground and stuck in the rocks. Waves broke up the hinder end of the boat. The captain was going to kill all of the prisoners in fear they would get away. The centurion talked him out of it to save Paul. They swam to a nearby island on boards and broken pieces of the ship. All survived. (*The Bible KJV*)

When Paul was arrested and beaten in Jerusalem, he used his Roman citizenship to prevent the Jews from killing him (shift #1). He had to use his identity as a Roman when Festus was going to give him over to the Jews to kill him. Paul appealed to appear before Caesar (Shift #2). Each time his life was threatened, he devised a plan which involved re-adjusting his life for the situation (*The Bible KJV*). Again, I believe these are perfect examples of shifting, re-vising, re-adjusting, re-thinking, a different plan because of decisions, unforeseen circumstances, or situations.

## **Purpose?**

I believe man was born into this world as a clean slate. Only God knows my purpose for being here, and whoever on earth he chooses to reveal it to. Over my lifetime I have observed that some children take sticks or whatever tool is available and constantly beat on any and everything in sight creating music to their ears but unlearned children's noise to others.

Some children dance anywhere, everywhere, and have an inborn love for music with a sense of internal coordination to go along with it. Some children want to comb anybody and everybody's hair. They just love hair and especially cannot stay out of their own. What about the children who love changing clothes and wearing adult shoes? They seem to have a natural love for garments and can layer them fashionably. I love to see kids wearing their favorite boots no matter the season with the outfit to match, as their mom says, "they picked out the ensemble all by themselves."

What about the rough and rugged kids who tackle and wrestle everyone in the house? I always feel sorry for the youngest sibling. What about the kid who collects every dinosaur and the books that go along with them? Let's not forget about the kids who carry paper, pencils, crayons, markers, and books, with them all the time (That was my child). Could it be they were telling those around them who they really were?

A quote from an article on *Psych Central* concerning being born with purpose:

Each of us enters the world possessing an innate, core, true self. Each one of us is an "original model," and as such we all have unique gifts to offer to the world. ("10 Strategies for Discovering and Living as Your True Self")

There are men in the Bible whom the Lord called before they were born. He knew them prior to birth, formed them in the womb, and birthed them to be messengers to His people. He called their names at the time He needed them to move into the mission/life He had planned for them.

A few examples:

Jeremiah:

<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

<sup>5</sup> Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. (*The Bible KJV*)

Isaiah:

<sup>5</sup> And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. (*The Bible KJV*)

Paul:

<sup>15</sup> But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

<sup>16</sup> To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: (*The Bible KJV*)



<sup>25</sup>And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. (*The Bible KJV*)

### Sampson

<sup>7</sup>But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. (*The Bible KJV*)

There are many scriptures which testify of the predestination of men. He knew us before we were formed. He knows why everyone is here. He knows who people are, and of what they are capable. He knows everything. Even in all of this, life can be harder by not accepting Christ, or life can be easier by accepting Christ and allowing the Holy Ghost to lead to purpose. There is a scripture in the Word of God that addresses doing things Gods way and going in the purposed direction.

<sup>1</sup>Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

<sup>2</sup>It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.

<sup>3</sup>Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

<sup>4</sup>As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. (*The Bible KJV*)

In 2020 when the world was under siege by sickness and circumstances, at some point the lockdown was lifted. Stores began to open, and people began to slowly venture out, but cautiously. I was never on lockdown because of my job. But I had an extreme amount of time to reflect on my life, who I was, what I wanted to do, and who I wanted to be moving forward.

I met a list of people who also had time to reflect in the same areas. I ran into some of them at a local craft store. I met a lady who previously retired from her job while I was shopping in the art department. She retired and began to paint consistently. We were both standing there staring at the paint. I asked her if she is an artist? She said she did not know if she should call herself that, but she loves to paint. The passion surfaced when she retired from her job. I told her I started painting as well and shared pictures of my art on my phone; she did the same. She also told me she takes her paintings to local vender shows to sell them.

The jest of the conversation; she worked many years before retiring, but she did not have much time to paint. Now that she is in the senior years of her life, she is doing what she always wanted to do, paint.

I met another lady at the same craft store in the art department. She was younger. We were both looking at the paint because there was a clearance sale on acrylic and oil paint. I asked her if she is an artist. She said she paints, but she is an Engineer. She showed me pictures of her art on her phone. I looked at the pictures in complete amazement. I had never seen art so bold, beautiful, and full of color before. I asked her why is she an Engineer instead of an artist? She said her parents did not approve. They told her to go to school for Engineering. She has an amazing job with a huge corporation, but she looked unhappy. I asked her if she sold her paintings or had a website? She said no, she usually gives them away, she just loves to paint. I suggested a few museum

competitions and other venues. I had never seen such talent. I have so many stories like this from people I randomly met and people I know personally.

All of this made me think about my life. Do I take the work, life experience, and education to get a different position, or should I simplify my life and do what makes me happy and content? A quote from *zety.com* states:

“In a survey taken by 2,000 people, respondents were asked to recall their childhood dream jobs and how their dreams changed as they grew to adulthood. The survey found that sadly, more than 6 in 10 people failed to attain their childhood dream jobs. The exact figure was 67% and 58% of those respondents still wish they could make their dreams come true.”

(CPRW)

According to UOTP Marketing:

This ancient dilemma is by no means black and white; there are many benefits to a dream job in the grey area. It is worth noting that should you choose to pursue your passion, workdays will seem less monotonous, and there won't be a dull feeling washing over you when the alarm clock rings. The phrase, “*Choose a job you love, and you'll never work a day in your life,*” may seem like a washed-out cliché, but it does hold some truth in it.

(UOTP Marketing)

I learned that being an entrepreneur was the situation for my life and I believe my purpose. When I worked for others it was exceedingly difficult, stressful, and exhausting. I was doing what was expected of me, what I was shamed into, and my body told on me.

A profound statement from *Work is the New Doctor*:

If you're trying to improve your health, the first stop is likely to be your doctor's office. But your own office may have nearly as much influence on well-being, according to a growing body of research that suggests your job can affect everything from mental health to risk of cardiovascular disease and how long you live, ("Work Is the New Doctor's Office").

I was having issues with high blood pressure, sleeping, shopping, eating for comfort, and dreading going to work. The funny part, others around me thought it was great that I had the position, but I had to decide for my own grown life to be healthy and pursue my dreams.

According to Unyte:

Research shows that people who live more authentically are prone to greater psychological well-being. Greater mental health generally equates to greater physical health, too. Anything that takes us away from who we truly are and who we are meant to be in this world has the potential to create immense stress in our bodies as we are denying our true creative expression of our authentic selves.

When one cannot live from this true place of authenticity, then stress is often created in our minds and bodies. This stress may be subconscious at first (since it likely started from a young age), but it eventually builds over time, resulting in mental and physical imbalances that can show up as anxiety, depression, chronic anger, fatigue, stomach disturbances, and chronic illness. (Unyte, 2021)

The Word of God states:

I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth thee. (*The Bible KJV*)

The soul consists of the mind, will, and emotions. Paul spoke of how he desires that the saints total man is blessed. The mind-how one thinks, will-decision making, and emotions-healthy and mature emotionally. Kenneth W. Hagen states:

The soul includes the mind, will, and emotions. Therefore, we contact the intellectual and emotional realms with the soul. It's easy to define what our body is because it's the part of us that's visible. It contacts the physical realm—the realm we can touch and observe.

Many theologians believe the soul and spirit are the same. However, the Bible makes a clear distinction between the two. Paul said in First Thessalonians 5:23 (*The Bible NLT*), "*May your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.*" (“The Three Parts of Man”)

Being the authentic self-shows one flourishing/growing in all three areas, mind, will, and emotions. In the mind, there was thought and rationalizing the evidence presented. The will shows a decision was made to be and do what was meant without the entanglements of opinions and naysayers. Even if there was an issue the fortitude to move forward was there. The emotions/feelings were considered either way. Whether there was fear trying to stop the leap of faith, confusion, etc., all of these things were considered, and the soul wanted to prosper.

