

When a family of women have finally escaped domestic violence, they find that their journey has only just begun. The Pink House is a raw and unvarnished peek inside the lives of a family who discover together the power of love to overcome difficulty, create victory from victimhood, turn tribulations into triumphs, and heal their hearts and souls.

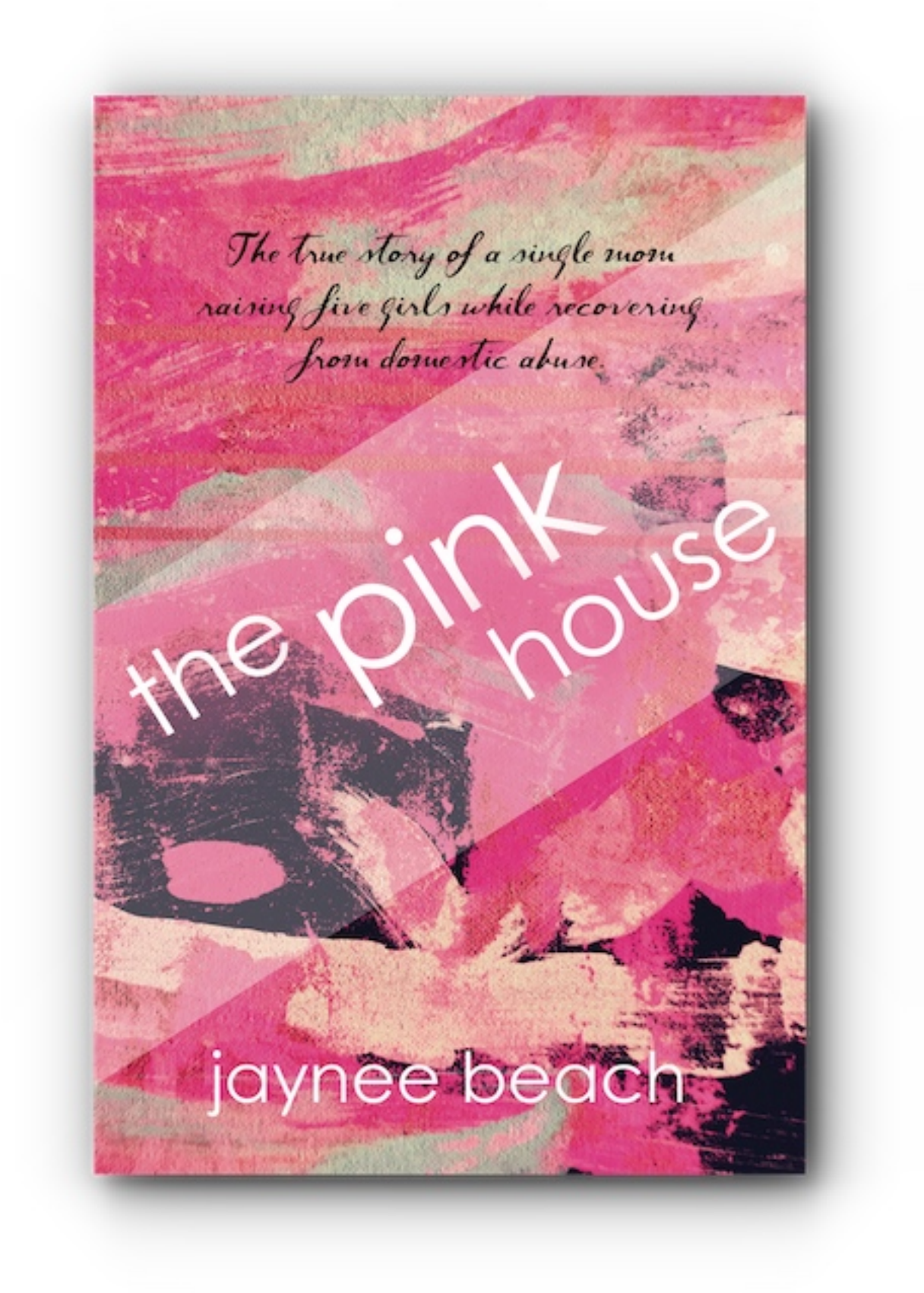
THE PINK HOUSE

by Jaynee Beach

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The background of the cover is an abstract composition of various shades of pink, red, and black. The colors are applied in broad, expressive brushstrokes, creating a textured and layered effect. The overall mood is one of raw emotion and resilience.

