

Conquering  
*Me*



# Conquering *Me*

A Memoir Of Courage,  
Faith, And Transformation

**By Dr. Jolinda Wade**

*as shared with Arthur Samuel Joseph, M.A.*

Foreword By Dwyane Wade, Olympic Gold Medalist And  
Member Of The Naismith National Basketball Association  
Hall Of Fame



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# Conquering *Me*

## A Memoir Of Courage, Faith, And Transformation

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*And do not be conformed to this world,  
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,  
that you may prove what is that good and acceptable  
and perfect will of God.*

ROMANS 12:2

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# Table Of Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	ix
<b>Preface</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 1: The Beginning</b> .....	5
<b>Chapter 2: Becoming A Mother—Fear, Discovery, And My Evolution</b> .....	19
<b>Chapter 3: Addiction—Drugs, Alcohol, And Fear: The Impact On My Life And My Children’s Lives</b> .....	35
<b>Chapter 4: Prison—The First Time, Homelessness, Abuse And My Awakening</b> .....	51
<b>Chapter 5: Hearing God’s Voice—And Listening: My Awakening Sunday, October 14, 2001</b> .....	89
<b>Chapter 6: My Renaissance—Restitution And Redemption</b> .....	123
<b>Chapter 7: My Unfolding</b> .....	149
<b>Epilogue: Unconditional Love: Stories From My Friends And Family</b> .....	189
<b>Afterword: A Message Of Hope</b> .....	247
<b>To My Fantastic Four: Deanna, Keisha, Tragil, Dwyane An Open Letter To My Children</b> .....	255
<b>The Hero’s Journey: A Commentary By Arthur Samuel Joseph, MA</b> .....	261
<i>Acknowledgments</i> .....	269



## Foreword

There's something remarkable about watching someone become the hero of their own story.

My mother didn't wait for rescue. She didn't pretend the hard parts didn't happen. She met them head-on—with honesty, with faith, and with a love that refused to give up. Her life has taken her through trials that would've broken many: addiction, prison, pain. But somehow, through it all, she kept looking up. And in looking up, she found a way forward—not just for herself, but for those of us lucky enough to walk behind her.

This book is her voice. Her truth. Her story told in her own words. You'll hear about the love she's always had for God—not rooted in fear, but in grace. You'll see the lessons she's learned as both a mother and a grandmother. You'll feel her faith in action—even in the loneliest moments.

When she was in prison, I only saw her once. My sisters, not many times. And yet, she never stopped seeing us. She held on to our faces—visualizing them, leaning on them—when it would've been easier to give up. That mental picture of her children helped pull her through, and that kind of love? That kind of love is not ordinary. It's Agape!

My mom has enhanced my life in ways I'm still learning to name. She's taught me about real love, real care, real strength. And I like to think I've given her a little something back too—maybe a lesson or two, maybe just a reason to keep going.

This isn't a story wrapped in a bow. It's raw. It's detailed. It's honest. But that's exactly why it matters. Because someone out there needs to know that redemption is real. That healing is possible. That your past doesn't disqualify you from purpose.

Read these pages, and you'll meet a woman who turned pain into power, mistakes into ministry, and faith into forward motion. She is, without question, the hero of her story. And I couldn't be prouder to call her Mom.

**Dwyane Wade,**

Olympic Gold Medalist, NBA All-Star,

and member of the National Basketball Association Hall of Fame

# Preface

This book is an opportunity for me to share the various experiences of my life through the arc of my Journey to this point in time. I want you to take away from your reading of my story insights that may inspire you and may enable you to empower yourself. My tale starts with experiencing my life through the prism of my pain and struggles, continues onward to my victories, and shares my ever-present courage for survival that led to my ultimate success. I “made it out!”

However, for so many years it was virtually impossible for me to “see the light of day,” as the tunnel I was buried in was so very deep and dark until—finally—at 10:30 a.m., October 14, 2001, when God’s voice awakened me. Frankly, I’d heard His voice before, but this time I listened. God asked me to get dressed—and go to church. With that simple act, I changed my life and claimed my power.