I am not saying that whoever chooses to follow a structured path in life is miserable. What I am saying is, the soul will tell whether the structured path is working for or against the life that is present. If it is working for, all is well, and life goes on. If it is working against, stress, anxiety, irritability, health problems, fatigue, and the dream of a lifetime is screaming to be fulfilled.

According to an article on Huffington Post:

“What if you learned that the signs and symptoms you experience are occurring because you were never taught how to be what you want, do what you want or even have what you want in your life?” (“Signs & Symptoms of an Unfulfilled Life, 2017”)

This is truly a profound question.

I am also not saying that working for someone else is wrong, or it is a lack of authenticity if employed by someone do. This is about making choices due to social pressure, being a people pleaser to one’s own detriment, or only doing what others expect (which is what I did for many years), it is about not being true to oneself.

An article from Jennifer Beer states:

You want to be true to yourself, not a slavish follower of social expectations. You want to “live your best life,” pursuing your particular desires, rather than falling in line with whatever everyone else thinks happiness requires. Studies have even shown that feelings of authenticity can go hand in hand with numerous psychological and social benefits:

higher self-esteem, greater well-being, better romantic relationships, and enhanced work performance. (Beer)

Berkley Exec Ed's website posed five questions :

1. Are there parts of you that you are not honoring?
2. Are there Interests or passions you are neglecting?
3. True thoughts or feelings you are hiding?
4. What excuses are you using for denying these parts of yourself?
5. What can you do to start embracing more of your true self? (“The Importance of Authenticity”)

## A Great Discovery?

Initially, upon starting my research for this subject, there was a popular book that kept coming up, *The top five regrets of the dying: A life transformed by the dearly departing*, (Bronnie Ware). This book made me think long and hard about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life, especially at 61.

Bronnie Ware, an Australian healthcare provider worked years in a hospice environment helping those who were terminally ill and transitioning. As she cared for patients, they began to share life experiences with her but mainly their regrets. Eventually she turned what she learned into a book to help others understand the power of time and living life without regrets (Bronnie Ware).

The patients regrets mainly focused on what they did not do and what they wished they had.

- I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.
- I wish I hadn't worked so hard.
- I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.
- I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
- I wish I had let myself be happier. (Bronnie Ware)

There is another quote from Bronnie Ware's book:

When people realize that their life is almost over and look back clearly on it, it is easy to see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled. Most people had not honored



even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made. (Bronnie Ware)

I took the whole list and quote to heart. Knowing this information and actually changing my mindset was mandatory. I found deprogramming what I was shamed into believing was at the top of my list. I was always taught that having my own business was something I should be ashamed of. Owning my own business is truly at the core of being my authentic self. This ideology did not come from my dad. He was an entrepreneur. It was amazing to watch.

An article online makes great points entitled, "*What it Means to be Your Authentic self,*" (Foust). According to Foust it truly takes much courage to be authentic. Choosing to jump out of a system does not come without consequences, according to the article. The list also reveals reasons why not being authentic is a choice often made.

Here are some of the risks that come with leading with your authenticity:

- People won't like you.
- People won't accept the real you.
- People will judge you.
- Your feelings might get hurt.
- You lose control.
- You can't control how people will respond to your authenticity and honesty.
- Overall, you are more vulnerable to the unknown. (Foust)

Here are a list of benefits of being authentic from the same article "*What it Means to be Your Authentic self,*" (Foust):

When we are authentic, we stay true to ourselves, and who we genuinely are. We are present in the here and now. We do what makes us happy, we follow our passions regardless of who we disappoint, or how it may be perceived by others.

Living a life of authenticity is a constant effort and means sacrifice. Not everyone in our lives will respond well to our authentic self, because of how it may impact them. We have the opportunity for others to love us and accept us for who we are at our core. We have the opportunity for others to love us and accept us for who we are at our core.

When we are being authentic, we are being vulnerable; we are showing all parts of us, the good with the bad. When we do this, we allow for more intimate and honest relationships, and we allow for true acceptance and unconditional love. (Foust)

I found an article on “*Trust Mental Health’s*” website. There is a full article with so much information on being authentic. I read that we are living in a time where social media is a new world and source of reference for living to many, especially the youth. The art of authenticity is becoming jaded.

The quote below according to “*Trust Mental Health*” says a great deal on authenticity in just a few small paragraphs.

Being true to yourself means living in alignment with your values, beliefs, and personal identity. Living authentically means you do not conform to societal expectations or pretend to be someone you are not. Instead, you embrace who you really are and live your life as an expression of the real you. Being authentic allows you to express your true self, embrace your uniqueness, and honor your

individuality. Genuine people possess a quality that sets them apart - they are sincere in their thoughts, actions, and interactions with others.

Society increasingly values appearance over substance. There is so much emphasis on material possessions, how you look, where you vacation, etc. It is almost as if we have forgotten the value of being a genuine person. (“The Power of Authenticity: Embracing Your True Self”)

## Conclusion

In the beginning of this essay, I wrote about Paul and his experiences with shifting outcomes using inventive ways and how the boat he traveled in broke up in a storm. Things happen in life which can cause a shift, change the original plan, dream, vision, and goals. The encouragement is to not get completely washed away, be an unnecessary martyr, or a bystander, while watching life slip away without leaving a personal footprint.

A quote from Bonnie Ware: *The top five regrets of the dying: A life transformed by the dearly departing.*

Many did not realize until the end that happiness is a choice. They had stayed stuck in old patterns and habits. The so-called 'comfort' of familiarity overflowed into their emotions, as well as their physical lives. Fear of change had them pretending to others, and to their selves, that they were content. When deep within, they longed to laugh properly and have silliness in their life again. (Bonnie Ware)

In an article on *Psychology Today*:

“For Maslow, meeting our full potential means we must do the things that will make us truly happy: “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be.” (“When Do You Really Become Yourself? | Psychology Today”)

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# **Memoir of a Journey**

## **That Stream!**

When I was a little girl, I used to go to church with my grandparents and aunties. My granddad was the pastor of a little white church on a small plot of land. I remember the stream of water next to it. My cousins would run to the stream after church and watch the frogs jump around. Of course, I did not like frogs, or any other creature who resided in that watery habitat. So, I was always a bystander. The thing about being a bystander there, those who loved the watery playground wanted to share their findings with those who watched. It was always fun running away from what was in their hand . . . not really. (Higginbottom)

## **I Loved My Summers**

I loved summers when I was growing up. The excitement of waiting for the last day of school to begin summer break. It was hard to concentrate. June had arrived, and my down time was in front of me. Looking around the classroom I could see the same hunger for summer vacation in the eyes of my classmates. It was the same way up until I graduated from high school.

The summer sun was so big, yellow, and beautiful to me. The sky looked like an endless blue mass. I wondered how the sky could be so blue and clear. While in class, I looked out of the window at the blue sky as the birds flew against it. I was so fascinated. I am the same way today; I love a clear sunny day. I look up and see the wonder of God. It is so magnificent. I did not care about the heat; I just wanted to be free to stay up as late as I wanted, eat popsicles, and ice cream cones, ride my bike, and play outside all day as I rode my bike all day.

It is funny to think about it now, my friends and I rode up and down the same street over and over as if each time was the first time. The warm heat hit my face as I glided along the way. Could there be anything better than a bike in the summer? Having my own bicycle, with streamers on the handlebars. At that point, the whole world consisted of that moment. There was nothing else, just warm, hot summers, riding my bike, and laughing about anything. Oh, I cannot forget about the bike races. I tried so hard to win every time. My little legs were no comparison to the other guys riding with no effort. It did not matter; it was fun and free.

There were cherry trees in the yard of a doctor's office around the corner. My friends and I would climb the trees and eat cherries until our stomachs ached. We did not care because we were coming back the next day to do the same thing. Childhood can be so simple and beautiful.



I was a tomboy, they called it back then. I was not a real tomboy; I did not like all things boy. I did not like to get dirty, dodge ball, wrestling, or spitting. I would just hang out with the boys in the neighborhood, ride bikes, and climb trees, not too high though. There was no little girls my age to play with in the neighborhood until a few years later; plus, I was the only girl in my house.