*The true story of a single mom
raising five girls while recovering
from domestic abuse.*

the pink house

jaynee beach

"I truly enjoyed reading 'The Pink House'. It made me both laugh and cry. It is a remarkable story about an outstanding woman and her five daughters. The trials and tribulations they faced together were moving and motivating! I recommend all women read this book. It is guaranteed to make them motivated."

-- Martha Gillett

"Jaynee never expects to be a single mom. She plans to be the perfect Mormon wife and mother, but when children's protective services tells her she must leave with her children or they will be taken from her, she finds herself raising five daughters by herself. The Pink House is the tender, heart-rending, and ultimately triumphant story of an imperfect family making the best of things. You will laugh and cry and fall in love with these girls, and their story will keep you turning the pages till the very end."

-- Deb Simmons, Author

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**Mama told everyone that we lived in
a very pink house.**

**But she wasn't talking about the outside
of the house.**

She was talking about who lived inside.

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Chapter 1: A New Life (Katie)

I was six when my world went topsy-turvy. Actually, there are a lot of people since that time, who have helped me see that my world had always been topsy-turvy, that all the events of that awful year were actually a start to a world that was right for the first time in my entire life. But it was a long time before I saw it that way.

Life for me changed from a world of hot tempers, sharp words and sharper blows, laying low and waiting until it all blew over, feeling ashamed when one of my sisters took the heat instead of me – through a flurry of activity where strange ladies in pink suits and high heels carrying notebooks and papers asked us questions like “did he ever touch you there?,” and tossed around legal-sounding words like ‘injunction’ and ‘affidavit’, and Mom crying a lot and looking scared a lot more – and then it was just us. My two older sisters, Stephanie and Anne, who were twelve and nine; and my two younger sisters, Sarah and Michele, who were four and two.

We moved on a rainy Saturday afternoon, helped by people from our church, loading all of our stuff up in a U-Haul truck, and into a much smaller house near Mom’s new job. Three of my sisters had the chickenpox, and I even got them later that week. Luckily, it was Spring Break. The marks were all gone by the time we started our new school a week later.

And then, from the bleakest of bleak, light. Five girls, a Mom, and even a girl cat, that Mom could finally allow us to get because our Dad had always hated cats, but now our Dad was gone forever and we could do whatever we wanted. It was a promising start.

Chapter 4: Crayola (Anne)

I love cats. I had wanted a cat forever. But back in our old life, we weren't allowed to have a cat, because our Dad hated cats. He said they were useless creatures. He told us many times that if we ever had a cat, he would drop-kick it out of the yard. Mentioning a cat was a sure way to trigger a rant – or worse – from our Dad.

So as soon as we moved into our new house, the first thing we did was ask Mom if we could have a cat. And Mom gathered us around and told us a story.

“A long time ago, before Katie and Sarah and Michele were born, and Annie was a little toddler, Stephanie was in kindergarten. And as you all know, Stephanie has always been very creative.”

We all nodded in agreement. Steph was very creative and it was one of the most fun things about her.

“So when Hallowe'en came around, Stephanie's teacher handed out a picture of a cat for each of the kids to color. Guess what color all of the kids made their cat?”

“Black,” we all answered in unison. Of course, black. It was Hallowe'en, after all.

“Guess what color Stephanie made her cat?” Mom cast a look at Steph that said “don't give the answer away.”

“Purple,” we guessed, “Green. Pink. Red.” We tried to think of something creative enough for Steph, but Mom shook her head at every guess.

With a big smile, she went on. “Stephanie went around the room and gathered every crayon that was brown or black or tan or cream colored. And then she colored her cat calico.” Steph nodded, beaming. “Her teacher was so astonished, she called me on the telephone. She had never seen a kid in her class do such a thing.”