Please note: I did not say, “*My life changed.*” I clearly said, “*I changed my life.*”

I fervently believe that when you read this book, you will not simply be motivated to take action in your own life; you will be *inspired* to do so. I share this because the root of the word *inspire* means to “breathe into” someone. As God breathes the breath of life into me, I want to

breathe my very soul into you. Through this passionate commitment to give all that I can, if I can help save one life by publicly sharing my story, I will have fulfilled the mission of this book.

We are living in a time when people truly need inspiration. We are living in a time when we need to experience hope and possibility. *Conquering Me* is, on the one hand, the story of my life, but beyond this, it is an exploration of faith, courage, resilience, will, and ultimately—freedom.

I was a broken vessel that I had to piece back together for God's purpose. Faith without work is dead. One must really put forth an effort to come through those things that we fear the most. Until that day of my awakening, I firmly believed that fear had conquered me—that I had no control over my situation in life.

The word *conquer* means to “overcome”—to “take control of”—and that day, on October 14, 2001, God came to me and told me that I could now take control of my life. Simply by *letting go* of my crippling fear and *letting God in*, I would be reborn. Not simply “reborn” in the evangelical sense, but I would be fully responsible for rebirthing myself.

I had been swimming alone against the tide—going nowhere. The Creator did not give me my fear; I created it. After my awakening, I heard the Creator say, “I didn't give you a spirit of fear, but the power of love and a sound mind.”

Fear sucks the life right out of us. It takes our power from us, crushes our belief system. Fear controls when we laugh, whom we laugh with, and whom we love. When we are in fear, we are not of sound mind. Fear is the mind killer.

When God spoke to me that day, except for the births of my beautiful children, it was the most remarkable moment of my life, for, in an instant, I released my fear. God did not release my fear; God gave me the power to release my own fear, and in that moment, I knew that all would be right.

I had heard God's voice many other times in my life and generally ignored it. This time was different. Through letting go and letting God in, I immediately felt God's reassuring presence that I was not alone. God was my partner. The comfort and security this knowledge brought was an epiphany. In choosing to listen, in choosing to act, I climbed out of the tunnel to emerge into the light of day. Literally, each day ever since has been amazing.

I *am* my own hero. What an astonishing thing to say. I began writing this book when I was sixty-six years old and completed it when I was seventy. Given the circumstances of my life over the previous several decades, I never thought that I could be anyone's hero—let alone my own. As the chapters unfold, you will be able to discover how I am actually able to acknowledge this truth. It is not an aspirational truth—*it is the truth*. I am my own hero and I know it.

My belief is that, if you, too, have taken a wrong turn in life as I did and have gotten lost, you can learn from my story and, hopefully, it can lead you to *your* right path.



## Chapter 1

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# The Beginning

Let me take you back to where this all began.

I was born on the South Side of Chicago, the fifth of nine children, five girls and four boys, to our single mother, Willie Mae Morris. My father had left us but continued to live in the neighborhood and only occasionally visited us. So, it became my mother's responsibility to raise seven of us as well as manage to support us on the meager wages she earned cleaning houses, among other jobs she held.

I knew she loved us. She showed us her love every day by faithfully working diligently to make sure that we always had a roof over our heads, food on the table, and clothes on our backs.

At the same time and for many years as we were growing up, my mom was an alcoholic. Sometimes she'd go out and party, and often, she held card games in our home. Although she drank and enjoyed the company of men, she didn't allow any of the men to mess with us. This was the lifestyle we were exposed to—in fact, my older siblings also abused drugs and alcohol. We didn't see it as being such a bad thing. It was our normal.

Even when my mother was drinking and partying, she still continued to put our welfare first. She continued to love us, provide for us, and

care for us. In this respect I now recognize that she was very special—in fact, exceptional.