I remember getting a yellow ten speed when I was in junior high school (middle school). I rode that bike up until I graduated from high school. I used to ride that bike everywhere. I felt free and independent. I wore an afro in junior high school, a jerry curl we called it, and my hair used to blow in the wind while I was riding, it felt so good. I stopped riding my bike because a friend of mine got into an accident and lost a leg which made me nervous about it. It was okay though; it really was time to focus on getting a driver's license.

I took driver's education in high school. I had a boyfriend in the senior year of high school who would let me practice in his car. My dad also tried his hand at teaching me. My dad made me nervous because he was a micro-manager in the way he was teaching me. I was so tense I could not focus. He did not mean any harm; he just wanted me to be safe when I had to drive on my own. Eventually, I did get my license though. I was twenty years old, married, and living in another state. I passed the test; the driving test was extremely easy. I was so elated and ready to try out my driving skills. (Higginbottom)

## **What Were We Waiting For?**

My parents divorced when I was incredibly young. I was around seven or eight years old.. I was a daddy's girl, so his absence made me feel even more disconnected. Whenever I write about this event in my life, I freeze for a few minutes because it takes me back to the day my parents went into their bedroom and shut the door, as my two siblings and I waited downstairs in the living room. I cannot remember the day's events which put us in the living room waiting for what, expecting what? But we were there like we were waiting for what was to come next. I cannot even say what my siblings and I were talking about.

Finally, my dad came downstairs with his suitcases and my mother following. There was so much going on in the marriage for both of them we kids did not understand what was happening. My siblings and I stood staring not knowing what was happening nor what to do. I followed behind him and watched my dad get into his car with his belongings. He gave me a phone number to call him. I pleaded with him to take me with him. He could not. Even though he was active in my life afterwards, watching him drive away leaving me there, had a resounding effect on me.

When my dad and mother separated, I was told by my mother that she had to just focus on my brothers, and I would be ok. I did not understand what that meant being so young. I was still reeling from my dad's exit which I did not understand either. No one talked to us, prepared us, or explained it to us. Pretty much what I was told was, my brothers needed her more, and I had a place to live. So much of that day set the stage for a different kind of future. At least that is what the enemy planned for my life. I thank God for a church going foundation.

After my dad left he moved in with my aunt, his sister, until he rented an apartment. I so much wanted to live with my dad because it was hard living at home. He did not live far from us though, and he was very active in our lives. He took us so many places and spent a lot of time with us. We went fishing, movies, skating, basketball games, baseball, boxing, and more. He also became a little league baseball coach. The players remember him to this day with fond memories and funny stories. I was not a major league baseball fan per say (dad loved major league baseball), because it was a little too slow for me. But I did like little league ball.

## Fun on Wheels

I found a new love to add to my summer activities, roller-skating. Roller-skating became my new favorite thing to do. I asked for outdoor roller skates and received them. They were the kind you put your feet in with your shoes on. I skated and skated. It was so much fun. I am trying to remember what happened to those skates.

One thing my dad loved to do during his visitation time was going to the drive-in to watch westerns, and Clint Eastwood movies. It was heavy for our little minds, but he was oblivious to that fact. My brother and me were happy because we were with him, eating popcorn and candy from the concession stand. It could not get any better. That is where I got my love for Westerns later in life, the movies reminded me of that time.

Dad took us to our cousin's boxing matches and to see the Harlem Globe Trotters. He also began to take my brother and me to the skating rink across town to roller skate. My dad would pick us up on Saturday mornings, drop us off at the skating rink, and pick us up when it was over. He gave us entrance money and enough to get a snack. I thought I was in heaven. I was so shy, but nothing stopped me from skating. I had graduated from skating on the cement in front of my house to roller-skating on a wooden floor with the true roller-skaters. I was in awe.

The skating rink on Saturday mornings was the place to be, but it was so hot in there during the summer months because there were so many people in attendance. I had never seen anything like the activities of a roller-rink such as this in my life. It looked just like the movie "*ATL and Roll Bounce*." Diverse groups were on the skating floor doing dance routines. Other groups of

guys were following one another while doing steps in unison. They turned, did three-sixties, and dropped on one foot/skate. Groups of girls were following one another taking steps to the music. Whistles were blowing, and guys were whistling with their fingers to their mouths telling those in front of them to move because they were coming through. The rule was to move because they would not break their stride to avoid anyone. That is a rule I learned quickly. There was so much to see and learn. The skating rink became a community of loyal rollers. We still talk about it to this day.

The Lord blessed my feet, and I learned to skate with indoor skates quickly. I thought I had hit the jackpot whenever I walked into that skating rink. There were so many people in the rink skating every Saturday, but somehow it worked because I learned the rules and followed suit. Stay out of the outside lane unless I was a professional who could keep up or get run over. Do not try to interrupt the lines or dance skating groups. The beginners skated in the middle. Respect the whistles and pay attention.

When I roller-skated, I felt like I could fly; it reminded me of riding my bike. I also loved music. To have music and skating together made me very happy. So, my brother and I skated every Saturday that our dad took us. When Dad could no longer take us, we learned how to catch the bus to the rink. When my brother did not go, I went by myself. By this time we were older. I felt I was given something of my own.

Summer skating was terrific. Sun all day and roller-skating. Summer skating turned into winter skating, and winter skating turned into all year round. I skated in that rink and other local rinks until I graduated high school. Even after that, I made my way to a skating rink somewhere, even though I was out of town. That was the thing back then, making it a point to see how rollers in other states skated. There was always a comparison of how we skated in our home state skating

rink to theirs. It was like being part of something big and honorable. We took skating seriously, like being a member of a local church. Even after so many years, we recognize the regulars no matter where encountered.

I was at my local convenience store, and I turned and saw a man standing behind me in line. I looked at him and told him, I know you from the roller-skating rink. He smiled and said, I remember you too. Back then he was so young and so was I. I noticed a little gray hair on his head and mustache. That visual gave me a warm feeling and a reminder of how so much time had passed. We laughed as though we had a secret memory, something no one else had. We were part of a community within a community. We talked about different ones who were still skating and where they skated. I cannot really express in words what we all shared, but it left beautiful memories, comradery, and joy. (A. G. Higginbottom, 2023)

## The Dilemma

The soul cries out for a clean slate. The removal of fingerprints from past experiences.

Let's prevent a rerun. Remove all things that are familiar.

Stop the magnet from drawing that which has always been.

How do you remove what may have been pressed into the DNA of the subconscious?

The history of hoping for something new but yet the disappointment seems to remind you of reality.

There is an enemy who knows you better than anyone.

Set up before the foundation of the world.

Takes life's tragedies, mishaps, and other people's unfinished issues to make them a common recipe for an assignment to abort later in life.

How do you fight something so deeply ingrained?

So much damage.

Eyes wide open.

Taking that which is needed to be human only to use it to keep you from walking in your full potential.

Standing in line waiting for your turn to receive your inheritance.

Hand stretched out wide not understanding what's inside of the box.

With much wisdom comes much sorrow.

We say that we will pay the price, but do we really understand what that price is?

And so is the Dilemma

## **Foundational**

I would spend many weekends at my grandparents house. My aunt, my dad's sister, always wanted me to spend the weekend over there. She loved putting the little dresses on me for church that my mother would pack in my bag. Even as I grew older, up until I was a pre-teen, I still spent the weekends and a great number of my summers with her over my grandparents' house.

I have many good memories there, but I also have memories that were foundational once I was old enough to understand the dynamics of my environment. My dad and his dad (my granddad) did not see eye to eye. My dad experienced neglect, horrible abuse, and abandonment while growing up. He never talked to us about it. He never even mentioned it. What I know I learned from others.

What was foundational for me? I loved my aunts and grandmother and I wanted to be around them. I learned how to pray, and they took me to church. But my granddad did not talk to me much at all. He really did not show me or my siblings much attention or affection.

He absolutely loved my little cousin, so we communicated through him. Whatever candy or money he received from my granddad he would share with us. I learned later that my dad told my granddad to never put his hands on us, or he would deal with him personally. So the alternative was to not deal with us much at all. I thought it was normal how he interacted with me. At the same time I thought something was wrong with me, maybe I was a bad girl or something. So. I would try to be as quiet and on my best behavior when he was around.