“I had never supposed there would come a time in my life when we could have a cat. But I said to myself back then that if we ever did get a cat, it would be a calico, and we would name it Crayola, in honor of Stephanie, and to remind us to always bring our imagination and creativity to everything we do, even if it seems way different from what everyone else is doing.”

Mom stopped talking because we had stopped listening. We were going to get a cat!

And since there was no time like the present, we raced off to get shoes and coats and we clambered into the car and we went to the Humane Society to adopt a cat.

The animal shelter of the Humane Society was a sad place. All of these pets, hoping for a forever family to take them home and love them. As soon as we came into the animal area, the dogs set up a racket, howling and barking and crying and begging us to take them home. But we were not there for a dog. We went down another corridor and into another large room filled with cages with cats. So many cats. They were all so cute! And we wanted all of them.

But we knew we were there for just one cat. And at the end of the very last aisle, sitting a little bit apart, was a tiny calico cat. The splotches of the different colors on her fur were large and distinct, as if someone had colored them on there with big fat crayons. She looked exactly the way I had imagined, when Mom had been telling us the story of Stephanie’s calico cat. I glanced over at Stephanie, and judging from

the look on her face, I concluded that she agreed that this little cat matched the cat from her kindergarten-aged creation.

“Nobody wants her,” the worker explained, “Because she doesn’t have a tail.”

“What happened to her tail?” we all wanted to know at once.

“She never had one. She is a Manx. They don’t have tails.” The worker went on. “Actually, this is a pretty rare combination. I have never seen a calico Manx, ever. But it seems that everyone wants a cat with a tail, and it doesn’t matter that she is so rare. She’s really sweet, too,” she added, an afterthought.

But by then we had already figured that out for ourselves. Instinctively, we had softened our voices, quelling our excitement, approaching gently so as not to frighten her. “Hi Crayola,” I said, the first to call her by her name. She started purring. It was love at first sight. She rubbed up against the edges of her cage, trying to get as close to all of us as possible.

“Can we take her out?” I asked the worker. She nodded, but reached in to the cage herself. She was going to handle her at first.

“What did you say you wanted to name her?” the worker asked us, as we all reached in to pet her at once.

“Her name is Crayola.” I wanted that settled, once and for all. The worker raised her eyebrows, and said “That’s different.”

Mom was chuckling quietly behind us.

“I guess we have made our choice, then,” she said.

So the worker said we could stay there with Crayola, while Mom went up to the front office and arranged to pay the money. At that point, Mom stopped.

“How much is it?” she asked, suddenly worried. “I don’t have a lot to spend. I guess I didn’t realize you would be asking for money.”

The rest of us froze in place, listening carefully. Crayola was supposed to be part of our family, we just knew it! Surely the lack of money wasn’t going to ruin that!

“We have to pay our vet for shots, an exam, and any care the animals receive upon intake,” the worker informed us. “Even though we get these services at a discount, we still look to our adoptive families to help us defray the costs. And then there is the added expense of getting your animal spayed, which you will need to do right away, since we estimate that Crayola – it’s ‘Crayola’ is it?” the worker balked at the odd name, while we all nodded like a bunch of bobble-head dolls, “Crayola is about 4 months old, so she is the right age to get spayed. As beautiful as she is, we don’t need any more unwanted kittens in this world...” the worker tapered off, as she shifted in the direction of the front office.

Mom stood still. “You didn’t actually say how much we would have to pay.”

I had been trying to calculate it in my head, but I had no idea how much it could be. I did know that Mom didn’t have it.

“I have some babysitting money,” Stephanie offered.

I didn’t have anything like that to offer, so I said “I’ll give up all my lunch money for the rest of the year, if that will help.”

“Me too,” Katie chimed in. Sarah didn’t say anything because she didn’t talk, and Michele had gone back to petting Crayola. She had to be our cat!

The worker lowered her voice and spoke directly to Mom, but we all could still hear her. “It’s about eighty dollars,” she said.

Oh no! We knew for certain that Mom did not have that kind of money! And I was pretty sure that Steph didn’t have that much babysitting money, either. Stunned, we collectively slumped as the disappointment settled in on us. As if propelled by an unseen force, we slowly moved back toward Crayola’s little cage in silence. We knew what was going to happen next, without anyone telling us. We were going to have to put her back. Katie sniffed loudly, and I noticed that she had tears trickling down her cheeks. Sarah stared off into space, having already mentally exited the scene.

