

I SAY A PRAYER FOR ME: One Woman's Life of Faith and Triumph by Stanice Anderson



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Chapter One

"I Only Meant to Wet My Feet"

"Beware of guys with matchbook covers torn off at the end," my father warned me as he walked away.

"What exactly does that mean, Daddy?"

He turned and, with a smirk that seemed to question my intelligence, said, "It means that they use drugs!"

"Use drugs! With a matchbook cover?"

"Yes!" Offering no more as he went to his next task.

Our "talk" about drugs was apparently over.

I shrugged it off and thought, How stupid does he think I am? Does he think that even at seventeen years old, I don't know anything? After all, I knew drugs were injected. I had seen the movie, *The Man with the Golden Arm*. Plus, I had seen junkies on the corner in front of the poolroom. They shoot dope into their veins. Boy, to be considered such a smart man, he sure is dumb about the things of life.

It was clear to me that I was going to have to learn things on my own—just like I had learned through being raped three years earlier that men were not to be trusted; not even fathers. After all, they were men first, and fathers second—only out of a sense of duty.

Of course, neither my father nor mother knew about my being raped; but then there was a lot about me they didn't know. I never got the sense that they wanted to know anything about my inner reality. I was their dream-daughter and I lived my nightmares in private, like a "good" Anderson was taught.

After graduation from high school, I started going out almost nightly to what we called the Go-Go's: dances with live bands in rented halls. Usually beginning at 10:00 p.m. and lasting at least until 2:00 a.m., the dances were an all-consuming lifestyle that consisted of fabulous outfits, everyone trying to outdo the other, luxury cars, dancing to the point of near-exhaustion, and trying to "pull" the guys with the nicest cars and sharpest clothes. It didn't matter that they weren't about anything progressive and wholesome. Most of us had petty jobs that afforded credit cards to accumulate the clothes and most of the guys sold drugs or were involved with some other criminal activity. It was living life on the edge, which, for reasons I didn't understand then, appealed to me.

After the Go-Go's, I went to after-hours joints where the guys gambled and the girls watched, ordered bootlegged drinks, and shopped through the various "hot"—as in stolen—wares, especially the clothes that were needed to maintain the lifestyle.

By sunup it was time to go home and since I worked a day job, it would mean taking an hour or so nap, showering, and then heading off to work. By the afternoon break, I would be so sleepy I could barely stay awake. That is until I was introduced to NoDoz, a stimulant that warded off sleep. A few of those and I could get through the rest of the workday and then go home and get ready for the Go-Go again.

Soon I was taking NoDoz like it was candy and using credit cards to charge clothes like I never had to pay for them.

I felt discombobulated most of my life—long before my teen years, so I was ripe for what happened when I was twenty years old.

Early one weekday morning after the Go-Go, a group of friends and I went to another friend's house for breakfast. There was a guy that interested me in the kitchen. I walked toward him and asked him to light my cigarette. He pulled out a book of matches. As he opened the cover and struck the match, I noticed that the cover was torn off on the end.

"What's that?" I pointed to the matchbook.

"What?"

"Let me see those matches."

As he handed them to me, I recalled my father's words from a few years earlier and my curiosity was piqued. While, I must admit, danger! was my first thought, my inquisitive spirit overwhelmed all good judgment.

"Why is this matchbook cover torn off like this?"

"You don't know?"

"No."

"Come on! As fly a girl as you are, you really don't know?" With a slimy smile, he proceeded to reach into his jacket pocket and pull out a clear capsule with white powder inside. He then pulled out the missing strip of the matchbook cover, which was folded in half like a paper airplane without the

cockpit torn out of the middle. He turned the strip over, carefully twisted the capsule open, and poured the white powder onto the furrowed strip. It was much like he was putting toothpaste onto a brush.

In the next instant, he directed the strip to his nostril and inhaled deeply. The white powder jetted up his nostril and disappeared. He smiled and shook his head as if to scatter the powder through his skull or something. He proceeded to line the remaining powder on the strip and like a vacuum cleaner his other nostril sucked it up. He made a snorting sound like a hungry pig and then handed the matchbook strip to me. School was in. He was the teacher. I was the willing student.

Lesson 1: "The strip is called a 'quill.' And what you are about to experience is 'boy,' also known as 'dugee,' also known as heroin. But it won't hurt you, as long as you put it up your nose, which is called 'snorting.'"