## **This Was Me**

When I reached junior high school, seventh grade, I developed a love for fashion, and I was a smart-straight A student. I guess I got it honest because my parents were a walking fashion magazine before and after they divorced.

I was known to wear a double-breasted gray coat, a fedora, carry a briefcase, and wear black boots. I also had a full-length leather coat. I was the teenager who wanted clothes for gifts. I babysat in the summer to buy my own school clothes. I also did not want anyone washing my clothes but myself. I loved clothing and knew how to put them together. It was like that throughout high school where I won best dressed as a senior. All of this showed I could have-should have and wanted to go to school for fashion design, which I loved. I used to draw pictures of clothing and fashion ideas. I smile when I see young people with the same attributes because of how they present themselves. I think it is a wonderful expression.

Sadly, there was a teacher at my private college prep high school who thought it was a good idea to tell the people of color to consider other professions such as, trash collector, mail carrier, working for the city, etc. Working for the city and labor positions are all noble professions which many of our parents chose and did well in, but the advice provided proved to be prejudiced and one sided. I am glad that me and my classmates of color paid them no mind.

## The Little Girl

‘I met a little girl once. She was one of the most beautiful little girls I had ever seen. There was something about her that was so different, special. She had on the prettiest little dress. From her shoes and the way she wore the ribbons in her hair to the necklace hanging about her neck, the whole outfit from head to toe seemed all planned out to the smallest detail. It wasn’t just the clothes that she wore or the ribbons in her hair that got my attention. It was when I looked into her eyes from a distance; it took my breath away. I had to step back a moment. As I looked into her eyes, I saw so many things. They spoke without her opening her mouth. I saw many places, faces and life experiences in those eyes. One could get lost there. Along with all of these things, there was something else. There was passion for life and many things yet to be. But wait! There, right there; sorrow, grief, pain, struggles that you would think such a young one should never have experienced. But when she smiled, it all just seemed to disappear. Look how she turns around when she smiles. Oh my, she has a spot on her dress! That doesn’t seem to matter; the beauty outshines the imperfection. I just want to hear her speak, I thought to myself. I wondered how her voice sounded having eyes like those. I knew there was much wisdom there. I’d watched her with others; they seemed to walk away as if they’d been given something life changing. Her ball was rolling my way. I’ll get it, I thought. I didn’t want her to wander too far. Maybe she’ll say something to me; here she comes. “Here you are,” I said. Wow! She just stood there looking at me with those amazing eyes. “What is your name?” she asked. “I knew I was going to meet someone new today. You are not here by accident, and neither am I.” “Then why am I here,” I asked? “You’re here because you need to see that there is still something good in the world. Something that may have

been damaged but didn't change its form. See this spot on my dress? This is just a little spot, but the dress is still beautiful. It's my favorite dress. I felt bad when I got a spot on it, but I still love this dress so much that I couldn't throw it away because of a little spot. I wear it just as I did before the spot. Whenever I wear the dress and someone sees the spot, they ask me, 'How did such a pretty dress get a spot on it?' I tell them I don't think about the spot on the dress, I think about how good the dress makes me feel when I wear it. This dress was always beautiful, but it never got this much attention until I made a mistake and spilled something on it. So now, when I look in the mirror with my dress on, I don't see the spot. I see all the faces of the people I have met because of it." (A.G, Higginbottom, 2023)

## **A Prayer Answered**

I got pregnant and married right out of high school and had a son. I married my high school sweetheart. This was also a childhood prayer during the nights I cried myself to sleep from feeling alone. I wanted my own family and travel the world.

I met him in the summer before my senior year in high school. We were introduced by a classmate of mine who was his neighbor and friend. We were together all of the time. He was browned skinned with a long curly afro. We called them jerry curls back then. He was also popular with the girls because he was handsome.

I got pregnant in the last month of high school. I found out a month after graduation. I was so sick and nauseous. I was so green about those type of things. I was not taught much about relationships, dating, or anything like that. When we found out I was pregnant, my boyfriend proposed, which we were talking about before that happened anyway. He enlisted into the Army, and we got married towards the end of his bootcamp.

My dad performed the ceremony. By that time he had been a long time born again and in ministry. It was just a few there, bride and groom, parents, best man and woman, and an aunt. My new husband went back to finish bootcamp, and I stayed home because I was soon to deliver our baby. He did come home and visit after our son was born because he could not get leave to be there for the delivery.

He finished bootcamp and he sent for me about five months later. He did come home to visit during the five months. I was blessed to live in Kentucky, California, Germany twice, and Georgia.

I loved it. My children were able to experience different cultures, schools, and meet people from all over the world.

Our first station was Fort Cambell, Tennessee. We lived down the street in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. That is how close the border of those two states were. I was able to experience life in Tennessee and Kentucky.

It felt so surreal. We were so young. I was twenty years old, and he was nineteen. We were wide eyed and excited about life. It was a big bold world with us as a military family with a little baby. I loved being a mom and a wife. It was like something right out of a movie. I was so happy.

We were stationed at Fort Campbell, Tennessee for about a year when he received orders to go to Korea for about a year. I could not go with him. Me and the baby went back to our hometown, and we stayed with his mom until I rented an apartment with my best friend. We call each other sisters. Her husband was deployed as well. It was difficult to say the least to be a newly married couple with a baby and having to separate for over a year.

My sister and I did everything together. It was a great relief for us to have one another for support. We were like two teenagers having months of slumber parties. We laughed, shopped, skated, ate, we were happy, and sad.

Time seemed to pass quickly. Eventually, I did get an apartment for just my son and my then husband who came home from Korea. His next station was California.

## Where Does The Time Go?

Where does the time go?  
A question so many ask.  
One minute they're a baby,  
And they grow up so fast.  
From the time of conception,  
Until they are born into this world;  
It doesn't even matter whether it is a boy or a girl.  
You look at those little hands and feet.  
They are so very small;  
The next minute you turn around,  
They are over five feet tall.  
Those are just the early years,  
But now it's time to drive.  
Next, it's time to go to college;  
You are saying your goodbyes.  
You wonder, where does the time go,  
While your wiping teary eyes?  
As you remember the teething,  
The crawling and the walking long ago  
The story books,  
The innocent looks,  
And "Mommy can I go?"  
What about the laughs, the tickles,  
The sleepless nights and popsicles?  
The puberty that seemed forever  
In all actuality, you just came together.  
We empty ourselves out when they are born;

It doesn't end until they are gone.  
Now it's time for myself,  
But how much time is really left?  
The precious birds have left the nest,  
And now I can take my rest.  
Oh baby it doesn't end there;  
Now you have grandbabies pulling your hair.  
This is life and the cycle goes on;  
You wonder, will you be alone?  
Will they remember when you are gone?  
The sacrifices that were made,  
The countless bills that were paid,  
The love, the tears, the years gone by;  
Yet we ask ourselves the question;  
Did I do all that I could have done?  
Time will tell, I say,  
God's Word stands true.  
A lot of their decisions depend on you.  
Did you train them up in the Lord  
As the Word of God says?  
If you did,  
Let them go;  
They will come back,  
As God promised they would.  
(Higginbottom)

## **The Voice**

I graduated from high school in May of 1981. I found out I was pregnant in June of 1981. My high school sweetheart enlisted into the military July of 1981. He proposed and we got married in December of 1981. My dad performed the marriage ceremony. Our first son was born in January of 1982. I moved away from home as a military wife, a new mommy with my high school sweetheart/husband, June of 1982. Those were the first two childhood prayers answered. I wanted a family and to travel.

With us being so young, family life was a little tumultuous at times. Eventually, we split up, but we got back together, had a daughter, and continued to travel in the military. I absolutely loved traveling, seeing, and living in different places. We lived in California, Germany twice, Georgia, Kentucky/Tennessee, and I was in my hometown in between military assignments.

