



Mama Jennifer is a memoir of survival, faith, and hope. From childhood trauma and a violent attack while pregnant to healing and missionary life in Africa, this true story shows how God turns pain into purpose.

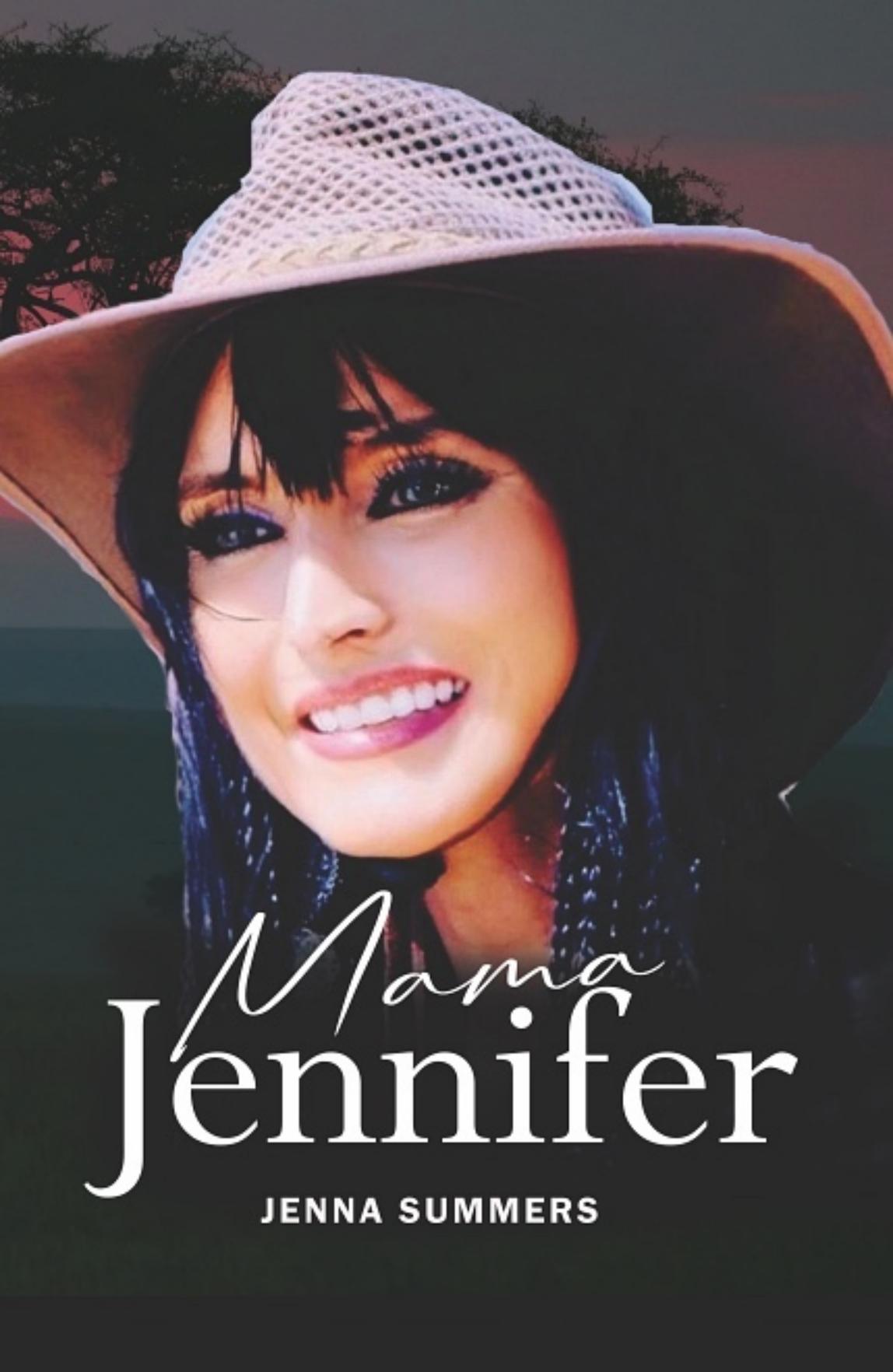
Mama Jennifer

By Jenna Summers

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Mama
Jennifer

JENNA SUMMERS

Mama Jennifer: A True Story of Courage, Healing, and Faith

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About The Author

Born and raised in the Piney Woods of East Texas, Jenna Summers began her missionary journey at the tender age of four. It all started when her father, moved by her enthusiasm, bought a Bible storybook she had seen in a store window. Jenna's young heart was deeply touched as her father read the stories of God's love and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, leading her to seek salvation early in life. Growing up, however, was not without challenges. As the daughter

of an entrepreneur and a Golden Glove Boxing champion, Jenna often faced abuse and mistreatment. Despite these hardships, her commitment to follow Jesus remained unwavering, and she frequently shared the wisdom God gave her with both her family and schoolmates.

Jenna's life story takes readers on an extraordinary journey marked by near-tragic events. She endured violence in Africa, survived a destructive house fire, and faced a horrific assault while pregnant, during which she was brutally stabbed multiple times by a home intruder. Her resilience shines through as she navigates the long road to recovery, offering forgiveness to her assailant, bringing healing not only to her body but also to her spirit.

Throughout her travels to more than 60 countries, Jenna has built a successful ministry. She has developed schools for African street children, counseled trauma victims, translated Swahili, spoken to thousands, written and sung worship songs, and inspired countless individuals to embrace God's grace.

Reflecting on her experiences, she often says, "I've had my foot in all four oceans."

Jenna Summers

Now living in Austin, Texas, Jenna has worked as a flight attendant for a major airline and for a charter airline, with the honor of serving the military by transporting troops to overseas bases. She has three adult children living across the United States and is a proud grandmother to six grandchildren. Her children continue to bring joy to her life, along with their growing families. Names and identifying details in this book have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals and families.