When I was twelve or thirteen, Mom said, “My kids are growing up.” And, with the realization of how her behavior was affecting us, she gave up her drinking and partying life—just like that. A number of years later, she did tell me that a couple of years after she stopped drinking, she tried to sneak a beer and it just “froze in her mouth.” She never touched another drop again.

That took grit and willpower. For that reason, as well as for the powerful love and devotion she had for all of us, plus her courageous work ethic, her unwavering faith in God and the Holy Spirit, my dear mother is my first hero.

One theme woven throughout this book is heroism. As I just stated, my mother is my first hero. My grit and determination come from my mother. I am forever in her debt for being such a powerful role model. She accepted whatever life gave her and always remained a woman of faith, steadfast and upright.

Another theme that will run throughout this book is an exploration of fear. One thing that I discovered in crafting this memoir was how, for so many years, fear and my lack of self-worth and self-esteem were inextricably linked, and I asked myself, “Where did my fear, my lack of self-worth, and belief in myself begin?”

One thought that occurred to me is that I was a very sensitive child. I felt every single thing so intensely. In this context, one recognition that emerged is that I simply needed more affection, more hugs, more personal time with her than my loving mother could provide.

I now recognize that this longing for more nurturing than my siblings required was due to my emotional sensitivity and to the fact that I had contracted rheumatic fever, which clearly depleted me physically as well as emotionally and spiritually. I was weakened in every way.

Because of my illness, Mama wouldn't let me go outside and play with the other children. Consequently, I spent a great deal of time alone. This, in turn, was scary as I didn't know what was happening to me, or where to go to feel safe and know that everything would be "all right." I didn't know how to share what I was feeling or even who to share it with.

As I spent a good deal of time by myself, I created a rather elaborate fantasy world where I would stage my dolls, shoes, and anything I could find to interact with and tell them stories that I created from my rather remarkable imaginary life. I would speak out loud. I would envision what the people in my stories looked like, where they lived. I saw everything, and it was very real to me.

I have always loved reading and, during these solitary times, I retreated into the world of books. I even used to hide under the bed or find anywhere I could to hole up and escape into the world of stories. They transported me into a realm of fantasy, adventure, and romance.

The tales I read became my reality. I simply did not have to be here—I was transported to a better place. And, because of my passion for reading and my inability to express my feelings, I discovered that, in solitude, my books and my hiding places became a sanctuary, a safe place for me to be.

However, this behavior led my family to think I was strange. My dad often said, "There's something wrong with this child," and that I needed to be in a hospital. My siblings would sometimes say to me, "Girl, you're strange." But, truth be told, I didn't want to be "different." I didn't want to be more "strange" than I already was perceived to be.

Even at that early age, I recognized that I wanted to be like everyone else—but I wasn't. I didn't know how to process my feelings, so I shut down and didn't share what was going on with me. I later realized that this, in turn, contributed to my isolation and lack of self-confidence.

It may sound silly or trivial, but another fear was a fear of scary movies. They terrified me! I couldn't watch anything scary as it really messed me

up. We only had one TV, and those scary movies were what my family liked to watch, so if I wanted to watch TV, I had to watch them too. It was all very real to me—even *Frankenstein* was terrifyingly real.

One movie in particular I clearly remember watching was *Children of the Damned*. I was ten years old. It was movie day, and my mother let my siblings take me to see it at the movie theater. Of course, I couldn't watch it; I peeked at it, hiding my face as best I could. When we left the movie, I thought I would be OK—until bedtime, when I tried to lie down and I saw the images all over again in the shadows our clothes made on the bedroom walls.

These shadows were so real, I just went off. My sister had to call my mama, who was at a party, to come home and calm me down because I was so upset that I screamed and hollered. As she had done before, Mama left the party and came home to take care of me.

She would always do that, or if she planned to go out, she would delay leaving whenever I became so distraught that I needed her to comfort me. She would let me climb into bed with her and, literally, hold me until I felt safe. It was her spirit that created this feeling of security and sanctity for me. Nobody else could calm me down except my mother.