While we were separated, I/so did he, frequented the night clubs quite a bit. We lived in different cities and had different friends. We did not think we were going to get back together, so we lived as single people. One night while I was driving home from a night club in downtown California, I pulled up into the apartment complex where I lived, and there was a man standing in the alley by the garages waving his hands at me. It was so strange because on my way home, my life was flashing before me like a movie. I was also thinking that I needed to change my life. I remembered my dad, and I was thinking about my grandmother. There was something my dad said while I was attending his church as a teenager. He said that he asked God not to let him die in his sins. I repeated that while driving home from the club that night. I left the club early because I kept seeing flashes



of demon faces on the dance floor. I thought I was hallucinating but it kept happening. I was not drinking because I was not a drinker, I just loved music and dancing. It was like my eyes were opened, and I saw what was really going on in the spirit realm. I believe God was telling me to come out of the club life.

There I was, driving towards my garage, I saw this strange man waving his arms at me. I stopped my car, looked at him and proceeded to roll my window down to see what was wrong. As soon as I reached to roll the window down on the passenger's side, I heard a loud voice ask me, "What are you doing?" I froze with my hands in the air and turned around to see who said that. Of course, I did not see anyone because I was in the car by myself. I was startled, dazed, confused, and just sitting there. The man tapped on my window, I looked at him and shook my head no. I pressed on the gas pedal and sped into my car port. I ran to my apartment door, unlocked it, and went inside. Suddenly, I heard helicopters flying overhead, I saw siren lights blaring through my window shades, and I heard voices. I looked through the window shades, low and behold, the police had drawn their guns and were aiming them at the guy who was trying to get my attention outside, along with another guy. I was horrified! That guy was trying to high jack my car with me in it to escape from the police.

I had my own live experience of what was like a action movie, in California too mind you. God saved my life that night. If I did not hear the loud voice (which I believe was an angel) stopping me from rolling down my window, I would not be alive today, I am sure of that. (Higginbottom)

## **Welcome to Germany!**

I lived in Germany twice. The first time we were stationed in Germany in the 80's. The flight was an experience. I had our son with me, and I was eight months pregnant with our daughter. I did not tell my doctor I was flying to Germany. I am sure he would have advised against it being I was in my fourth trimester.

There I was, on a plane for 12 plus hours, eight months pregnant with a three-year-old in tow. I was so nervous. I am a person who would rather drive than fly but of course I cannot drive to Germany. The plane was massive with more than one level of seating. We watched a movie, ate, had something to drink, blankets, you name it. It was very comfortable.

It was quite a sight though, to see the sky go from light to dark because of the time zones. It was as if someone had turned the light out. I was too nervous and excited to sleep. My son was knocked out most of the way. The little girl who prayed and asked the Lord for a family and to travel, was on a plane heading to Germany, with one son laying across her lap and pregnant with another baby. It was a glorious moment.

The plane landed in England first to refuel. I wanted to see England so bad. But England was not the destination. Just the idea of me getting off the plane with my three-year-old son and going into early labor would have been one for the books. Up and away we went heading towards Germany. When we arrived in Frankfurt, Germany, the airport was humongous. It literally looked like a city within a city. Germany was very liberal so, seeing naked posters on the walls of the airport was common. I covered my sons eyes.

I made it with no physical events whatsoever, other than being tired. My husband met us at the airport. We retrieved my luggage and headed to our new apartment.

The city was big and beautiful. The landscape was green and picturesque. The highway travel was a little different. I have never been to a place where going one hundred miles an hour was legal. I myself did not drive on the highways at all.

We arrived at the apartment. It was out in the countryside not too far from the army base, where the smell of manure was the sign we were there. The apartment was owned by a German gentleman and his family. He rented to military families.

We lived on the second floor. The steps leading to the second floor were marble and beautiful. We walked inside, the wood floors were gorgeous throughout. The bathroom was all marble except the ceiling. It was something to see. In the living room there were big picture windows, you could see the countryside in that area. There was a big glass patio door with a patio on the other side of it. I was amazed. The kitchen was very small. That seemed to be the norm there. The focus was on creating spaces where the family could gather, live and be comfortable. I wholeheartedly agree. The living room, dining room, and patio were nice sizes for the family.

## **Not a Vagabond**

April 2024, my dad went home to Glory 22 years prior. I had a dream a little over 22 years ago that my dad would pass away. I believe the Lord gave me that dream because He knew how much I loved my dad, and it would not be a complete shock to my system. Even after the Lord showed that to me, I was afraid. I asked God if there was any way to delay or change the revelation He had given me, and the answer was no.

After the dream of my dad passing, I called him and told him what the Lord had shown me. He gave the response I expected. He said that we all have to go sometime. My dad was not afraid. He always told us in all the tests and trials he went through not to weep for him; he was not a vagabond and had a home in heaven. That was one complicated phone conversation for me. My dad was a true lover of God and a man of faith who lived according to the Word. He was an expert teacher of the Word of God and loved God's people.

After that phone conversation, I began to distance myself from my dad. I was not ready for him to leave. I continued to petition God to reverse the decision, but we never know what covenants others have in place with God. I remember my dad saying if he ever came to a place where he could not take care of himself, he wanted to go home. That was his covenant with the Father, and precisely what happened.

My dad began to have health issues, which was a sign of the vision coming to pass. Within a year, his health was declining even more, and he was in trouble. My dad was admitted into the hospital. The doctors wanted to amputate his foot to save his life because of the progression of Diabetes. My dad did not want his foot amputated. Eventually, the doctors won the battle. Of

course, with God on his side, he came through the surgery like a champion. I was going to the hospital to visit him. I was nervous because I knew what I dreamed and that the Lord was taking him home, I just did not know how or when exactly. I just knew it would be health related.

I took the elevator up to the floor where his room was. I nervously got off the elevator wondering if everything was okay. I headed towards his room. I stopped in front of his room. I saw his wife, sisters/my aunts crying in the waiting area ahead. They called me by my name as they were crying and clinging to each other. I stood there frozen. I turned my head to the left; I saw the doctors and nurses working on my dad as he laid in bed. Suddenly, the doctors and nurses rushed by me from my dad's room pushing the bed down the hallway with him on it. I just stood there watching my dad as they took him away. I literally felt like I was in a dream. Everything seemed to be in slow motion. I turned and looked at my aunts again and asked where is my sister? I was more concerned about how she would react to the situation. I think I was in shock.

We were at the hospital all day until that night. I was quiet that day. I said a prayer to myself. I asked the Lord to allow me time alone with my dad. My dad's wife had to meet with the doctors. I was asked to go into the room where they were treating him to stay with him until she came back. He was under a machine to help him breathe. I sat there with him. I told him what was in my heart and thanked him for everything he had done for me. I also thanked him for the example he set before me on how to love God and His people. It was a divine moment I will cherish for the rest of my life.

My dad had become septic. So, a decision was required whether to allow him to pass on. His wife made the decision to let God take him home. They prepared everything for the family to come into his room. I stood by his bedside and read his favorite psalms from the Bible. I backed

away for a minute because it all hit me at once. He is about to leave us. The time was so peaceful. He went home to be with the Lord so gently.

I miss my dad every day, but I am not sad. He went home. I found out later that the doctors wanted to amputate both feet because he developed gangrene in the other one as well. My dad's covenant with the Lord stood steadfast and he went home just as his covenant stated (when he came to a place where he could not care for himself, he wanted to go home to glory). What a testament, a gift, true faith, relationship, and love. My greatest fear was his great triumph. (A.G, Higginbottom, 2023)

## **Loved that Pen**

I do recall an incident which made me aware of how much I actually loved to write, but I allowed others to influence my life decisions.

When my kids were small, I started a magazine for housewives and single mothers. I went to local businesses offering them the opportunity to advertise in my magazine which would be distributed throughout the city. I even asked certain business owners to write a small testimony or word to encourage women to thrive. The money earned from businesses placing ads in the magazine paid for printing costs and enabled me to distribute the magazine for only one dollar. I placed the magazine in salons, offices, barber shops, and other businesses. The magazine was doing well. It was generating funds to expand and produce a profit which would help my family.