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Chapter 1: Seeds of Faith

A Town Gripped by Violence

Faith Takes Root in Unlikely Soil

That day in Naivasha town, there was a peculiar stillness, contrary to the usual bustling scene outside my counseling office. Typically, a crowd of people waited eagerly, but today, not a soul was in sight. An unsettling sensation washed over me, a familiar tug that something was terribly wrong. I stepped outside, climbed into my truck, and began driving.

Suddenly, chaos erupted around me. I saw people brandishing machetes, heard screams piercing the air. Terror gripped the town, but there was no time to succumb to fear.

As I drove through the treacherous roads, rocks pelted my car. Flames and smoke filled the sky, with the scent of burning flesh all around. I prayed fervently, begging God to guide me up the mountain to our home, where my husband, Noah, awaited. Helicopters buzzed overhead; the military's presence was meant to quell the violence.

Scenes From That Time

Miraculously, I reached home and found Noah. He explained the nightmare of how the Kikuyu tribe was attacking the Luos, driven by the lust for power in the wake of the elections. Desperation tinged our every move as we tried to reach our children, who were back in the United States, through messages. We were uncertain if we would

survive this horror. The screams from the field next to our home were unmistakable. The prisoners had been released and were raping the women in the fields.

Noah and I went to our secret room, a safe place we had prepared for times like this. Together, we prayed, asking God for guidance. With faith, we decided to escape in our Land Cruiser, taking food, water, gas, and medical supplies with us.

Our journey took us to Nairobi, Kenya, and later to Botswana, where we began to rebuild our lives. This was only a small part of our story, a story of survival, courage, and the strong power of faith in the face of great challenges.

During the chaos, I thought about the journey that had brought me here, remembering a simpler time that first planted faith in my heart. It was very different from the violence I had just seen, but it reminded me of the lasting power of hope.

“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”
– Psalm 91:11-12

The Seed and the Storm

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.” – Matthew 22:14

There were many moments in my life that shaped who I am today. But to help you understand how it all began, we need to take a walk down memory lane – back to when I was just a little girl.

One day, my father and I were strolling past a quaint little shop when something caught my eye. A leather-bound book

was resting behind the glass window. The ombre-colored leather cover shimmered under the light. Its edges were finely stitched like the robe of royalty. It was the kind of thing you'd expect to draw the eye of a seasoned collector, not a four-year old girl.

But there was something about it, something sacred. Even now, I can't quite explain what drew me in.

Inside the cover, in gold-embossed lettering, were the words "Stories from the Bible." The title glowed like a relic from a medieval palace. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. Hundreds of people must have passed by it every day, but I wondered if anyone else saw what I did. A hidden treasure, waiting for someone to recognize its worth.

It was as if Heaven had whispered to me, "This is yours."

I tugged on my father's arm, begging him to take me into the store. I did not even know how to read yet, but I knew I needed that book. My father was not one to give in easily, but after my pleading, something changed. I believe God touched his heart in that moment.

When he finally placed the book in my hands, joy burst through me like a sunrise. I clutched it tightly to my chest, skipping all the way home under a golden East Texas sky. Everything seemed brighter that day, as if Heaven had kissed the Earth and I was carrying a piece of it in my arms.

That night, I was eager to hear the stories, and for the first time, I went to bed without any fuss. The words from Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path," echoed in my heart, even before I truly understood them.

"Please, Dad," I asked, eyes wide. "Just one more story?"

He sighed, tired but not unmoved. “You’ve already heard it enough times.”

“Please? Just one more.”

With a half-smile, he opened the book again. “Don’t get used to this,” he muttered.

But I already had.

That night, he read me two stories. One told of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. I didn’t understand it all, but I felt awe and sorrow for what He endured. Tears welled as I imagined His pain. In that moment, a spark of belief was lit inside me. A flame that would never go out.

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” – Philippians 2:8

Though I was only a little girl, that seed of faith was watered by His Word, and it began to grow roots deep enough to withstand every storm to come.

Reflection: The Little Book That Changed Everything

That leather-bound storybook may have looked ordinary in a dusty shop window. But to me, it was a doorway into eternity.

God used that simple book to plant a seed that would one day grow into a calling – to serve, to love, and to carry His truth across nations. My journey didn’t begin on a mission field or in a pulpit. It began with a child who somehow knew her heart could not live without His Word.

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” – Isaiah 40:8

Faith Amid Brokenness

If this sounds like a picture-perfect childhood with warm father-daughter moments and faith growing in a happy home, let me gently correct that image. My reality was far from perfect. My dad was not always kind, and my mother, though she loved deeply, carried a sorrow that weighed heavily on her spirit. Behind closed doors, smiles faded and shadows lingered.

In that atmosphere, Scripture became my refuge. When the house felt cold or heavy, I would turn to the promises in that little storybook Bible.

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” – Psalm 34:18

That verse became my lifeline. Even as a child, I noticed the hidden pain in my mother’s eyes and began to understand that when no one else could comfort us, God could.

Looking back, I see how a simple book in a shop window became the start of something eternal. That small seed of faith, planted in a broken home, became the foundation of my life.

Through every valley, it reminded me that God was with me.

Reflection: Faith That Endures

Even in the shadows of my childhood home, God’s Word became my refuge. Brokenness did not destroy me; it became the soil where faith took root. In that soil, God began shaping a life that would one day testify to His healing, His presence, and His unshakable love.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” – John 1:5

That promise carried me then, and it continues to carry me now.



Me, as a little girl in East Texas, before God began opening my eyes to a much bigger world

Big John: The Fighter

The Lord works in the most unexpected ways. It was not a devout preacher or a church camp that stirred my faith. It was my father.