My fear of scary movies continued. Even as late as when I was in the eighth grade, I still couldn't watch them. Of course, to this day, I'll never see a horror film.

Throughout my childhood, my favorite day of the week was Sunday. That's when my mother would have us all dress in our Sunday best, and we would go to church. I loved church. I loved Bible study. I loved hearing the songs and, when I was old enough, I loved reading the Bible and singing the songs.

Whatever reality existed Monday through Saturday, Sunday was its own reality. During the week, my family life was busy and more chaotic. On Sunday, we were together as a family. In this way, the church became like another sanctuary for me, as we were all together and we felt embraced

by God's loving and nurturing presence. And, throughout the rest of my life, even in my darkest days, when I go to church alone or take my friends along, whenever I am in church, I feel safe and I love being there.

I first heard God's voice when I was twelve years old. I remember where I was when I first heard His voice. I shared a room with my sisters and one of our brothers, Eddie, who was nine. I was sitting on the side of the bed and, as I often did, was writing in my "journal." What I called my journal were simply random pieces of paper where I shared my most personal thoughts, then stored them in a purse I hid under my mattress.

On this particular day, I was sitting alone in my room, writing something deep and heartfelt, when I heard a soft, gentle Voice say, "It's OK. I love you. You're special." When I heard this, I immediately felt reassured and comforted.

As this Voice emerged within me, it blocked out everything else in my external reality. In this moment, I was not aware of anyone or anything else. I don't know exactly what I was writing that brought the Voice to me to tell me I was special and that I was loved.

It was over in a few seconds. After this extraordinary experience had passed, I stayed on the side of my bed for some time, grabbed a book, and just started reading. Afterward, I felt truly special—for the first time in my life, I felt like I did matter.

As I told you, my dad said, "There's something wrong with this child." So, when I first heard God's voice, not knowing it was His voice, I too began to doubt what I was hearing and think maybe I was crazy, really crazy. I knew this wasn't simply me talking to myself; the experience was too profound, but I was terrified that, if my family found out I was "hearing voices," they would send me away for sure! So, I never shared with anyone that I heard this voice. I kept it to myself.

I was fourteen the next time I heard the Voice. I was alone outside playing hopscotch by myself, and in this episode, it was like I suddenly traveled in time to a foreign place. When I returned to myself and

looked around, I found I was still playing hopscotch. The Voice then said, “You’re safe.”

Now, I didn’t know where I had been taken, but later, as an adult living in Panama with my husband, I experienced a feeling of *déjà vu* when one of my friends took me into Panama City. I was standing on the American side of the street, listening to Spanish being spoken. When I looked, it was exactly where I had “traveled to” when I was fourteen. I recognized it and said to myself, “I’ve been here before.” I knew this was not a hallucination, as I was not on drugs or doing them at the time. It was then that I recalled the Voice and what it had said to me.

So, from the age of twelve through the rest of my life, I heard this Voice. I never knew when or why it would emerge; it simply appeared. Interestingly, it never scared me—it was simply a voice to me. As I’ve said, I never shared with anyone in my family, and one of the principal reasons was, besides not wanting them to think me crazy, that I felt it would give my family another reason to think I am strange.

This sentence is important for the reader to understand. This fear of being strange, of being different, is what was about to lead me down a very dark path for the next thirty-one years of my life—trapped in a living nightmare. So, even though for years I continued to hear the voice, I didn’t know where it came from, what it even was, or what it meant; I didn’t know why it came to me.

It wasn’t until 2001 that I *knew* it was God’s voice. It was simply a voice that I didn’t understand, and I ignored it. I buried it. Whenever I heard it, I would once again close my mind and heart to it—until that fateful day years later at the age of forty-six, when I could no longer deny that it was the voice of God I’d been hearing throughout my life—and I finally chose to listen.

The notion of *choice* is a critical metaphor for all of us. A friend recently said to me, “Every single thing in life revolves only around two things: to choose to do something or to choose not to. It doesn’t matter

how seemingly daunting, how scary. All that matters is how badly you want it.”