Stephanie and I looked at each other, both of us thinking at about a million miles a minute. How could we come up with some money? Why would the animal shelter charge money for pets that nobody wanted? Except we did want Crayola. Just because someone else had given her away didn’t mean she wasn’t wanted. As we walked slowly back out from the cat room, back past the dogs, Stephanie and I had the same idea at the same time.

“Wait a minute!” I cried. “What if we earned Crayola? What if we came here and walked the dogs and exercised them? What if we came here every Saturday and helped you?”

“We could clean up the cages,” Stephanie volunteered. I wasn’t too keen on that idea, but if that was what was required to get Crayola, then I was willing.

“We would come as many times as you want, until we have earned our cat.”

Everyone had stopped walking while Stephanie and I pitched our grand idea, but we were still in the dog room, and our excitement was getting the dogs riled up. The louder we talked, the louder they all barked; and the louder they barked, the louder we talked. Soon we were shouting at the tops of our lungs, but the dogs were still louder. By now, all of my sisters understood what we were asking for, and they all had joined in the begging and pleading. It was quite a scene, actually: dogs all around us, begging to be taken home; and five little girls, begging to be allowed to take a cat home. I giggled a bit at the irony.

The worker could see how sincere we were. “I have to ask permission,” she said. “So leave me your phone number, and I will call you. But you should plan to be here first thing on Saturday morning. The other workers and I get here at 7:00 a.m., and you need to be here then as well.” She looked directly at Mom. “I will call you if that changes.”

We assured her that we would be there, bright and early. We were going to earn our cat.

We drove home disappointed, but hopeful. We were excited that we had found our cat, and we were certain that she was meant to be ours. We wanted her right away, but we were willing to wait and work for her. We just hoped we wouldn’t have to wait very long.

The phone was already ringing when we walked into the house. Katie got to it first, because Stephanie was helping Mom get Michele out of the car seat, and I was helping Sarah. “It’s the animal shelter!” Katie yelled at the top of her lungs, she was so excited, “The lady wants to talk to Mom!”

We clustered around, listening to Mom's half of the conversation, and straining for the part of the conversation that we could not hear.

"Yes," Mom said. She paused for a moment. "Yes, we do... yes, we can."

Another long pause. We were dying! We watched Mom's face carefully for any cues. There were none.

"Oh. My." Mom sounded slightly surprised. "Okay," she said after a moment, nodding her head at the same time, even though the person on the other end of the line could not see her. "Okay," she repeated again.

I had counted three "yes" answers and two "okay" answers. I took this as a good sign.

"I believe we can do that. Thank you. Thank you. Yes, I suspect you have just made five little girls very happy." This was our first clue that the conversation had gone our way. We collectively held our breath, waiting for Mom to finish the good-byes and hang up.

Mom hung the phone back in its cradle, and looked around at us. Her eyes were twinkling.

"Let's go get Crayola," she said, and headed back down the hallway toward the front door.

A huge yell burst out as all five of us whooped and cheered. We were going to get our cat! We were going to get Crayola!

On the way back to the animal shelter, Mom explained. Another couple had been at the animal shelter earlier. We had never even noticed them. They had been looking for a dog. They had overheard our dilemma, and after we left, they had offered to pay the fees for Crayola on our behalf, along with the fees for their own new dog. They had been very impressed with our willingness to work hard for our new pet.

They were certain that we would be responsible pet owners, and take good care of Crayola.

I was the first to put two and two together. “You mean, we won’t have to go back on Saturday and clean the shelter?” I asked.

Mom smiled. “Nope. But don’t worry. Cats live to be about 15 years old. That will give you plenty of times to clean out the cat litter. You will have your opportunity to earn your cat.”

Stephanie was still concerned about reciprocity, however. “Is this couple going to want us to pay them back somehow?” she wanted to know.

I was somewhat surprised at Mom’s reply. “Yes,” she nodded. I perked up and listened closely. What were they going to want us to do?

“They said they wanted us to enjoy many wonderful years with our furry family member.”