The same man who bought the book and read it to me also became the unlikely guide who pointed me to Jesus. My father sometimes went to church and knew there was a God, but he was not a saved man. He carried no true peace inside him and had not surrendered to the Lord. His life was ruled by violence, anger, and pride. Somehow, God still used him.

At that time, I did not have a clear picture of who God was. I believed He existed. I would look up at the sky and feel sure there was someone out there. I did not know how to reach

Him, how to speak to Him, or how to connect. I was searching.

My father was a man consumed by earthly things – strength, success, survival. In his younger years, he was a Golden Gloves boxer with a fierce physique and powerful arms. A heavyweight champion full of fight, both literally and emotionally, he stood six feet two inches tall. His very stance filled a doorway.

When he entered the room, conversations paused. People knew his fists had earned him titles, and his temper could flare just as quickly. Around town, they called him Big John. His reputation arrived before he did.



**My Father, Big John – Strong in the Ring,
and Strong in Presence**

He also had gentler gifts. He was a talented artist, skilled with his hands and able to create beauty that seemed out of this world. He painted murals so vivid they looked like windows into another place. He sketched people with such

realism that they seemed ready to breathe. He could sit in a restaurant and sketch a stranger's face or even the details of his own hand, and the likeness would be uncanny. His work was displayed in different places and admired by all who saw it. It amazed me that the same hands that once clenched into fists could also create such lifelike beauty.

Later, he opened a grocery store to support our family. It became our livelihood. In some ways, he was a provider. In others, he was a destroyer. Somewhere in between all of that, God still used him.

That contradiction stayed with me for years. How could someone be both the source of my pain and the spark of my salvation? God's ways are not our ways. He can take even the most broken vessel and pour out something holy.

My father's life was not without hardship. He was abused growing up, which may have contributed to his aggression. After leaving school, he spent a short time in prison, where he was violently attacked.

I remember staring at my father's arm as a young girl. The scars from knife wounds left behind strange markings that looked almost like a gray tattoo etched into his skin. They were a grim reminder of what he had endured in prison. His time there was brief, and he eventually moved on to build a life for himself and his family.

He was not always violent in our lives. During my childhood, he sometimes showed a different side. He encouraged me to pursue music, even buying me a little red guitar and a soundbox to develop my talent. I became obsessed with it.



Me With My First Guitar

Every day, I would sing in my backyard with the soundbox. I sang so loudly that the neighbors could not help but hear me. I like to believe they enjoyed the show, though they might have been shaking their heads and shutting their windows. Either way, I gave them daily concerts whether they wanted them or not.

I would wake up as early as four a.m. to go to the store with my father and help him work. I was only five years old and often so tired I would fall asleep on the boxes. The hum of the coolers became my lullaby, and the smell of wooden crates and fresh produce wrapped around me as I drifted off.

Those small moments of closeness were like patches of sunlight through storm clouds. They did not erase the pain, but they gave me something to hold onto. They reminded me that not every moment was darkness. As I grew older, however, the shadows began to outweigh the light.

Silent Storms

The same man who could paint beauty on a wall and bring strangers to life with a pencil also brought terror into our home.

I had two sisters and one brother. My brother came later, but for most of my childhood, it was just my mother, my sisters, and me, caught in the line of fire. My father traumatized us emotionally, physically, and verbally. As the years passed, his mind deteriorated, and so did the safety of our home.

I was only six when I tried to protect my mother from his anger. I'll never forget the moment I saw him strangling her against the wall behind the couch. Her face turned purple, her body trembling. I screamed and cried, standing between them, begging him to stop. I was just a little girl, but my instinct was to shield her. I saw her bruised and beaten, her eye blackened.

One day, she took off her shirt, and I saw the marks all over her body – bruises like dark maps of pain. She lost multiple pregnancies. I can't say for certain whether it was because of his abuse, but how could it not have played a part?

Even through all of this, I prayed. I asked God for mercy, for peace, for a break in the violence. Somehow, He heard me.

There were more nights than I can count when I sobbed beneath my covers, pressing my face into the pillow to stifle the sound. I did not want him to hear me cry. I feared it would only make things worse.

I was just seven when he picked up a switch and began whipping my legs. He didn't stop. Each lash tore into me like fire, until the sting turned to burning, the burning to bleeding. Welts split open across my skin, thin webs of blood

spreading where the switch had struck. I screamed until my throat was raw, begging him to stop, but he never did.

For nights afterward, I cried myself to sleep, my body aching so badly I could barely move. Every time I moved under the covers, the pain stabbed like knives into my skin. The next morning, I would drag myself to school, each step causing immense pain and reminding me of my father's abuse. Days later, I still felt the fire in those wounds.

My mother told me not to tell anyone at school. "Say it was from a bicycle accident," she instructed. And I did. I lied, just like she asked. But I could tell from the looks on the teachers' faces that they did not believe me. Everyone knew. We were living in a silent storm, and everyone around us had learned how to look away.

My father's rage could erupt without warning. If we dropped something at the table, he might knock it over or hurl a chair across the room. Violence was his language.

Once, when I missed the bus, he had to drive me to my high school. The entire ride, he struck me repeatedly in the head as he drove. Each blow rattled my skull, the tires humming beneath us like nothing was wrong. I pressed myself against the door, sobbing, whispering, "Please, Daddy, please stop. Please stop."

When we finally reached the school, I wiped my eyes and forced a smile, trying to hide the truth from my classmates. But the secretary in the office knew. She looked at me with eyes that said she understood something was terribly wrong. Still, I buried it, embarrassed for anyone to know what really went on at home.

I was so afraid to let people into that world. I didn't know how my father might react, and the thought of friends witnessing his rage terrified me. Sometimes I'd invite my

closest childhood friends over, and while we played, I would stay on edge the entire time – nervous, tense, praying nothing would set him off. I laughed along with them, but every creak of the hallway floor made my stomach tighten. They never knew. I hid it well.