Well, when my husband came home from Dessert Storm, he did not re-enlist. I was excited about the magazine and how it was growing. I explained what I did to financially support the magazine and how it was growing to help the family. It was not accepted by my husband, and he wanted me to get a REAL job. I was doing well with my magazine, but it caused issues at home, so I dropped it and began looking for a job.

I regretted giving up the magazine because it was a wonderful experience; I felt purposeful, I was helping and ministering to others, I loved to write, and the magazine was well accepted in the community.

I have allowed others to talk me out of a few things in my life, but I also learned how important it is to be me. There is only one of me.

## A New Chapter

When I got married, the plan was to focus on my home and children. When they were in grade school, around the third grade, I would begin to work, explore my dreams, and career passions. I went through a divorce around the time my children were in grade school, so college for me was placed on the back burner to find employment to take care of them. I did take real estate courses and earned an A on all four classes, but I needed to find something right away to take care of the household.

My husband came back from Desert Storm to our hometown where I rented a house for the kids and I to stay in while he was deployed to war. When things shift and become quiet and still, sometimes other things begin to scream louder. While the family was settling in after a long hard bout with our loved one fighting in a war not knowing what would happen, PTSD and marriage infidelities (yes, plural) showed up loud and clear. The PTSD we could manage, but his infidelities over the years were not manageable, nor was the emotional abuse. He did not want to work on the marriage to repair the damage, so in different directions we went. This was so difficult for me because I did not want my children to suffer the trauma of a broken home. Sometimes it is healthier over all to let go.

I have worked jobs over the years to take care of my household as a single parent. I learned much about myself; I learned what I liked, what I loved, and what I hated.



## **The Second Time Around**

I went to beauty school to obtain a Managing Esthetics License when my youngest son entered high school, (yes, I remarried, that's a long story). I completed the program in a year and a half while I worked two jobs.

I drove to Columbus, Ohio to take the Board exams. I was so excited to go to Columbus and take on this great challenge. It was said at my school that many go through school but do not take the exams to earn their license or they fail. That made me more determined than ever to take the exams and pass. I wanted both licenses; Managing Esthetics License, and an Independent Contractors License (to open a business).

Well, the night before my exams, I studied and studied. I stayed up half the night (big mistake) going over my index cards and the information in the book. I was too excited to sleep. I was studying and praying. Eventually I fell asleep on the couch. I figured I would get a few hours of sleep and take the two-and-a-half-hour drive with some caffeine.

I do not know how much time passed, but I jumped up startled. I could not remember what I was doing, supposed to do, and where. I was so out of it. I felt like somebody drugged me with a sleeping pill. I looked at the time and I was late leaving the house to get there on time. If you get to the Board late, the door is shut and locked, and no one is coming in.

I got myself together, grabbed my study material and my purse. I was still out of it and could not remember where I was going and how to get there. Oh, the internet on my phone would not work, so I could not get the address to the State Board in Columbus. If I had written it down,

because I was out of it I would not have found it anyway. I felt like I was sleepwalking. I could not understand what was wrong with me.

I drove to the gas station down the street to ask if somebody could help me. Maybe they could pull up the address for me on their phone or give me directions or something. Well, I just happened to go to a gas station where young people were working. I walked in all discombobulated asking for help. They probably thought I was on drugs. They said they did not know anything, so I walked out. When I got into my car, the internet on my phone began to work. I thought that was the perfect time to take off.

I got on the highway and eventually came to myself. I reached Columbus in just enough time, but wouldn't you know it, there was a traffic jam which caused me to miss my exit and the time window was closed. I finally got off the highway and took the ramp to come back home.

Everything was fighting me that day. But prayerfully I understood that if I would have made it to the State Board to take the test, I would have failed. I guess so, two hours earlier I could not remember my name, but I was determined to go. I still cannot determine what was wrong with me that day. I have never been out of it like that before in my life. But again, I know the Lord was protecting me.

Eventually I went up there again. I made none of the choices I made before. I went to bed and slept, I had everything ready, and it was a smooth beautiful ride going to the State Board. I took all of the exams and passed with flying colors. To celebrate I went to lunch and ordered myself a Ribeye steak with cheesecake for dessert. It was juicy and tender. I was a Licensed Managing Esthetician with an Independent Contractors License. I went to my school to report the good news. It was a wonderful day.

I was blessed to find a small studio space and opened a salon to perform facials, waxing, make-up, lashes, and relaxation massages. I absolutely loved it. This was also in line with beauty. Not creating beautiful garments per say, but helping others feel beautiful.

I felt so free and happy with owning my own business. Being an entrepreneur is what I was meant to do, and the Lord was blessing it. The Lord blessed me to do everything for my business. I decorated it, did the marketing, website, created flyers, business cards, banners, etc.

I was also a make-up artist for a photographer through my business for a while. Eventually I closed it and a few years later the world went on lockdown. Taking the leap of faith to open my spa when others did not think it was an innovative idea was liberating.

## Choices

Life is such a beautiful journey. Even the hardest things are meant to take us higher, make us stronger, expand our being, and cause us to draw closer to Father God. We are forever children in this life, whether God's or not, we are children to whoever we choose to follow. The fruit of that is who we are and who we choose to become. We have a will and the right of choice given by God to do with this life/time whatsoever we choose. Our choices whether good or bad are laced with consequences, the consequences being good, bad or both. I made the decision many years ago to follow God the Father through the shed blood of his Son, Jesus Christ, being led by God's Spirit.

The Father spoke to me with an audible voice when I answered the call of salvation over thirty-six years ago. He told me in the middle of the night, if I obey him, there is nothing he would withhold from me. I was a young saint, a babe at the time, I did not quite understand such a marvelous thing, but as life moved forward, he showed me by his care how faithful he is concerning his promises.

Life as it is, is full of ups and downs. The Father keeps His children. He loves true worship and asking Him for wise counsel and help in time of need. I have definitely utilized all of these factors in my life because he is beautifully faithful to his word concerning me and all who seek him. Being sixty-one years old, I have seen many of life's lessons, experiences, bad decisions (with the consequences), as well as good decisions (with the rewards).

I have been married a few times, traveled, lived in different places, raised my children, worked, established businesses, obtained degrees, and suffered great loss. But the Father never forgot, of course, what he told me in the midst of it all. There is a scripture in the bible:

*“9 The glory of this **latter** house **shall be greater** than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.” (The Bible KJV)*

This scripture stands true for my life in this season because he also told me this scripture as well. In 2020, my life shifted into the manifestation of this very scripture. It is so odd, as the Father does things in this manner sometimes, as the world was going through a horrific ordeal with the virus, lock down, many dark days for the nation, and my family, I was experiencing a new birth of wonderful talents I never thought I would have done. (Higginbottom)

## **Birth of an Artist**

I told a story about the beads I was obsessed with, and that obsession turned into a business. Just as many others, during the lock down in 2020, I thought I would try different hobbies other than the ones I already had to help with relaxing and keeping positive. I was not on lockdown because I was considered an “essential worker” doing food deliveries. Well, one day I thought it would be a good idea to try painting. I was not a painter. I dabbled a bit in designing posters, flyers, home décor, fashion, but not painting. I admired the art, but I was not the artist.

I literally felt led by God to start painting. There was a question, “I do not know how to do that. What do I do?” So, I followed the lead. The idea came to my mind to go to my local Hobby Lobby craft store. Of course the first thing I needed was paint supplies. The simple things were paint, brushes, and a canvas.

I drove to Hobby Lobby. When I arrived I went straight to the paint supplies. I looked around thinking, my art will look like a three-year old doing finger painting (chuckle). Well, okay, here we go. The other thing I noticed was the paint was on sale fifty percent off; not only was the regular paint on sale, but they also had paint in the clearance section starting at 99 cents. I laughed to myself because the Lord was confirming his unction to me. I grabbed the basic paint colors, blue, black, white, gold (my favorite), silver, green, yellow, purple, grey, and brown. I also purchased paint brushes. I did not feel led to get canvas’s at that time, because the Father had something else in mind.