In Oakland Elementary School, in the fifth grade, I made the choice to stand up to fear. At recess, there were always a lot of students on the playground, and I might have played with one or two of them, but more often, I wound up by myself just observing. Believe it or not, I didn't even know how to jump rope, and I was afraid if I attempted to, students would laugh at me.

There was one particular student, a Native American girl, who was a loner like me. I used to watch a handful of girls bullying her every time we went to recess. They didn't seem to have anything else to do but bully her, and the teachers in the yard never intervened.

One day, I became so upset that I couldn't take it anymore as I watched them pulling her hair and shoving her. I said aloud to myself, “Enough. Enough in my spirit.” I marched right up to them and said, “If you don't stop hitting her, then you're going to have to fight me,”—like I was the toughest person there. Of course, I was afraid they would turn and come after me, but they didn't. The fact that I had sisters who also went to this school gave me a reputation that I played to the hilt, and perhaps this was the reason they backed off.

Even though crippling fear was connected to me and traveled with me until 2001, in this one moment when I was ten years old, fear did not stop me. I was able to summon my courage in spite of it and then found I could simply walk past the fear—because I had to be there for someone else, someone who was more unfortunate than I was—and, in the process, I conquered me as well.

As I write this chapter, aside from the fear that controlled me until I was forty-six years old, it is gratifying for me to realize that one of my strong character traits is that I have always wanted the best for everyone and have often stood as a protector of those less fortunate and those confronting impending danger. I find it rather quixotic that, while I

could be there for others, I could not be there for myself—until I was forty-six years old.

From the age of fourteen, my lack of self-esteem, fear of being different, craving and wanting to be like everyone else, my unquenchable fear, and my need to belong drove all of my choices—my initial fear and the choices that ensued ruined and ruled my life for the next three decades.

Up until my life drastically changed in the spring of the eighth grade, when I was fourteen, I'd been very active at school. School had always been my refuge. I loved school; I loved my teachers. I was a good student and had a wonderful reputation. In fact, I even wanted to be a teacher when I grew up. If you had asked my teachers, "Who will be the one to succeed?" they would have all said, "Oh, Jolinda is going to succeed." But then, during my final year in middle school, driven by my desire to belong, I began hanging around with the "in crowd."

When I first began making ill-informed choices for myself, I was a "follower" and I wanted to follow the in crowd. This particular group was, how can I say it, wild, independent, and didn't follow the rules. I knew, of course, that I wasn't allowed to drink at school, but as I was a follower, not a leader, one day at lunch, my friends offered me peppermint schnapps and I took a sip. They said, "When we go back to class, the teacher won't be able to smell it." But I reeked of it.

Whenever a student told me to "Try this," or "Try that," I did. It began with peppermint schnapps, the next was marijuana, and then dropping acid. I even tried cocaine, and a hallucinogen they called "tack." This all led to my experimenting with heroin. Before long, I was drinking even before school and, on occasion, would go into my mother's medicine cabinet, identifying the particular pills that would give me a sense of euphoria. My next youngest sister had more street smarts than I did, and I would ask her, "What is this?" She'd tell me, I'd take it, and that way I thought I could get high without Mama smelling it on my breath.

Well, that was my thinking. I said to myself, “You can’t smell pills, but alcohol she could smell.” I regularly began dropping these pills before going to school. We called it “doing a Belushi.”

As I began using pills, drugs, and alcohol, I became less focused on school and just wanted to hang out with my friends. My teachers clearly began to see me changing; certainly, they could smell alcohol on my breath, and, of course, saw that I was hanging out with the wrong crowd. Clearly, it was not the “in crowd” after all. The teachers cared about me and let my mom know that I was abusing alcohol, so that she could try and catch me before it was too late. However, it was already too late.

Then, in the ninth grade, I was admitted to Dunbar Vocational High School in Chicago. It was a difficult school to get into, but I was accepted. They had a rigorous academic program, and students at Dunbar often went on to college—and some of the better colleges as well—and still I squandered the opportunity due to my poor choices.