The Scar of Oil

Even as a child, I clung to God’s Word as my lifeline.

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” – Psalm 23:4

Then there was the incident when I was fifteen.

My father came home in a rage. I didn’t even know what triggered it. Before I could make sense of anything, he grabbed me by the hair and dragged me toward the stove. A skillet of hot oil sat there, spitting and hissing. He shoved my face dangerously close to it, threatening to immerse me in it. I could feel the heat licking my skin, the terror rising in my throat. Instead, he plunged my hand into the oil. The pain was indescribable – white-hot, blinding, unforgettable. My skin blistered instantly, and the sickening smell of scorched flesh filled the air. That moment branded my memory as surely as it scarred my hand. I carry that scar to this day.

But even then, I held on to God’s promise: *“Fear not, for I am with you...I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”* – Isaiah 41:10

The pain was real, the fear constant, but so was God’s presence. I believe it was the Lord who intervened in those moments, commanding His angels concerning us, protecting us from the full extent of my father’s wrath.

“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.” — Psalm 91:11

Maybe that’s why, despite it all, we survived.

I was always afraid my father would one day come home and kill us. I’d wedge myself behind the couch, curl up under the bed, or bury myself in blankets, trembling as shadows flickered across the walls. My heart pounded in my ears, and every creak of the floorboards felt like a threat. And yet, even in those hiding places, I often felt the protective presence of God around me. Whether it was a meek cry for help or a hysterical plea of agony, I knew He listened. That assurance gave me the strength to believe my life would one day be lived for Him.

I found solace in prayer, a peace only God could provide as fear raced through my body. Even then, I knew that nothing I asked of Him was too big. His presence became my hope.

The abuse was not always physical. My father’s words could be just as cruel. Profanities and degrading names poured from his mouth like poison. He seldom held back, calling us things no child should ever hear, including “bitches” and “whores.” Those verbal assaults left scars that shaped the way I saw myself for years.

Despite everything, I continued to wear a big smile at school, pretending that life was great. I became skilled at laughing loud enough to hide the cracks.

Most teachers and classmates never knew the truth. However, one person did know – my homebound teacher, Jan.

A devout Christian woman, Jan was assigned to me after a car accident left me homebound. She visited twice a week and quickly became more than a teacher.

She became an angel in my life.

She saw the abuse I endured at home and gently took me under her wing, offering not only academic support but also spiritual encouragement. She prayed with me, talked with me about God, and gave me comfort and guidance. I even stayed at her house sometimes, where I felt safe. I remember the warmth of her kitchen, the sound of her soft prayers, the way peace seemed to hang in the air. In her home, I felt valued.

Tragically, Jan died in an auto accident, losing control on an icy bridge and joining the angels around the throne of God.

Her death was a profound loss, but her influence on my life was immense. Through her, I found strength and hope, eventually surrendering to the calling to become a missionary.

Because of Jesus, I found immense peace in helping others, even helping my father at the grocery store, despite all the hurt. Something inside me just wanted to give. I wanted to love people well. That desire grew so strong that I often dreamed of becoming a nurse when I got older. It felt natural to me – right, even. Helping others was the language my heart spoke fluently.

Reflection

When I look back at my father's life, I see a man of contradictions. He was an artist who could paint beauty that took your breath away, a boxer whose fists could silence a room, and a provider who also destroyed what he built. The world knew him as Big John, strong, intimidating, larger than

life. To me, he was both the man who bought me my first guitar and the man who left scars on my skin.

Both sides of him shaped me. His contradictions taught me that people are complicated, broken, and often dangerous, but also that God can use anyone, even the most unlikely, to point us toward Him.

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’” – 2 Corinthians 12:9

Glimpses of Grace

One of the most memorable experiences during those early years was caring for the water babies, infants born with hydrocephalus, with fluid collecting on their brains. Their heads were swollen and heavy, fragile under the weight they carried, and they needed special care. I felt deeply honored just to be with them. Most of their parents never came to visit, so I became their comfort, sitting in the wooden rocker by their cribs and singing softly over them, a lullaby of love rising in the quiet halls.

I carefully turned them in their cribs to help prevent pressure sores, knowing they could not speak but still deserved to be cherished. I whispered prayers, smoothed their blankets, cradled their tiny hands, and hummed familiar hymns. Holding those precious little ones was one of the greatest blessings of my young life. I knew they were seen by God, and through me, I hoped they felt seen too.

God also surrounded me with blessings in other areas of my life. My teachers encouraged me to participate in fun and creative activities, and school became a safe space, a bright spot amid the darker parts of my world.

Looking back, I can see how God used those opportunities, those teachers, and the friendships I formed to wrap me in His joy and love. He gave me light in the middle of the storm.

Even then, I was learning that ministry is not always behind a pulpit. Sometimes it looks like holding a baby no one else will hold. Sometimes it is found in classroom laughter or a kind teacher's encouragement. Sometimes it is just showing up with love when the world has none.

From a young age, I had a heart for others. I walked around the neighborhood, visiting people and bringing them smiles and joy. That ability to lift others' spirits was a gift, and I believe it came straight from the Lord.

My teachers took notice of my singing voice and often entered me into school competitions. I loved those moments because they allowed me to express my joy and feel truly alive. I was a happy-go-lucky kind of girl back then, full of laughter, always surrounded by friends, and on good terms with just about every teacher I had. Few at school remembered me with kind words. Others did not know me.

The love people showed me at school often came through in special ways. I was nominated as a Miss DHS nominee at one school, a Homecoming Queen nominee, and a Duchess at another. These moments meant the world to me. They reminded me that despite my pain, God's hand was still on me and His favor still followed me.

Behind those smiles and titles was a different battle. My father did not value education. He only wanted me to work in the grocery store. If I did not, he became violent.

