

Paula

As a child my life was full of turmoil and chaos. My parents were separated when I was very young and divorced by the time I was in first grade. My father, a large, militant man was given custody of me because my mom was deemed an "unfit mother". I had no idea what that meant but I did know that my mother was sick. Sometimes she was so sick that they had to place her in an isolated, padded room with a special jacket that kept her arms wrapped tightly around her; other times, she was in a room full of people doing crafts. She would give me the crafts she made.

Sometimes she was healthy and could live in her home. I was forced to go and visit her on Sunday afternoons. Other times, she would do things like call the school with bomb threats or tell people she was going to kill me. Then the police would come and take her to the hospital again. Those were confusing times. I had a mommy but not one like other little girls. I lived with my daddy but he worked shifts and long hours so I spent a lot of time alone. When he was home, he spent a lot of time with his "friends" Jack Daniels or Jim Beam. I did not like his friends, they made him mean and nasty. At church, I was told that I was not good enough to pray to God for myself; I had to have a priest or Mary intercede for me.

My world was crazy. I was not loved by my parents and I was not good enough to talk to God for myself. I wondered why I was born. But, God knew me and God loved me. And, I will tell you how He taught me those truths. First, my dad was a supervisor in a mill and his nickname was "little Hitler". He was a difficult man but he must have had a Christian boss because every year for Christmas my dad's boss gave him a subscription to Guidepost magazine, which my dad would blaspheme each month as he tossed it into the trash. But, since I had few friends and much free time, I developed a love of reading. I would pull those magazines back out of the trash and read them. The stories of how this God performed miracles, saved lives, changed hearts, and loved people gave me such hope. Hope that if this God loved these people then He must love me, too.

One day, my mother did a crazy thing at my school and the police and my dad were there. The guidance counselor brought me into his office to wait. On his wall was a poster, it was picture of a little boy with the caption that said, "God doesn't make junk" - it was a popular poster during the 60's and 70's. I read and reread those words. No one had ever said that to me. In fact, all my life I had heard my dad tell me what a pain I was and how he wished I had not been born. My mom could not love me, the kids teased me and called me names, teachers ignored me, the church terrified me, yet this poster told me that God did not make junk. I felt like junk. I was being raised by a man that did not know how to care for a little girl so my clothes were mismatched, my hair a knotted mess, and my meals were TV dinners. My mother was so sick she could not be bothered with me.

This poster empowered me. I walked out of that room thinking, "I'm not junk because God does not make junk." I believe my little 9 year old self walked a little taller and smiled a little bigger. Even though, no one around me was a believer or shared Christ with me, that poster told me there was a God and that He did not make junk. I spent the remainder of my school years believing those 2 things. In spite of my alcoholic father and mentally-ill mother, I was not junk. That belief made me become a straight A student, earn valedictorian, attend college at age 16, do community service, and any other thing that would outwardly prove that I was not junk. I believed with all my heart that there was a God and He loved me and He did not make junk.

At Penn State, I had very little to do on Friday evenings since I was underage and most Penn Staters were off drinking. One night as I was walking the campus, I came upon a church that had singing inside. So, I went in. It was a Campus Crusade for Christ meeting. At first I thought, these people are crazy. They are standing around on a Friday night with their hands in the air, crying and singing to God. But, I kept going back. One girl gave me a Bible and I began reading it. The Old Testament confused me, but the New Testament was the best stories I had ever read. Time went on and I still strived to not be junk by being a "good person", an over

achiever and excelling in all I did. I met a wonderful man and I knew he was a gift from God to me. We married, and we got pregnant.

Tragically, I lost that first child but I had its twin. This baby boy was so sick and just hanging onto his life. I remember arguing with God to heal this baby, and I clearly remember the night I held his limp, frail, sick little body and said, "God, I know you are there and I know you are real and I have strived and tried to not be junk because You don't make junk but my striving cannot make my son better." And, I heard God say, "No, but I can if you would just let go and let Me in control. I can heal him and complete you." I guess if you have to say a date that you were saved, when you knew for sure beyond a shadow of a doubt that you were God's and when you died you would go to heaven, that night in the hospital room holding my "failure to thrive" baby would be that moment.

But, I see it as a lifelong journey of God telling me that I was His child. Not my parent's, who could not care for a child, but His child and He doesn't make junk. I used to pride myself on what I had become in spite of my family and that night I realized that all my accomplishments had been because God had held me in the palm of His mighty right hand. The poster and Guidepost magazine had given me God as a parent. He had guided me and protected me and I just needed to let go and trust that if God had brought me this far, He was more than capable of handling the rest of my life. What I realized that night was that I did not have to prove, by my efforts, that God doesn't make junk. I just had to accept the efforts He made for me, to be able to enter His Kingdom, be His child and to let Him control my life. And, this is just the beginning.