I purchased all of my supplies, and I watched a few YouTube videos to familiarize myself with art and technique. This adventure was truly a faith move because I was a novice at best. I began painting using the canvass I purchased. I was truly operating in the abstract art painting arena. The canvass I was using were okay for practice, but if I wanted to eventually sell my paintings or try to have my art in a gallery, so I needed a quality surface to paint on. One day I was praying about painting, and the surfaces I was to paint on, and possibly have them framed. Even if I could afford the more expensive canvass, which I could, again, it can get pretty expensive in the long run as a beginner, especially to have them framed. Framing can go up to well over one hundred dollars. Your profit can be eaten up by the cost of material. After praying and meditating on it, I heard to buy pictures already framed and place your art inside the frame, that way I will not have to buy canvass or pay for framing if needed.

I took the paper off the back of the frame and took the picture out of it. I stood there looking at the picture waiting for inspiration. It hit me. Paint the foundation grey and tap in white paint on top of it. They say you really cannot make a mistake painting abstract because it is a free expression.

Well, I made a mistake, and I did not like what I saw. I put my hand on my head and said, “Lord I made a mess, could you please help me fix it?” After a few minutes, I could see clearly what to do. I painted gold using up and down motions with my brush, and brushed gold up and down at the bottom slanting to the left. Next, I applied black lines randomly throughout. I stepped back and could not believe what I was seeing. The picture looked like angels standing as far as the eye could see, and they were casting a shadow on the ground in front of them. I was beyond elated and grateful. I loved it. I called it Psalm 91.

Now, what do I do with this scratched frame? I heard to put pewter colored paint where the cracks are to give it special effects. After I was done, my heart was so full. I was so inspired. That was the beginning of my journey becoming an Artist.

I began painting pictures for my children, friends, and decorating my home with my paintings. I could not believe this was me doing this. I have accomplished many things in my life but as a painter, not me.

I visited the local art galleries to learn more. I enjoyed it so much. One art gallery I visited downtown where I live was having an exhibition for new artists in the area. I felt led to apply. I had faith to believe I would be accepted, and receive the stipend given to the chosen few. I applied, submitted my paintings and an artist bio.

I went on YouTube to research all of this first. I waited to hear back from them. It seemed like it was taking forever. I continued to paint and wait. One day I received an email stating that I was not chosen for this show but not to give up.

Well, prior to applying I asked the Lord if I would win, he said yes, when I received the email I was confused. So, back to prayer I went and asked God what happened. It came to me that I did win, it was a good experience, I learned, I grew, and it was all right. Time passed and I was happy, content, and felt so accomplished.

About a month later, I received an email from the art gallery with a flyer and an invitation to participate as an artist in the members showcase. I thought I was reading the email wrong, so I read it again. I could not believe it. I was invited to be part of a showcase for new artists who applied for the stipend showcase that I did not win. They had so many applicants who applied for



the first showcase, they decided to have a members showcase to allow more artists to present their artistry in the gallery.

The first thing that came to mind is when the Lord told me that I did win. Yes, I won a spot in the gallery, but it came a different way. I was so thankful to God the Father for blessing me.

I had so many questions. Do I use a painting I already have; do I paint a new one, will my painting sell, what do I do? I painted a new painting, gave it a title, a description/interpretation, and submitted it to the art gallery.

I dropped off my painting on the day appointed bright and early. I felt like I was in a dream. I was actually dropping off a painting for a showing to the art museum. Me, the artist? When the Lord – Father God tells us something, he means just what he says.

I was told when I was growing up that I would not amount to anything. I never understood this. I got into college prep high school because I was a straight A student, and I went to church while growing up. I am so glad the Father was looking out for me and defied the evil report of the naysayers. (Higginbottom)

For Photo of painting see Appendix 2 – Page 79

## **A Masterpiece**

Creating a masterpiece is an everyday thing.

The best stack of pancakes ever

Pulling a pie out of the oven with great expectation

Hitting the alarm clock for the first time

Turning a key to open a place called home

One more look into the mirror before leaving

The smile that is all gums coming from a baby

A slight lift of the head to catch a cool breeze

Dad throws me the ball one more time

The elderly couple holding hands after fifty years

Taking off the training wheels for the first time

I learned how to spell my name

A masterpiece is created every moment of the day

That masterpiece is life.

(Higginbottom)

## **That Craft Store**

There was a craft store not far from my house that was well-loved and still talked about fondly. The community, me included, could go to this craft store to purchase materials for any craft project. I shopped there for years and visited frequently because I was always working on one project or another. If I wanted to make a poster for something, purchase flowers for home décor, vases, or wicker baskets, buy paint for crafts, or whatever craft idea I had in mind at that time, I could go there to purchase the materials and make my art projects a reality.

I often just walked around the store because it was so relaxing, and I could always find clearance sales for something I needed. I just knew I felt at home in the craft store. It felt like family because the associates were always so lovely and helpful. I would also run into friends and family there who loved it as much as I did.

One day, I drove to the craft store and noticed signs on the building; "Store Closing Sale." I stood there in disbelief and thought I was in a nightmare. I had to go into the store to verify the sign and understand why this terrible thing is happening in our lives. The store associates confirmed that the closing sign was true, and they were closing it. I was heartbroken, to say the least. Walking around the store, I had visual flashbacks of all the memories, smiles, laughs, and glorious craft merchandise I had purchased there. I kept saying to myself, "How could this be? We all love this place." This store is one of our spaces where we can relax, see all the beautiful colors, look at all the project possibilities, and even be motivated to create something new while walking around.

As stores do when closing, the merchandise cost declined and changed weekly. It was just a reminder to us that closing is undoubtedly going to happen. I went there almost daily because I discovered the aisle with the beautiful, shiny, colorful beads. I was never interested in beads before, but for whatever reason, I just wanted to be around these beads that were on sale at an unbelievable price.

I walked down the bead aisle every visit and thought, "These beads are so beautiful and cheap too"; I have to purchase beads. Maybe I could get them for my granddaughter. I found a reason to purchase those beads I felt needed a home. I began to buy them. The idea was to give them to my granddaughter, and she and I could learn how to create something together.

My granddaughter is an entrepreneur outright. She was taught, as early as three years old, how to create a product she was interested in and sell it (cupcakes). As she got older, her vision grew with her. So here I am, wanting to introduce this new commodity and add it to her list of business interests. We truly got this passion honestly as they say, because my dad was also an entrepreneur. I have had my own business ventures, so the vision for a new experience was brewing underneath.

While I was at the store gathering these beads almost daily, I called my granddaughter and told her what I was doing. She was excited about the idea. I know nothing about beads and have never made an earring or bracelet, which was a grand idea. I love jewelry, but I purchased my jewelry already made from department stores. But I felt I needed to, had to, must have these beads in my life, which I was trying to include my granddaughter (funny).

It was such a rush. Each week the beads got cheaper and cheaper. I was still unhappy with the store closing but focused on buying as many beads as possible. The associates would smile when they saw me coming into the store repeatedly, buying so many beads. I ran into an old friend

there at the closing craft store. She began to tell me she makes jewelry and has been making it for a while now. I told her about my new passion for beads, for whatever reason I did not know. She and I exchanged phone numbers. She called me shortly afterward because she heard the same craft store in other surrounding counties were also closing. She invited me to accompany her and her other friend as they shopped at these other stores. I could not be more excited. Before I knew it my bead count had grown bigger. My friend looked at me while shopping like, "Wow, you are serious." I could not explain it.

Eventually, I took beads, plastic storage boxes, jewelry-making tools, and findings (wire for earrings, and elastic string for bracelets) to my granddaughter. We started with making bracelets and moved on to making earrings. I do not know how, but we were making jewelry. The Lord showed me what to do. After our little jewelry-making sessions, my granddaughter began to make jewelry on her own. I could have done better at it, but my granddaughter caught on quickly and grew into the art of jewelry making. She took the jewelry she made, set up a little table on her porch, and stood there selling her product to the neighbors who passed by. She even sold her handcrafted jewelry at local vendor shows. I was so proud.