I began ditching class and learned that, if you showed up in homeroom, they marked you “in.” Then, I wouldn’t go to my classes after that. So, for stuff like that, I “beat myself up” and, the more I beat myself up, the more I drank, the more I used drugs. It was a vicious downward spiral.

Even so, I couldn’t see how serious my situation was. All I cared about was wanting to be with my friends who were in the “cool group.” I so yearned to be popular, to be liked. I wanted to be “that girl”—but I wasn’t. I was what we called an “L-7,” a “square from Delaware”; nevertheless, I forced myself into their world, and I was *accepted*.

For the last few years, I’ve been able to gain greater insight and have more perspective about my life. I’ve often looked back at my childhood, my school years, and seen the extraordinary lack of self-confidence and self-esteem that might have been evident to anyone who knew me, but perhaps I hid it well. Remember, I had become very proficient in burying my feelings.

In hindsight, I now realize I was craving attention, acceptance, affection, and love. Perhaps, I was also hoping my peer group would become a second family, providing me with the affection and acceptance that I didn't feel I always received at home. Again, not because my mother didn't love me, of course she did, but because she simply didn't have the time to fill the void I felt within.

So, at fifteen, not thinking very highly of myself, somehow I noticed that one of the most popular boys on the block was attracted to me—in fact, he lived in my building. Remember, I wasn't street smart, so I didn't know his rep.

Later, I learned that he had a very, very bad reputation, but I was blind to it. My mother hadn't really let us go out in the neighborhood too much because of the type of neighborhood it was, so I was shielded from the reality of my block.

My first boyfriend was seventeen, and I had known him since we were in grammar school. We had always lived in the same building, and my mama knew his mother, and sometimes Mama would babysit for her. When I was twelve and thirteen, he always used to watch me when I was coming home from school, but I didn't know this then. I wasn't interested in boys; I was far too innocent. Maybe that's why Mama protected us, but it made me want to break out of her protective bubble, and I began hanging out with him.

So, when one of the most popular boys in the neighborhood was attracted to me, it did something to me, and I became infatuated with my “first love,” who ended up becoming my lover. He was very popular; all the girls liked him and wanted to be with him. None of that mattered—he liked *me*. And, because I was so naive, so innocent, I couldn't see that he was playing me—he was playing on my naivete. I used to say to him, “You've got me wrapped around your little finger.” You see, I never knew that, with all the affection he was showing me, he had only one thing in mind.

When I wrote earlier about choice, here was the choice that would change my life forever: At fifteen, I chose to give myself to him because I believed I was in love with him and he with me. This was the man I was going to marry.

I had images of the white picket fence, all that stuff. This was my fantasy world, my romantic books, come to life. This was it! The fairy tale world I had been living in for so many years was now real. I even named all the kids we could have. I was going to have about twelve kids, and I wrote all their names down. There was Ardella, Bidella, etc.—all of them were going to be named after him.

The day came when I decided to give over my bodily treasure, my most precious jewel, to this young man I was in love with, believed I would marry, and spend the rest of my life with. Talk about naive. Oh my god, I was the poster child!

Whenever we had sex, I used to ditch school to be with him. That first time was not at all like I thought it would be. It hurt! He was rough. There was no compassion. There was nothing. In fact, it hurt me so bad, we had to call it off. I didn't enjoy anything about it!

I didn't know about how to protect myself from disease and pregnancy. I never thought about asking him to wear a rubber—he didn't have one anyway; also, we didn't talk about such things. All I thought about was "I'm giving my virginity over to my dream come true"—to the man who loved me. I can tell you I have no fond memory of losing my virginity.

We began having sex in January of that year. We were not intimate that often. I didn't like it and it scared me, but because he was my "dream come true," I continued to give myself to him. Then, in July of that same year, I discovered I was pregnant, and my doctor said I had conceived in March.