Many mornings, it was a fight just to get to school. At home, my mother lived in constant fear, packing up to leave and returning again and again. Divorce was considered shameful back then, so she stayed. The cycle never ended.

In the middle of all that instability, school became my refuge. It was the one place where I could laugh, sing, and feel like a normal teenager.

Shadows at the Dance

I remember being nominated as Duchess for our junior prom. I was around fifteen at the time.



Jenna Summers – Miss Southern States, Aged 15

Just an hour before my date was supposed to pick me up for the dance, my father threatened me. I will never forget the way his voice cut through the excitement of the evening. I was supposed to sing on the football field that night, and for once, I was genuinely happy, giddy even. He ruined that moment with just a few words.

He told me he might show up unannounced and drag me out of the dance by my hair in front of everyone.

The fear that gripped me was not just emotional. I felt it in my chest, in my stomach, and in the way my hands trembled as I tried to zip up my dress and fix my hair. That kind of threat, for a fifteen-year-old girl trying to have a normal night, was paralyzing. I could not let anyone see it. I smiled. I laughed. I danced. The fear followed me all night like a shadow, just a few steps behind.

It is hard to explain what it is like to be terrified while trying to act normal, how your heart can be breaking and beating so fast all at once, but no one sees it. I kept looking around, expecting him to burst through the doors. My joy was constantly interrupted by fear. Somehow, I got through the night. God carried me through it, just like He always had.



Me, as a Homecoming Nominee

Another moment reminded me just how much God was watching over me.

I was seventeen. By that time, my father insisted I work long hours at the family grocery store after school, often until late into the night. It was not a choice. It was expected.

One particular night, I made a decision. I chose not to go in. I do not even remember why; I just knew I needed a break.

Something in my spirit told me not to go.

That same night, someone drove by our store and fired a sawed-off shotgun, blowing out every window.

I was stunned when I heard the news. Shaken to my core. I could have been there. I should have been there. But I was not. God kept me from it. I know without a doubt that He was protecting me. His timing, His grace, His hand over my life.

Sometimes I wonder why He allowed so many painful things, but I do not question His protection. He was there every time, even in my deepest fear. Even when I thought no one cared, He cared. He never stopped shielding me, even when I did not understand it yet.

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” — Isaiah 41:10

That is what He did. He upheld me every single time.

Songs in the Storm

Singing was my haven; it was the one thing that made everything feel like it was falling into place. It truly helped me.

My father encouraged it, my teachers supported it, the audience loved it, and I personally found deep joy in it, especially because it brought me closer to God.

Even during long family drives, especially while traveling, my dad and I would sing together, our voices blending in unexpected harmony. Sometimes he'd glance over at me and say, "I love to hear you sing." That one sentence would brighten my entire day. I had to hold on to those rare moments of affirmation, treasuring them like hidden gems. Over time, he began to express how proud he was of the woman I had become. It didn't erase the past, but it meant something.

Years later, while I was in Africa, Noah got the call. My father had passed away from Parkinson's.

The news hit me like a wave, and I collapsed to the floor, sobbing uncontrollably. It wasn't just grief...it was a tangled storm of sorrow, anger, and strange relief. I had spent so many years shielding myself from the man who had caused so much fear, and now, just like that, the door was closed. The chapter was finished.

I flew back to the States for his funeral, heavy with unresolved emotion. At the gravesite, surrounded by people who remembered different versions of him, I felt a song rise in my spirit. Through tears, I began to sing Amazing Grace. One by one, others joined in. The sound of that melody floating through the air felt like both a release and a farewell.

My mind flashed back to one of my last visits with him. He had looked at me with tired eyes and quietly said, "Sissy, I wasn't good to you. I'm sorry. I love you."

It was the moment I had waited my whole life to hear. But even those words, soaked in regret, couldn't undo the damage. He had found God before he died, and for that I was

thankful. Yet even after coming to faith, there were moments when the old rage returned. Still, I chose to let God's grace fill the places his love never reached.



**At my Father's Funeral — Remembering
with Love and Gratitude**

Seeds for the Future

One Christmas, he became enraged while we were driving. I feared he was going to throw my mother out of the car. He opened her door and tried to push her out. We screamed from the backseat, terrified. He also started hitting us. I turned to prayer, and faithfully, the Lord saved my mother.

Moments like these showed me how quickly God answered my pleas, strengthening my faith. Yet every Christmas seemed to bring some new trouble. It broke my heart because Christmas had always been my favorite time of the year. I determined early on that I would change those memories one day. Later, in Africa, I was able to do just that, redeeming Christmas with joy, worship, and celebration.

Redeeming Christmas

Even in Africa, I made Christmas special for my children. We lived on a hill surrounded by mud huts and open plains, with the sky stretching endlessly above us. I filled our home with music, laughter, and the warm smell of baking bread. We cooked together, sang songs, exchanged small gifts, and I watched their faces glow with joy.

They never knew how much those moments meant to me. I had known painful Christmases before, and I wanted to change what the season meant in my life. I wished for them to feel joy where I had once felt sorrow, and peace where fear had once been. In giving them happy memories, God gave me my own back.

Through moments like these, I began to see how faith had gently changed my life.

Growing through faith became a game-changer for me, both spiritually and emotionally. Regularly reading the Bible and praying daily brought discipline into my life and taught me divine attributes such as resilience, self-control, and the ability to stand firm in trials. God made me strong, equipping me with the strength I would need for the plans He had prepared. My faith and my hardships worked together, making me resilient and preparing me for the challenges ahead.

“When you give or sow your seeds of faith, you are expecting benefits.” – Mark 11:24

Just like a farmer does not toss seed on the ground and walk away but works the soil and waits for the harvest, I learned that faith has a due season. God’s timing is perfect, and His promises never fail. *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* – Philippians 4:13. That truth carried me again and again.