We did enjoy eighteen beautiful years. We had definitely lived up to the mandate given to us by the generous mystery benefactors who had made it all possible. Since we had gotten Crayola just before my birthday, Mom said she could be my birthday present as well. I knew Mom did that mostly because she couldn’t afford an actual present for me. But that was okay: Crayola was really all the present I ever wanted. And for the rest of her life, this made her mostly mine, which meant she came to live with me after I finished college.

All the way to the end, Cray had her sweet personality. Although, even from the very beginning, she let us know if she wasn’t happy about something. Like on her first Christmas with us: when Crayola did not get a stocking of her own, she suddenly began pouting. She stiffened up and turned her head away whenever any of us reached to pet on

her. She stood next to my stocking, with a scowl on her face, looking first at the stocking, and then at me.

“Look, Mom,” I pointed, “Crayola is mad because she wanted a stocking too, and she didn’t get one.”

Mom laughed. “Anne, I think you are anthropomorphizing a bit there,” she chided.

“I’m anthro-what?” I asked. I didn’t know what it was, but I was pretty sure I wasn’t doing it, whatever it was.

“Anthropomorphizing,” Mom repeated. “It’s when people assign human attributes to non-humans.”

“What?” I still didn’t understand.

“What Mom is saying,” Steph dived in, “Is that you are trying to claim that Crayola is pouting. Cat’s don’t pout. People do.”

“Well Cray is pouting right now,” I insisted, “So I guess cats do pout.”

“No,” Steph argued, “Cats don’t pout. You are making it out as if she is doing a human thing, when she isn’t. You are anthromorph-, ah, anthropize-, ah...” Stephanie tapered off when she realized that she couldn’t say Mom’s big word.

I decided to ignore Stephanie’s struggle, so that I could focus on my point. “Look at Cray,” I said, “Look at her face. That’s her mad face. Maybe you don’t know her as well as I do, but that is definitely her mad face. She is upset. And she is pouting, just like anyone who gets mad about something. She wanted her own stocking. That is just obvious, no matter how many big huge words you use.”

Steph opened her mouth as if she was going to continue arguing. But Mom suddenly said “I have an idea. I want to try a little experiment.

But we can't do it until tomorrow. So how about we just put this whole conversation on hold for the next twenty-four hours?"

We all loved a mystery, and besides, it was Christmas after all, and we had other things to focus on, like the presents under the tree. So we waited. I spent the day hugging and loving on Crayola the best I could, but she wasn't having any of it. Every time I reached for her, she stiffened her back and turned her head away. She was mad.

The next day, Mom asked all of us to please bring our stockings back out to the living room, and put them back onto the hearth. Then, at the end of the stockings, she laid a new, smaller stocking. The name at the top had been written with silver glitter glue: "Crayola." Inside, there were several small cans of fancy cat food. She picked up Cray, and brought her over to the stocking to smell it.

"This is your stocking, Cray," she said. The rest of us were almost as excited about this one stocking as we had been about the whole entire Christmas just one day prior.

"Look, Cray," we all jumped in, "This is for you." We got out the fancy cat food and opened up one of the cans. Crayola jumped in and began to eat. After a few bites, she rubbed up on her stocking, purring.

"See?" I crowed triumphantly, "That's her happy face. That is very different from her mad face." Anyone could easily tell the difference between the happy Crayola of today and the pouting Crayola of yesterday. And from then on, a new Christmas tradition was born. Anthropomorphizing or not, Cray's stocking was placed on the hearth alongside all of ours on Christmas Eve. And on Christmas Day, her stocking had treats in it, and she had her happy face on.

And so it was throughout the years, with our beautiful furry family member. Crayola definitely took us on her share of adventures, and I'm

pretty sure she used up all nine of her lives, including the time that she was caught in the fan belt of someone's truck and got torn up pretty badly. I am still amazed that she survived that one. According to Mom, she wasn't supposed to. Mom had carried Crayola to the emergency veterinarian, all shredded to bits. The veterinarian had taken one look at her, and decided that there was no way Cray would survive her wounds. He had headed back out to the waiting room, planning to tell Mom that in his professional judgment, the best course would be to accept that Crayola was injured too badly to make it, and put her to sleep. It would prevent any additional suffering. Just as he had opened his mouth to deliver the bad news, Mom burst into tears. Softening, the veterinarian had immediately changed his mind: he told Mom that they would observe Crayola for twenty-four hours.