When I learned that I was pregnant, I also learned that he was a player. In that one year, he got three other girls pregnant as well. Imagine!

I always thought he was all mine. I had no idea that people could be this mean.

When I found out that there were three more girls who had gotten pregnant by him that same year, I went to see one of the mothers with her baby, which he denied up until the time I went and saw the baby. He couldn't deny it after that. He was seventeen years old and I later learned that he was what we called a "cherry popper." His goal was to have sex with as many virgins as possible, and he didn't care about the consequences to any of us. Again, I never knew anybody could be that mean.

Even though he could no longer deny that he was that baby's father and had gotten me pregnant, he still took no responsibility for any of us. My baby was the last of his babies born that year. My first child, whom I named Deanna, was born in December. I don't know if that relationship defined the rest of my relationships, but I can definitely say it truly damaged me and made it far more difficult for me to trust anyone.

While pregnant, I continued going to school but had to leave Dunbar and went to a continuation school for pregnant girls. After delivering Deanna, my beautiful baby, I was able to return to Dunbar, where I remained until I dropped out in January of my senior year.

Mama watched Deanna during the day while I went to school because she was then working evenings. When I got out of school, I had to come straight home in order to take care of Deanna myself. I was supposed to graduate in June 1973, but had been demoted to the junior division because of my lack of credits. All I needed to do was make up the credits, but that demotion made me feel ashamed and humiliated that I was a senior but in class with juniors. I made another egregious choice, left school, and began working in a factory.

Even though I dropped out of school, education was important to me, and receiving my diploma was important to me. Finally, thirty-two

years later, at the age of forty-nine, I earned my high school general equivalency diploma (GED).

The path to earning my GED was like all the convoluted, circuitous paths of my life's Journey. I had begun pursuing my diploma as early as my early twenties, and attended various schools, but never achieved my goal because using and selling drugs was the world I was in.

When I added drinking into this mix, I was definitely no longer interested in getting my GED. One reason was that when I was in this place, I often felt more of a failure and did not want to confront the truth of having dropped out of school. I didn't want to acknowledge yet another failure.

Still, one thing that kept me going was that I wanted it as much for my mother as for myself. So, finally, in 2004, the third time I was released from prison, I was determined to graduate and went to Olive-Harvey College in Chicago.

One amazing teacher that God sent me was my son Dwyane's high school basketball coach, Coach Fitzgerald, who came late at night to my home to help me study for the GED exam. I thought he was the craziest person I'd ever met in my life, coming into this Black neighborhood late at night, but he didn't care. He was committed to helping me pass the GED test, and nothing was going to prevent that.

Once again, as I've already said, God never left my side. He sent Coach Fitzgerald to help me with English, history, and other subjects, but math was challenging for me. So, God sent me the perfect math teacher who really helped me to understand math through his dedicated way of teaching.

Throughout the years of failed attempts, I never gave up the belief that I would finally accomplish my goal; and, when I received my diploma, it was one of the most fulfilling moments of my life. I recognized I had truly accomplished something.

I am not sure my family knew how proud I was of myself, but I was. My mom was still living, and she had never stopped believing in me. So, to see her beaming with pride from ear to ear when she saw my diploma filled me with immense joy. Yes, I was that girl who got pregnant and dropped out of school, but I was also that girl who never stopped dreaming, never gave up, and finally accomplished my goal of graduating from high school.

Up until the time I made that first cataclysmic choice that changed my life and took me on the path to the dark side, I never thought I would wind up being “that one”—the girl who got pregnant and dropped out of school. No teenager ever thinks anything bad can happen to them; certainly, that was true for me. I never thought that I’d be the girl who got pregnant and dropped out of school, made the decisions that I began making, and started going downhill.

I never imagined I would travel the road I did, which would take me to such a perilous world. But I did. Yet, despite it all, God never left my side. I did not know that He protected me until the day I awakened and joined with Him to protect myself.

Please understand: *Everything* we do is wrapped up in the choices we make—*everything*.