Looking back, I see that the seeds of faith planted in my childhood were not small or insignificant. They were preparation, God's way of shaping me, protecting me, and calling me toward something greater than myself. Though storms raged around me, His hand was steady, guiding me forward.

By the time I turned twelve, I felt called to share the teachings of Jesus with others. Carrying my Bible with me, I spoke of His love and grace to my schoolmates, inspired by the stories my father had once read to me. Life unfolds in unexpected ways, especially when we surrender to God's plan. It feels as if He had a master plan for me all along, beginning when I was only a little girl with a book too big for her hands.

With my Bible in hand and faith growing stronger each day, I stood at the threshold of a new season. The journey ahead would take me from a broken childhood into a calling that would stretch across the nations, one step at a time, led by the One who had been with me all along.

Chapter 2: **A Divine Encounter**

One Moment Changes Everything

Angels in Overalls

“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.” – Zephaniah 3:17

I had not yet turned eleven when I began going to Bible school at a little country church. An elderly couple who often stopped by the store asked my dad if they could take me along with them. To my delight, he said, “Yes!” My excitement was so great that my heart nearly leapt out of my chest.

The old man was heavysset, with a kind face partially hidden beneath a worn cap. He always wore faded overalls that looked as though they had carried him through a lifetime of work. His wife was gentle and soft-spoken, dressed in a simple smock dress that swayed around her ankles. The warmth in her eyes made me feel safe, as though I had stepped into the arms of love itself. Together, they seemed like angels, ordinary in appearance but extraordinary in purpose, sent by God to guide me toward Him.

The church they brought me to was a quaint, weathered building nestled deep in the countryside. Its wooden beams creaked under the weight of years, and the rickety outhouse nearby was a further sign of its age. None of that mattered. Within those walls, the Spirit of God breathed life and hope, and that was all my young soul longed for.

The people who filled the pews were simple and down-to-earth. Most of the men wore their work overalls, fresh from the fields or shops, while the women came in modest dresses with their hair neatly pinned. There was no pretense here, only honest, hardworking country folk who had come to worship God.

At the front stood a young preacher and his wife. He preached with conviction, words tumbling out with passion rather than polish, and his wife sat at the upright piano, her fingers coaxing hymns from its worn keys. The choir was small, just a handful of faithful singers, but they sang from their hearts with such joy that it felt like a chorus far greater than their number.

The piano's notes were sometimes uneven, and the voices cracked here and there, but none of that mattered. To me, it was the sweetest sound on earth – pure, unvarnished worship. As their voices rose, I felt something stirring in my own heart, as if heaven itself had bent down to join in the singing.

The church was more than just Sunday services; it was also a Sunday school. The classrooms were situated in the back, very small and plain, with old wooden floors that creaked beneath our feet. Sunlight streamed through narrow windows, lighting up the well-worn benches where we gathered each week.

It was not much by worldly standards, but to me, it was a sacred place. Each lesson, no matter how basic, felt like it was written just for me. Bible stories came alive in those little rooms, painted not by fancy decorations, but by the love and faith of the teachers who shared them with us.

I listened wide-eyed, hungry for every word. When they spoke of Jesus calming the storm, I could almost hear the

waves crash and then fall silent at His command. When they told us how He welcomed the little children, I believed—deep in my heart—that He was welcoming me.

Those little Sunday school rooms became holy ground. They were the first place where I began to sense that God saw me, that He had a purpose for my life, even if I did not yet understand what it would be.

The Stirring of Salvation

The call of God does not wait for age. It comes from the willing heart.

Although I was still very young, something deep inside me was being drawn toward God. Week after week, sitting in that little country church, I felt His Spirit tugging at my heart. The songs, the preaching, and the Sunday school stories stirred a hunger in me that nothing else could satisfy.

My interest in His divinity kept growing, and I knew I needed to understand what it meant to be truly saved. I carried this new knowledge home, and it became the first place where I started sharing the things of God. My childlike excitement could not be contained. I wanted my whole family to know Him, too.

One day, my father surprised me. Gestures of kindness from him were rare, but this one touched my heart. He said, “Sissy, would you like us to go to church way out in the country, you know, the one with the outhouse?” My whole face lit up. “Yes!” I cried, and I begged him to take us. To my amazement, he did. That Sunday, our family went together.

Every week after that, Brother Scott, the pastor, faithfully led the service. His words were not fancy, but they carried weight.

Each time, I felt the Lord dealing with my heart. I knew I needed to do something. I knew I needed to be saved, but I did not yet understand how to reach Him.

Sometimes I would even walk up the aisle, trembling, my heart pounding in my chest. Once I got there, I did not know what to say or do. All I knew was that God was calling me, and I could not ignore it.

The Billy Graham Crusade

One voice, one message, and a stadium full of souls forever changed.

One evening, Pastor Scott approached us with an invitation that would change my life forever. “There’s a Billy Graham crusade, a convention,” he said, his eyes alight with excitement. “You must come; it’s an experience you won’t forget.”

The day of the crusade arrived. As we entered a massive stadium, the thousands of people overwhelmed me. The towering stands seemed to stretch endlessly, filled with a sea of faces, each one reflecting the same anticipation I felt.

And then the music began. It was not just a choir singing; it was everyone. The voices of thousands rose together, echoing like the voices of angels, filling the air with a heavenly sound.

When Billy Graham stepped to the pulpit, his presence was steady, his words simple yet piercing. “God loves you,” he said, his voice carrying across the stadium. “No matter who you are or what you’ve done, His love is unconditional.”

At that moment, his words cut through the noise of my doubts and fears. Tears streamed down my face as I realized the depth of my need for God’s forgiveness and love. Right

there, I bowed my head and prayed, “Lord, I ask for Your forgiveness. I ask You into my heart.”

Later, as I walked forward with others, a counselor gently guided me. She asked if I knew what I was doing. With conviction, I said, “Yes. I’ve already trusted Him, and there’s no going back.”