One day later, against all odds, Cray had pulled through. She wasn't healed, of course, but she was mostly out of mortal danger. Eventually, the only evidence of her mishap that remained was a jagged scar along her side, that could only be seen if her fur was moved back.

At the end, she was old, and tiny, and her digestive system didn't work all that well, so she got really skinny. I had to hand-feed her specially-prepared formula food, several times a day. Even though she moved a lot more slowly, she still loved up on us, purring madly while she kneaded us with her paws.

One day, her eyes had gone from their usual bright green to a dull, greenish-grey, and she wouldn't eat her food. She struggled laboriously up into my lap, and looked at me as though she was trying to speak. "Is today the day, Crayola?" I asked, my heart heavy with dread. I had known for nearly two decades that this day would inevitably come. It didn't make it any easier.

Cray laid down in my lap, her purrs growing faint as I gently stroked her.

I thought about the time she had chased the mouse through our house. She was such a fierce hunter! I thought about how she would sit in the window, making bird noises as she watched the birds outside in the yard. I thought about the time we had left the butter dish on the counter at Thanksgiving, only to return later and discover that she had eaten an entire stick of butter, licking the dish completely clean. I thought about how my sisters had cut a hole in a box and put Cray under it, and she would race around the house, just a cardboard box with a cat nose poking out the front; and how I'd get so mad at them because they were scaring Crayola. I thought about how Michele would turn Cray's ears inside out so that they looked like horns instead of ears, and then she would call her "thcawy monthtow cat" with her adorable little lisp.

I smiled as I remembered the time right after college that I had applied for a new apartment. When I filled out the Pet Addendum to the application, one of the fields asked for "Weight." For whatever reason, I thought it was asking for my weight, so I put 110 pounds. The woman at the apartment office was shocked. "What kind of cat do you have?" she had asked incredulously.

Still unaware of my error, I had perkily responded, "She's a Manx."

"Wow," the manager replied, "I had no idea they could get this large."

"She's actually quite small for a Manx." I informed her.

"One hundred ten pounds is small?" She was astonished. "Oh my god, how big do they get?"

Wait. What? Oh.

I started laughing at myself. “Oh! You wanted to know Crayola’s weight. I was wondering why you were asking how much I weigh. That seemed kind of nosy.” We both had a good laugh.

Years later, here we were, Cray and I. She was a fraction of what she had weighed back then. It had been eighteen years, more wonderful than I ever could have imagined when I was a little girl and we were all at the animal shelter together, finding her on that very first day. She looked up at me one final time, then laid her head against my stomach. I continued stroking and crying long after her breathing had stopped.

Chapter 7: Where Does My Help Come From?

It had been a long day, and I was worn smooth out. I knew that the interminable pace, the non-stop workload of classes, labs, experiments, statistics, reading, writing, studying; and then all that it took to care for my brood of five girls, along with the always-present worry and stress were taking their toll. The thrumming “never enough” pounded ceaselessly through my brain like the hoofbeats of the four horses of the apocalypse on their way to bring my barely-balanced world crashing into catastrophe: never enough time, never enough energy, never enough money, never enough attention, never enough wisdom, never enough, never enough, never enough.

Every day started and ended the same. Every day, I awoke dreading the day ahead, certain that this would be the day that I could not go on any longer. Every day, I swallowed the fear, gathered up what energy I could summon, and plunged forward, determined to simply survive one day, one hour at a time, to doggedly put one foot in front of the other one more time.

I longed for relief.

I was envious of the mothers who had husbands to take care of them, so that they could stay home and raise their children. I was envious of the married women who worked in jobs outside of their homes: at least they had help at the end of the day. I even found myself envious of those single mothers whose ex-husbands would take the kids every other weekend. What I could accomplish, if I only had a day or so to myself! But the father of my children had vanished – very deliberately hiding his location and contact information from me, after making it clear that he had no interest whatsoever in participating in the lives of his daughters.

