

FOREWORD

Susan's personal voyage to victory provides inspiration to all who have encountered adversity on their paths to finding peace, happiness, and fulfillment in life. Her story transcends racial and socioeconomic boundaries to paint a vivid picture of how faith, perseverance, and mentorship often provide the foundation to finding the courage and confidence one needs to escape the shackles of poverty and abuse. Like Susan, I too endured a tumultuous childhood, marred by poverty and instability. Thankfully, God always strategically placed angels along the way to provide whatever I was lacking. At times it was a warm meal, or shelter, and other times it was an encouraging word to lift the spirits of a child that was deeply wounded. In 1993, at the age of 14, God placed one of those angels in my life yet again, in the form of my high school guidance counselor. That angel was Susan Bowman, and like her mentor "Iliana," described in her book, she provided the extra love and support I so desperately needed as I entered young adulthood.

Now at 30 years old, with two Masters degrees and a successful career at Google, I can say with certainty that my success thus far is due, in large part, to Susan's mentorship along the way. She always encouraged me to envision a life beyond the despair that surrounded me in my small South Carolina hometown that at the time was plagued with the highest teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease rates in the state. Susan's personal journey to a life filled with love, financial stability, and peace is just as inspiring as the guidance and insight she has shared with me over the past 14 years. *Breaking Free* provides a vivid recount of that journey. All who read it will truly be inspired, and will clearly see that if Susan can overcome the odds, then I can...you can... anyone can.

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever thought about writing a book about your life but didn't know where to start? Well, that is how I felt about writing this book. I have some painful memories of my past as a runaway. Frankly, I didn't think anyone really cared about what I experienced. However, after sharing my story numerous times at professional speaking engagements, I was approached by a number of women who told me what an inspiration my story was to them. This persuaded me to write my life story. My husband, a national speaker, always encouraged me to share my story in public as a way to help others who are going through difficult times, especially those who need to know that there is a way out of their difficult situation. Although I experienced running away from home at 14, dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, homelessness, and extreme poverty, the most difficult challenge was the emotional abuse I endured from my then boyfriend during that time. It took me many years to break free from an abusive boyfriend/husband and then years to heal from the invisible scars.

I remember reading *A Child Called "It"* by Dave Pelzer and thinking how incredible his story was about his abusive past. While I read about his horrible childhood, I was intrigued by his strength to survive and his determination to overcome. I am so thankful he risked sharing his emotionally difficult story with the world. He and others like him who risk sharing their very personal and heart wrenching stories, have been an inspiration to countless people who have had to struggle their entire life with the pain of their past. No one deserves to live a life of regret for what others did to them. Being a victim of abuse, whether it's bullying or domestic violence, emotional or physical abuse, can eat at you your entire life if you allow it to. The effects of living with

emotional abuse, as told by Katherine Mayfield in her book, *The Box of Daughter: Healing the Authentic Self*, can be devastating;

“Emotional abuse is any behavior designed to control and subjugate another person by using fear, humiliation, and repeated verbal assaults. It can include constant criticism, intimidation, belittling, berating, and refusal to ever be pleased.

Emotional abuse is similar to brainwashing in that it steadily wears down the victim’s self-confidence, sense of self-worth, trust in their own perceptions, and self-esteem. Sometimes the abuse is disguised as ‘guidance,’ ‘teaching,’ or ‘advice,’ but the results are the same. The recipient of the abuse eventually loses all sense of self, and stops believing in his (or her) personal value.”

This is so true. I remember eventually feeling like I had no real value or sense of self. It’s hard to even function in your day to day life when you are constantly subjected to emotional abuse.

I believe that sharing my story can be helpful to so many; to the adolescent who wants to drop out of school and sees no purpose for their life, or the drop out that has no hope of one day going to college, a teen mom who is living in poverty and cannot see a way out, or that young lady who is in an abusive relationship and does not know how to break free. This book is also for those of you who just enjoy reading stories about people in seemingly hopeless situations, who find a way to succeed far beyond what they ever dreamed. May it help you to tap into your inner strengths and that determination to pursue your personal dreams. My wish is that my story will move those so inclined to seek out those young people that nobody wants to work with and to listen to their story. By listening, you can save their life, by encouraging them you can save several lives and by investing in them you can save an entire community.