I was willingly and gladly giving my heart to Jesus.

When the crusade ended, a peace unlike anything I had ever known washed over me. It was as if heaven had wrapped me in its embrace. From that moment on, I was changed forever. I could feel a spiritual shift deep inside me. This was not just a decision; it was a transformation. I belonged to Him, and nothing could separate me from His love.

A Glow That Couldn’t Be Hidden

When Christ enters the heart, His light can’t help but shine.

I cannot even describe the joy I felt at that Billy Graham Crusade. It was like hitting the spiritual jackpot, something deep and overwhelming, far beyond anything I had hoped for. A sense of amazement washed over me, along with a peace I had never known before. I felt safe, like God Himself had wrapped me in His arms. I had given Him full control, and I knew, without a doubt, He would lead me wherever He wanted me to go.

That surrender gave me strength. It shaped me. It gave me hope. I began to sense a future filled with purpose and good things, and I grew increasingly optimistic with each passing day. Though I had already been reading Scripture and sharing His Word before that moment, something shifted after the Crusade. People listened. Even the kids who usually rolled their eyes or joked when I brought up God began to lean in. It

was as if they could feel something different in me, like they sensed the presence of God, and it drew them in.

There was a glow about me, not just on my face, but in the way I smiled and spoke. It was not from me—it was Him shining through me. Every time I spoke about Jesus, I felt myself growing spiritually. Something inside me—something sacred—was bursting outward and touching lives. People’s hearts were stirred, and I knew it was God moving through my words. He was with me every step of the way. Whether I was sharing His love with others or enduring the private pain of abuse, I knew He never left my side.

Baptism at Lone Star Lake

The water was only a symbol, but the transformation was real.

After I returned home, the pastor arranged for my baptism at Lone Star Lake in the Piney Woods of East Texas. I was filled with excitement, knowing that baptism, while not necessary for salvation, is a powerful symbol of following Christ, representing His death, burial, and resurrection.

However, the day of my baptism turned out to be particularly challenging. My father decided to exercise his cruelty. He told me he would not let me go, even though it meant so much to me. I cried and pleaded with him, my heart breaking with each tear that rolled down my cheek. It felt like each tear was a drop of hope slipping away. After what felt like an eternity of begging, he finally relented with a dismissive wave of his hand. Relief and joy washed over me as I hurriedly prepared to leave.

The drive to Lone Star Lake felt like a journey to a new beginning. The towering trees and serene atmosphere echoed the significance of the moment. As I arrived at the lake, the

sight took my breath away. The water glistened under the warm sunlight, and the gentle breeze rustled the leaves of the surrounding trees. The congregation had gathered by the water's edge, their faces radiating warmth and encouragement.

The pastor stood in the shallow water; arms open in welcome. As I stepped into the cool water, it enveloped my feet and gradually rose to my knees. With each step, it felt as though I was shedding layers of my old self, moving closer to transformation.

The pastor's voice was calm and reassuring as he spoke about baptism, his words resonating deeply within me. "Jenna, do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" he asked, his eyes meeting mine with gentle intensity.

"I do," I replied, my voice steady and filled with conviction. As Pastor Scott gently lowered me into the water, saying, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," a profound sense of peace and surrender washed over me. The water closed over me, cool and refreshing, and for a moment, everything was still. And when I resurfaced, as he said, "Raised to walk in the newness of life," I felt like an entirely different person.

It was as if time stood still, like heaven had pressed pause, just so I could fully embrace the weight and wonder of the moment. I knew I was making a public declaration, boldly choosing to follow God for the rest of my life.

From that day forward, my faith was no longer quiet or hidden. It became visible, a living testimony of my devotion and service to Him.

A New Life

As I stepped out of the water that day, I knew I would never be the same. Baptism had not saved me – Christ already had, but it was the seal, the public declaration, the holy reminder that my life was now hidden in Him. The water was a symbol, but the transformation was real. I was His, and nothing could undo what He had begun in me.

“We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” – Romans 6:4



That day at Lone Star Lake was not an ending but a beginning. The same God who met me in those country churches and in the cool waters of baptism was already preparing me for a calling far greater than I could imagine.

The Vision of Africa

One day in class, I opened a book and turned to a page about Africa. My eyes fell on the pictures of endless plains,

dark-skinned faces, and tall acacia trees stretching into the horizon.

In that instant, the world around me seemed to fade. The chalkboard, the desks, and even the scratching of pencils all disappeared. Suddenly, I was not in a classroom anymore—I was in Africa. I could feel the heat of the sun on my skin, hear the rhythm of drums in the distance, and see crowds of people pressing in, thousands upon thousands, their eyes searching mine for hope.

It wasn't imagination. It was a divine encounter. God was showing me His plan, opening my heart to the nations. The sense of it was so strong it nearly took my breath away. I knew without doubt that this was where I belonged.

Not only Africa, but the world. I saw myself crossing oceans, walking through villages, stepping into cities I had never even heard of, carrying one message wherever I went:

Jesus loves you.

I was only twelve, but the certainty in my spirit could not be shaken. It was not a passing thought or a childish dream. It was a calling. A holy fire had been lit inside me, and I knew it would never burn out.

Not everyone believed me. Some smiled politely, others laughed, thinking it was nothing more than a fancy. But even their doubt could not touch what God had planted within me.

I held onto it like a secret treasure in my heart.

Years later, I found myself in Africa, right where God had said I would be. The landscapes that once seemed so far away now stretched before my eyes. Yet He did not stop there. God opened doors across the nations. I stood in churches, schools, villages, and open fields. I sang, preached, and testified. I

looked into the eyes of thousands of men, women, and children, hungry to hear the Gospel. I watched the vision given to a twelve-year-old girl unfold, step by step, across continents.