I told my first cousin about the bead sale. She began to go and purchase beads herself. She made the most beautiful jewelry. Her jewelry looked as if it belonged in a magazine. I was amazed and admired it so. I immediately told her she should take that natural jewelry-making gift and start a business. She said she was not interested in doing that. She just liked making jewelry for herself to relax. I was so disappointed because she was so good at making jewelry.

So, my cousin wanted to avoid starting a business, and my granddaughter was losing interest in making jewelry. I still had my own supply of beads, which I purchased until the stores closed. What do I do now? Why do I even have all of these beads? One night, I was sitting on my

bed, thinking about everything. I asked the Lord, "What do I do with all of these beads?" It was like a lightbulb popped over my head. I can make jewelry myself, but how do I do this good enough to sell to others? I began to watch YouTube videos on how to make earrings and bracelets. I practiced, and practiced, and practiced making earrings and bracelets. I became better and better at it. I began to wear the jewelry I made and received so many compliments. The vision that was brewing underneath began to materialize.

I decided to turn one of my bedrooms into a craft room. I had the time of my life. I decorated and built a high-top counter onto the wall on one side of the room, put a desk in one corner, and another desk in the other corner. I turned the closet into a storage space by putting shelves to store product. I put shelves on the wall in the room and hung pictures of my favorite things on the wall over the high-top counter. I also decorated each corner of the room according to its purpose. Before I knew it, I had created with the help of the good Lord, a craft room for all the beautiful visions in my heart, and an office space to pursue my online education.

When I was finished, I thought about my journey. The Lord put that desire for beads, wire, string, clasps, and tools in my heart. He also blessed me to fully stock my room with whatever I needed to flourish in my business ventures. All the while, I was buying beads and did not understand it. The Lord had a plan for the next season in my life. I started an e-commerce/online store for ladies' jewelry. I sold handcrafted necklaces, bracelets, and earrings. I also participated in vendors shows in my community. I did okay with it, but I wanted more.

One day, I sat in my craft room, thinking and praying about what to do. I heard to change it. I thought, change it? Change it to what? See, I started playing around with making men's jewelry and found that I loved it more than handcrafting women's jewelry. So, I understood at that moment what I was supposed to do. I completely wiped my online store of women's jewelry, rebranded,

and started a men's jewelry line. I cannot tell you how happy and peaceful I was when this change occurred. I liked making women's jewelry but felt anxious and did not feel the peace of doing it at that time. So, the men's jewelry line was born. I returned to YouTube and learned the ins and outs of making men's jewelry. I also learned how to use wire, leather, and beads to create handsome designs I love.

I really hope my memory encourages others to pursue what is brewing in their hearts, to take a leap of faith, and just go for it.

For Photo of jewelry see Appendix 3 Page-80

## **Treasure Place Indeed**

I was at the thrift store, which I call my treasure hunt place. I always find the most beautiful garments there. I commented on a dress the lady next to me was holding up. We ended up discussing inadvertently, being authentic in the senior stage of life. She stated she was 66 years old. I told her my age. We shared how we were finding ourselves in this new season of self-discovery after raising kids and focusing so much on just what surrounded our lives.

We talked about how our style changed and what our style was after shifting from certain dominant roles. We also discussed now having the time to do what we always wanted to do from the beginning. She got married young like I did, so we had so much in common. She started her own small business too and began to paint. She started painting during the lockdown and realized painting was another talent that surfaced.



## Senior Who?

When I first came to college, I had so many emotions. The top emotions were excitement and great expectation. The third was dread of the oh-so-famous algebra classes, which were genuinely challenging for me because I came into class with the mindset of anxiety. It turned out that I earned A's and B's on my assignments, but this was along with many anxiety attacks and ice cream. I quickly learned that I was not the only senior citizen in classes with fresh out of high school college students who whizzed through the material looking unphased. I often saw other seasoned individuals sitting next to me, with what in the world looks, or how I will pass these math classes. We encouraged one another often and chained ourselves to the math lab and tutors. I was determined to make it through to accomplish my goal while waiving the banner which read, "It is never too late."

So here I am, a master's student who is about to graduate. With many life lessons, new gifts emerging, and a great sense of gratitude, I stand in place for the seniors/seasoned individuals who were told it could not be done, responsibilities in life are too heavy, or feel it is too late. I stand with the sacrifices being well worth it, degrees in hand, excited for the future, and everyday creating authenticity. This is just the beginning again.

## What Can Be Better Than This

While researching for my thesis I discovered amazing life changing stories and information that was so inspiring. I was looking for statistics on how many people accomplish their dreams. I found an article on *Lifecare Advocates* website, *People Who Fulfilled Their Dreams Later in Life*, written by Aaron. The article was written to give tribute to a list of elderly individuals who pursued their dreams no matter the age; they were determined to accomplish what was in their hearts. I had to include the list on this thesis which speaks leaps and bounds of what my thesis is all about. Aaron from *Life Advocates* website wrote:

**Barbara Hillary** was the first African American to reach the North Pole, at age 75. Four years later, at age 79, she reached the South Pole, making her the first African American woman to reach both poles. Barbara, who turns 86 in June, continues her adventures around the globe. Barbara lives in New York City and still lectures about her amazing life. (Aaron, 2017)

**Fauja Singh**, at the age of 100, became the first centenarian to complete a marathon, when he ran the Toronto marathon with a time of 8:11:06. He went on to carry the Olympic torch during the 2004 games in Athens and again in 2012 in London. In 2016, he ran in the Mumbai Marathon. Fauja started running in his 80s after moving to London. (Aaron, 2017)

**Tamae Watanabe**, a Japanese mountain climber, became the oldest woman to climb Mount Everest in May 2002 at the age of 63. Not satisfied with that achievement, 10 years later, she climbed Everest again, at the age of 73, breaking her own record. (Aaron, 2017)

**James C. Warren**, a retired Lieutenant Colonel and former navigator of the Tuskegee Airmen, the first African American military aviators in the United States Armed Forces, received his pilot's license at the age of 87, making him the oldest person in the world to do so. James lived in Vacaville, California. (Aaron, 2017)

**Harry Bernstein**, at age 96, published his first book, *The Invisible Wall*, a heartwarming look at how love can break down walls. It speaks to the resilience of the human spirit. He authored the book as a way to cope with his loneliness after his wife, Ruby, passed away. Harry lived in Brick Township, New Jersey. (Aaron, 2017)

I read this list and it literally brought tears to my eyes and a praise to my lips. I pray that this list inspires others who read this thesis to do what is in their heart and soul to do. I definitely will continue to allow my soul and my God the opportunity for glorious expression.

## Shine You Will

When God wants you to shine  
no one else can stand in your way.

When He wants you to shine  
He protects you from what you think matters.

When God wants you to shine  
He welcomes all the haters.

When God wants you to shine  
Everything fades to black.

When God wants you to shine  
alone you may have to be.

When He wants you to shine  
there can be nothing standing in your way.

When He, God wants you to shine  
not even you can stop the purpose of the complete,  
especially when on your face you constantly seek Him.

When God wants you to shine  
it is not a matter of time  
because time has already been taken into consideration.

When God wants you to shine  
a fighter He will become  
because whatever comes against you, your warrior He will be.

When God wants you to shine  
the playing field is leveled  
for when it is time to arise  
the only thing on the horizon  
is His glorious, marvelous, manifested, presence.

(Higginbottom)



## Appendix 1 for Page 64

I also dabble in photography. This is another goal of mine. Part of my authentic self.



(Higginbottom)

([www.vecteezy.com](http://www.vecteezy.com))

## Appendix 2

Birth of an Artist – One of my paintings, Page 64.



(Higginbottom)

([www.vecteezy.com](http://www.vecteezy.com))



## Appendix 3 - The Craft Store

Black leather bracelet



Hand painted tag necklace  
(Higginbottom)



**Appendix 4 – Flyer for my salon business**

*Facials*

**Just Simply Beautiful**

**Facials  
Massages  
Eyelashes  
Makeup  
Waxing Services**

**Also:  
Weddings  
Bridal Parties  
Special Occasions**

**Make Your Appointment**

**Aleathea  
Licensed Managing  
Esthetician  
330-780-1770**

**\$5.00 off  
first visit**

**Ripl**

(Higginbottom)

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