"Are you sure?"

"Yep! Just don't ever shoot up and you'll be all right."

I snorted the next white-lined quill of boy that he poured.

"It burns!"

"Oh, you'll get used to that. It just means that it's good."

Again, I snorted. My head seemed to take flight. A euphoric trance took control of my brain. I felt light-headed; but what I remember most is I felt memory-light. No thoughts other than those of the moment. A powerful feeling surged through my body. It was like I could conquer anything and anybody.

His next move was toward me—to kiss me, I suppose. But he was in for a rude surprise. I pushed him away so hard against the refrigerator that the bottles inside clanked. I knew then that no man would ever hurt me again. Finally, I had control of what happened to me.

While the rape had turned my young world upside down, I thought that maybe this boy also known as dugee also known as heroin would give me the power to turn it right-side up. So, my love affair with drugs began.

As I look back it reminds me of the song by the Whispers that goes, "I only meant to wet my feet; but you pulled me in . . . oh, the waters of love run deep." The song speaks of falling in love; however, many of us only mean to wet our feet but are pulled into some harmful behavior that drenches and quenches the fires of our spirits. Well, I found out that the waters of addiction run even deeper.

While I went from NoDoz to snorting heroin, left unaddressed, my inner reality of pain and despair would always show up between highs. I was in denial about my problem for many years, thinking that I wasn't that bad. I would trade seats on the Titanic by changing the kind of drugs from pills, to dropping acid, to smoking reefer, to drinking liquor—but my ship was sinking nonetheless. And I was the last to know.

When I went off to college—only to avoid paying the credit card bills I had accumulated—I still used some form of drug and alcohol. Because I was in school, or kept a job, was not homeless or on some corner begging or on some stroll prostituting, I felt that I could not possibly be a junkie or drug addict. I still looked good—or so I thought. But my life was starting to become more and more controlled by drugs—the getting and using. But I only meant to wet my feet.

One thing about addiction though—it progresses! It's a downward spiral that leads to jail, and sometimes death.

I would always try to be around people who I thought were worse off than me. When I snorted, I befriended people that were injecting drugs. Then I could say, "I'm not that bad." However, at the age of thirty—ten years after my first snort of heroin, I injected it for the first time.

It's said that addiction is a "feeling disease." Being a lover of words, I broke the word "dis-ease" down. To me, it has come to mean that I am not at ease in whatever my reality is—I have a problem with my feelings and understanding that feelings are not facts. I was not at ease with the feelings associated with my rape, abortions, my squandered life, being a mother, a wife abandoned by her husband, a daughter abandoned by her father, and even being in my own skin—I never felt comfortable with being who I was and all that it meant or didn't mean. I used drugs to forget—to stay numb—to not have to deal with reality!

The night before I shot heroin for the first time, I was arrested for assault with a dangerous weapon, unauthorized use of a vehicle, and breaking and entering. With drugs comes an unspoken responsibility to maintain the lifestyle. I had become a dealer of the pettiest sort. "Hustling backward" it's called. I made money and spent it faster than I made it. I had recruited young boys to help me in my life of crime since I was a woman alone. As a result of trying to get some money owed to me, I accumulated these charges. I spent the night in jail, which had never happened before. The next day when I got out, a girlfriend of mine came over with some heroin.

While she was known to use drugs intravenously, I was known as a snorter. However, the possibility of facing twenty years to life in jail was very disturbing. I recall thinking about how useless my life had become—me—having had so much potential (as I was always told—until it became a curse rather than a blessing, because I knew that I was not living up to that potential). Now I faced the possibility of prison.

My friend passed me my half of the heroin so that I could snort it. I watched her as she prepared the heroin mixture for the syringe. I just wanted to turn my life off—if only for a few minutes.

"What's wrong, Stacey? Why you savin' yours?" She had taken her eyes off her mixture as she prepared to tie her arm up to locate a vein.

"No. Put it all in the cooker!" I pushed my portion toward her.

"All of it?"

For a few brief seconds, with pleading eyes she said, "Are you sure?"

"Yeah! Come on, hurry up before I change my mind!"

She did as she was instructed. "Well let me go first, and then I'll do you."