I drove down the road, vacillating between anger at the lot in life that had been given me, and sheer exhaustion. I was all alone. I recalled the final words my ex-husband had shouted in the courtroom when the judge asked him if he had anything more to say: “This was not my vision,” he had started in clipped tones, “This was not my dream, this was not my life,” he had continued, escalating. And then he spat out: “If she hadn’t wanted all those damn kids, our marriage could have worked!”

“This was not my vision, either!” I shouted at the windshield, as I pulled into the daycare to retrieve the youngest two. Drawing in my breath, I gathered up the energy it would require to ask them about their day, fully engaged and present. I loaded them into their car seats, and glanced at the little folder of papers that Sarah had brought from her half day at school, scanning for anything that required action on my part, such as signing something or initialing something, or sending yet more money for something. It seemed that the school was always asking for money for something.

Michele was full of her usual chatter, and I couldn’t help but smile at her adorable lisp. I knew it was something she would eventually outgrow, and I knew it would be something that I missed when she did. And on that tiny bit of energy, I pressed on the rest of the way, homeward, as I did every day.

I glanced at the clock in the dashboard as I entered our little neighborhood, mentally calculating how long the older girls would have been at home without me present. I hated that they were “latchkey kids.” Although, with the help of some neighbors, as well as my fellow graduate students and professors, I had been able to minimize this. The girls all stopped on their way home every day, and visited the Williams – a retired couple who were members of our church, and who lived up on the corner. Their own grandchildren lived

far away, and so in a sweet symbiosis, my children had “adopted” them as surrogate grandparents. Every day, Mrs. Williams would give the girls an after-school snack and some water; and together they would sit on the front porch and unwind. After a few minutes, the girls would head on home, to get started on their homework and chores.

Meanwhile, my professors had all helped me create a study and work schedule that allowed me to leave the university by 4:00 p.m. every day. I would come home to be with the girls during the dinner hours, help them with homework, spend evening time and bedtime with them, and then when they were all tucked in (and the younger ones were asleep), I would head back up to the lab, where I could organize and study the data that had been collected throughout the afternoon and evening in my absence. I often worked until one or two in the morning, then made my way home and fell into bed, only to awaken at six and begin the entire routine all over again. It was the best of both worlds: I could spend the important time with my girls, and still keep up with my studies and my research, as well as teach the lab that was required for me to earn an income as a graduate teaching assistant.

For years, people would ask “how did you do it?” – and this was how. I was blessed with ADHD, and my hyperactivity allowed me to get by on as few as four hours of sleep a night. I was blessed with neighbors who graciously allowed my girls to “adopt” them as grandparents; and I was blessed with supportive professors and fellow grad students who were willing to pick up the slack between four and ten p.m. so that I could be with my family. That’s how.

But even with all that, I was exhausted. I had used up all of my margins, and then some.

The very strict rule at our house was that there were to be no friends over to play while I was not home. This was for two reasons. First, I

lived under the shadow of a Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation. I was continually anxious that someone, somewhere, was investigating our family (it had happened before!), and with all of my absence from the home, I worried that CPS would find me wanting, and would determine that my children would be better off in some foster family somewhere, instead of with me. So I didn't want any neighbor kids at the house while I wasn't there, because if anything happened, I was certain that the end result would be the exposure of myself as a neglectful parent.

Second, my girls were still pretty new at setting limits and protecting boundaries. One time, before I had impressed upon them the importance of strict observance of the "no friends over" rule, one of the neighbors had come over and used my stove to cook up the last two boxes of macaroni and cheese that I had remaining in the pantry. Notwithstanding that these were intended as a special treat for the girls, this little neighbor kid had cooked it up, and then put pepper all over it, and then left it to waste on the kitchen counter. When I asked the girls why they had allowed someone to come in and ruin something that had been intended as a special treat for them, they couldn't answer. They had seemed helpless in the face of a peer with a strong personality. They were pushovers.

So, while we continued to work on the pushover part, I took the lead and told every single kid in the neighborhood that they were not allowed in our home or in our yard – no matter what – unless they saw my van in the driveway.