One day, while on furlough, I met one of my childhood teachers, the very one who had laughed when I first spoke about Africa. She hugged me tightly, her eyes wide with wonder.

“I remember you saying this would happen,” she whispered. And here I was, living proof that God’s promises are true.

The vision had never been a dream. It was destiny. Even now, I feel the same fire stirring, the call of God to go, to speak, to love, and to carry His name to the ends of the earth. I think back to that moment as a twelve-year-old girl, seeing thousands of faces pressed in with hope in their eyes, and I know it was only a glimpse of something far greater—something eternal.

One day, there will be a great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. Even now, I can almost hear their voices crying out in unison: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

That was the vision God placed in my heart as a child, and it is the vision that carries me still.

A Life Surrendered to Missions

This path to God taught me many things – patience, forgiveness, perseverance, and so much more. It felt like God sent me a crash course on becoming a better human, and I did not even need to enroll. I could hear Him in my heart, guiding

me away from sin and nudging me toward good. A faint voice would urge me to go to church whenever I strayed.

Imagining how Jesus went to the cross for our sins made me steadfast. He was mocked and beaten until His face was unrecognizable, yet He carried on with those scars. My own scars suddenly had a purpose—they became little badges of survival, reminders that my pain was not wasted.

Still, even while I shared His word and tried to abide in Him, something felt missing. I knew I was meant for more. One day, while going with my sister to church, I heard the pastor speak about missions—about surrendering to God and dedicating a life fully to Him. Something clicked. I felt His presence in my heart stronger than ever before.

Trusting Him, I went forward and told the pastor, “I’m called to be a missionary, and I’m standing here surrendering to God.”

I was eighteen. I had an entire life ahead of me to dedicate to His cause, and I was glad for it. Many people knew me, which gave me the confidence to stand boldly. I was unafraid—the kind of fearlessness you have when the Almighty walks beside you. I had faith. And so, armed with that divine confidence, I began my mission.

Little Jenna, Big Dog Problems

When I first arrived at the Seminary, I was young, wide-eyed, and overflowing with enthusiasm. I carried my Bible in one hand, my suitcase in the other, and an Irish Setter named Jack trailed along with me.

With only three women in the entire school, and with Jack hard to ignore, it wasn’t long before I was nicknamed “Little Jenna.”

Every Sunday, the pews were full, and I threw myself into every chance to serve. I went door to door, sometimes stumbling over words, other times speaking with a conviction that surprised even me. I listened to people's struggles, shared my own, and pointed them toward the same hope that carried me.

To my amazement, those simple conversations often stirred something lasting, faith renewed, lives reconnected with God.

Those moments laid the foundation of my calling.

But the Seminary held more lessons than Greek verbs and Old Testament history. Thanks to Jack, it also became a lesson in humility. Every night, he stationed himself outside the dorm and howled until the whole campus rang with his cries. His mournful voice set off dogs in nearby houses until it sounded like a choir gone wrong.

The preachers and their wives were not amused. My roommate, a stern woman from Mexico City, hardly needed words to show her frustration. Her sighs and sharp looks said it all.

Eventually, the matter reached the Seminary president, Brother Brooks. One afternoon, he called me into his office and, with all the seriousness of a judge, told me, "Jenna, you'll have to give Jack away."

My heart sank. Jack was not just a dog, but my comfort and peace of home in a place that often felt overwhelming. The day I let him go; he tilted his head as if to ask if I was certain. His tail wagged uncertainly, torn between loyalty to me and curiosity about the children waiting for him. I hugged him tightly, burying my face in his fur while he licked away my tears.

Yet God softened the loss. A nearby family with several children welcomed Jack with joy. They raced him across the yard, tugged at his ears, and curled up with him as if he had always been theirs. Seeing him loved so well gave me peace.

Jack had not lost a family—he had gained a larger one.

Years later, God gave me a sweet redemption of that moment. After serving in Africa and raising children there, Brother Brooks invited me back. This time, instead of asking me to give something up, he honored me before the Seminary with an honorary Doctorate in Missions. He became one of my greatest mentors, a man whose belief in me left a mark that remains to this day. And though the years have passed, his encouragement still echoes in my heart, stronger than Jack's howls ever did.

Through it all, I learned that faithfulness in small things prepares us for greater ones. As Paul reminds us in Galatians 6:9, *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”* Seminary tested and stretched me. It even forced me to part with my beloved dog, but it also prepared me for the harvest God had waiting in Africa and beyond.

And if Seminary taught me one humorous truth, it is this: sometimes the loudest voices on campus are not the preachers, but the dogs.

Gospel Chorale and Beyond

After seminary, I attended Baptist Christian University in Shreveport, Louisiana, to study missions and further prepare for my calling. There, the rules were strict—ankle length dresses were required every day, along with my favorite pair of tennis shoes.

During that time, I joined Gospel Chorale, a group that traveled state to state on a bus, singing for the Lord and witnessing through music. Those days were filled with joy, laughter, and the privilege of ministering through song.

For many, that season of life brings distractions, marriage, careers, or the pull of the world. But God, in His wisdom, kept me focused. He opened doors that led me toward a life of adventure, service, and purpose.

A Beautiful Surprise

The more I leaned into Him, the more I understood that the path was not only about the places I would travel but also about the person I was becoming. Through every challenge and blessing, God was patiently shaping me.

Just when I thought I had His plan figured out, He gave me something I had not even prayed for. He gave me a companion, a partner, someone who would walk with me in this calling and love me through every season.

His name was Noah.

What began as a simple trip to Texas and a clumsy fall on a skating rink turned into the beginning of a love story only God could write. That is the wonder of His timing. He knows exactly what we need, and when our hearts are ready, He places it before us in the most unexpected way.



Mama Jennifer is a memoir of survival, faith, and hope. From childhood trauma and a violent attack while pregnant to healing and missionary life in Africa, this true story shows how God turns pain into purpose.

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