I watched as she plunged the mixture into her arm. I could see only the whites of her eyes, as they rolled back into her head. Her neck pivoted back and bobbed back and forth as she fought for control. She was in a place that I wanted to go—that I felt like I needed to go.

I went to that peaceful, quiet, and carefree place; but another thing I found out about drugs: They turn on you—you always have to come back to reality. When the high wore off, I was still facing prison time and my life was still out of control.

You see, I only meant to wet my feet—but it pulled me in—the waters of addiction run deep!

Within three years, I overdosed and had to be revived three times, spent three months in the hospital as a direct result of the overdose, got in and out of a physically abusive relationship, lost my job, slept on a mattress on the floor of an apartment that I eventually got thrown out of for nonpayment of rent, did things with men that I never dreamed I was even capable of doing, stole food to eat, was blessed to get charges reduced to attempted unauthorized use of a vehicle and thirty days' probation with a year's suspended sentence, and, thank God, ended up in a treatment center with the help of a pastor of the church across the street from the methadone clinic that I went to.

Oh, but I only meant to wet my feet.

After I came out of treatment, I desperately wanted to get on with my life. No, I couldn't change the past; but I found out with the help of people in the twelve-step programs that I had to deal with my past—if I wanted to stay drug-free. I had to deal with the roots of what caused me to use in the first place.

And so began my journey—as painful as it has been sometimes—to deal with scars and open wounds left by rape, abortions, a failed marriage, an abandoned son, and the lifestyle. I had to go to God because it was too much for me to handle on my own. The wounds were too deep and the inner pain was too great. The twelve-step meetings I attended were only an hour a day. Even if I went to two meetings a day that was only two hours; but I had to learn how to live with myself for the remaining twenty-two hours, what I had done in my past, and my hopes of the woman that I had wanted to become.

I started praying constantly, reading all I could about God, asking questions, watching other people who walked in faith, and trying to emulate them. Even in my new faith-walk, I only meant to wet my feet—but it pulled me in—the waters of God's love for me ran deep—even deeper than drugs. I began to feel comfort when I prayed. I began to see God answering my prayers, making a way for me, leading me to jobs, people, apartments, and a healthier lifestyle. I saw God bring my son and other family members back into my life. The cravings for drugs started to leave. The desire to use drugs left me. As I witnessed my life change and the lives of my new drug-free friends, my relationship with God became even more personal. It was no longer a God out there in the sky anymore who had little time for the likes of me. He became my God and I was His daughter and even though my own earthly father rejected me, I began to trust and know that God never would.

Yes, I only meant to wet my feet!

* * *

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." We can hear the train coming and still insist that we can get over the track before the train arrives. Our first thoughts warn us of the danger ahead on the road but we head down the road anyway. Whether it be credit cards, drugs, alcohol, chocolate, working, playing numbers, trying to keep up an image that is killing us from the inside out, we have a tendency to think that becoming out of control can't happen to us. We also have the tendency to think that the past is the past—let it be—out of sight, out of mind. However, what happens to the old baggage that follows us to the present and attaches itself to the journey to the future—if we don't do anything about it? We wonder why our relationships sour so quickly, why we can't let go enough to love and be loved, why we can't let anyone close to us, why we worry so much about everything, why we feel so useless, unloved, and unwanted. Why we feel that we are better than, or less than, other people. Why we procrastinate, or get so angry, or so depressed. We need to address that old baggage by offering it to God through prayer, asking for healing and guidance on the steps we can take to do our part in becoming all that God birthed us to be. It can begin when we invite God into our lives.

* * *

Dear Heavenly Father: When we veer off the righteous path that you prepared for us even before we were born, steer us back—love us back onto your way. We know we have free will and sometimes that seems to be a curse more than a blessing because we sure know how to mess up these precious lives that you gave us. Help us to say "No" to anything that is not of You. Help us believe that as long as there is breath there is hope and that you can change a life as sure as the sun will set and the moon will rise. Nothing is impossible for You. Hear our prayers for our loved ones and acquaintances who are saying "Yes" to the wrong things. Show us your reality and help us to stay focused on your love that can heal any wound, bind up any broken heart, pull up and destroy the roots of any pain left from our pasts so that we can live up to our potential in You. Amen. So be it!

* * *

My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the
Lowest parts of the earth.
Your eyes saw my substance,
Being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all
Were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none
of them.

Psalm 139:15-16 (New King James Version)
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