And so it was, at the end of this very long day, as Michele prattled away from her car seat in the back, and as I mentally reviewed all that still remained to be accomplished before I could go to bed, I turned the corner onto our street in the neighborhood, and from half a block away, I could see the scene: five – no, six... no, seven children. Lined up

on the sidewalk at my front yard, literally leaning over the grass, waiting, pushing, anticipating my arrival. They glanced up, saw my van, and leaned in further, primed for that moment when my wheels crossed the sidewalk and into the driveway to make it official: I was home.

In the few moments that it took for me to complete that final half block journey, a thousand thoughts crashed through my heart and mind. "I'm so tired," I mentally complained, "why do all of the kids have to show up at my house? I'm too tired even for my own kids, why do I have to share my limited resources with everyone else's kids, too? Where are all of the parents of these children, and why aren't they watching their own kids? Why do they have to show up here, day after day? Why can't someone who hasn't been working all day take these kids? And while they are at it, let them take mine, as well. Why shouldn't this load be shared? Why is it all on me?"

I swam angrily, bitterly, in my pool of resentment.

And in the midst of feeling sorry for myself, somehow, the Comfort of the God of the Universe reached through the thick walls I had placed around my heart, and whispered gently to my soul: "You asked for this."

No, I didn't, I protested.

"Yes, you asked for this. From the time you were still a child, you always wanted to be the home, the haven, the safe and loving house that invited others in. You asked for this. You want this. Your soul was created for this. I gifted you for this."

In the seconds that it took to crawl those final few yards to my driveway, I acknowledged that yes, indeed I had always wanted to be the Mom to the entire world. I wanted children to feel safe and happy

and welcome and accepted in my home and in my presence. I wanted to reflect God's glory in that way. I always had.

For that moment, I let go of the anger and resentment at being forced into single motherhood. I let go of the self-righteous indignation and judgment that insisted that everyone else in my world had dropped the ball, and left me alone, to handle this enormous load all by myself. For just that moment, I laid down the heavy burden of bitterness and aggravation, and I freed up my heart and spirit to receive something different instead.

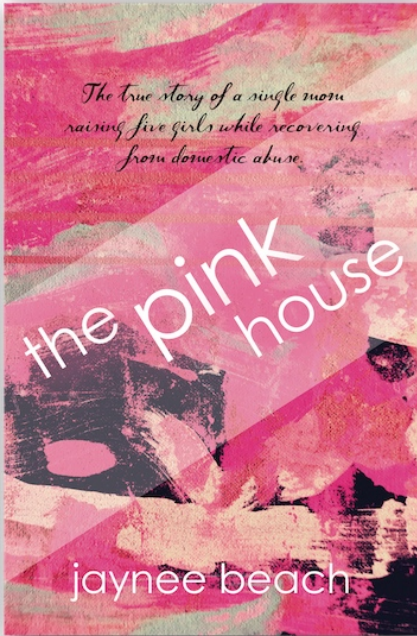
In an instant, I prayed for the strength I needed to live my calling. In an instant, I received the miracle of added energy that came from somewhere beyond me. My car entered the driveway; a literal cheer erupted as kids streamed across my lawn, and my own kids exited the house where they had been waiting. The joy of communion perfused the atmosphere. My little ones wriggled and squirmed to be freed from the safe confines of their car seats so that they could join the fray. The scene was nothing new: it had happened a thousand other times on a thousand other days. From any outsider's point of view, it would appear no different than a bunch of kids making a bunch of noise.

From inside of me, I was experiencing a miracle. The channels were open to receive the pure joyful energy transpiring all around me. The smile on my face was genuine, as I observed my children engaging with their friends and loved ones. My spirit soared with gratitude as I acknowledged God's generosity in my life. I had a decent home, a warm and safe home, a large-enough home to raise my children in; I had an income, and the wherewithal to continue to keep my job and provide for my family; I had the support and help of good people in my life at school and work, and in my neighborhood and church community. God had blessed me abundantly, so that I could receive and enjoy the desire of my heart. Most importantly, somehow, God

The Pink House

had taught me how and helped me create the kind of space that attracted my own children, as well as their friends. They wanted to be here. They wanted to be home.

I was renewed.



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