

THE LAST DANCE FOR GRACE

Excerpt of three chapters
from full book for
press review only.



BY **CRYSTAL MANGUM**
WITH **VINCENT CLARK**

The Last Dance for Grace

The Crystal Mangum Story

by Crystal Mangum

with

Vincent Clark



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Meeting

Before Crystal walked in the room, I imagined she would be like a streetwalker or hooker in an episode from some 1970's crime drama: Streetwise, chewing gum, and popping bubbles when she talked. Instead, in walked a very small woman. Perhaps she was no bigger than 5'1" and 100 pounds. After I got to know her, and when we were in the mall looking for clothes, I realized she was a size zero. Occasionally she had to buy clothes in the kids' section. Because of the ruckus the case generated, I had always pictured her being so much taller and fuller. Besides being shocked by how small she was, I was also taken aback when she opened her mouth to speak. She talked deliberately and spoke clearly.

"Crystal, how can I help you?" I asked.

She was definitely uncomfortable but looked directly at me. I knew she was suspicious of me and probably everyone she had encountered since the incident. By the time we met, the case had fallen apart completely. There were people trying to make

money from her story. Plus, the defense lawyers and a group of right-wing bloggers had spent nearly a year on a campaign smearing her. There was not one positive thing I had seen or read about this woman, and she had no way of knowing if I believed what I had read about her.

“I just want people to know the truth.”

I tried to keep eye contact; I wanted to gain her trust. “What is the truth, Crystal?”

In a strong clear voice she answered. “I’m not who they say I am. I’m not lying. Something did happen to me.”

From that moment I believed something had happened, too. This person sitting in front of me was supposed to be delusional. I had met plenty of people like that and this person did not strike me that way. As we talked and she became more comfortable with me, I realized that she had been paying close attention to the news coverage. She knew which talk show hosts had said what and understood the politics of her case.

During that meeting we agreed to see each other as often as we could. The goal, from the beginning, was to get her side of the story out. Not a single newspaper or network tried to do any investigation after the defense attorneys began swaying public opinion. This was going to be more than difficult because I did not want this to become a story about specific people who had been charged. This had to be about Crystal and what she had experienced. At this point it did not matter who did what and exactly how they did it because the attorney general and the North Carolina Bar had made their point. The criminal case was closed, and it would serve no purpose to fight that. Nevertheless, it was and still is important to tell Crystal's side of the story.

The first few meetings with Crystal were difficult for me. She answered without hesitation all of the questions I asked. Never once did she seem to be hiding anything about her past or that night in March 2006. What bothered me the most is that there was this completely different person being described on the blogs and television and not the person sitting in front of me. Crystal could talk about news events, politics, and sophisticated concepts in psychology. I learned early on that she was not just some B-average student as many Internet rumors were reporting. She was carrying a nearly 3.7 GPA when the case broke. What exactly was going on? Who were these people who spent their time trying to defame Crystal? If I had not been meeting with her, I would have expected that she could barely hold her head up straight. I certainly didn't expect her to be one of the best students in her department.

I have met plenty of famous and high profile people, and plenty of manipulators as well. Crystal seemed as ordinary as you could be.

I needed to square the two portraits of this woman. As difficult as it was, I read as many of the blogs as I could. It appeared that that is where the news media was getting most of its information anyway. Sean Hannity made constant tirades against Crystal. I began to notice that most of his rants were identical to people such as Internet columnists Michael Gaynor, Stuart Taylor, and K.C. Johnson. I found it amazing that these non-local people invested so much time and energy on the case. Most people I talked with just wanted the case resolved as fairly as possible.

From the time the case became public and until the day I began writing this book, an attempt was being made to craft a narrative of the Duke Lacrosse case that would suggest that Crystal was just barely a person. The contempt and outright hatred for this

woman proffered was that she had gone out on purpose to bring down innocent men in some kind of conspiracy with the Mike Nifong. Astonishing! It appeared as though the right-winged, disturbed individuals against Crystal had somehow gained access to the case file and could recite details that no one could know. That was, unless they had been granted access by the defense or the families of some of the lacrosse players. It seemed as though all of the energy, daily blog entries, and television coverage were parts of a planned negative public relations campaign.

Not once did those who sought to find faults in Crystal say anything at all about the party hosts. My conversations with Crystal and reporting by other sources suggested the players were a group of young men who were somewhat less ethical than Boy Scouts. At the party on 610 North Buchanan they said some very nasty things and their behavior was not stellar.

In the quest to find the truth, Crystal's judges took a side, but it still did not make sense that they were so concerned about this one woman. When I left my meetings with Crystal, I was more perplexed than ever as I read the descriptions of her in the opinion columns and blogs. Just how did they assume they could know enough about Crystal having never heard her speak? Why not just wait for the legal process to run its course?

The truth lies well beyond the headlines and opinion columns. Many people have failed to see a case that has multiple layers. The clearest one of the layers is race. The deeper I dug into the writings of the most ardent critics of Crystal, one thought constantly emerged. These critics believed that white men in America were the ones who had suffered from discrimination. Their real motive appears to be maintaining the banner of angry white men. They are the people who trade on race, whether for their

benefit or to cast aspersions; they take advantage of situations presented in this case. Then, whenever anyone wants to discuss the merits of the case, no one can really remember any of the facts. We are reduced to repeating propaganda and innuendo that was spread by the winning side.

As I talked with Crystal about the hours leading up to her arriving at the party, I could not get over how different I had pictured her. I assumed she had just come off a street corner somewhere in Durham. Based on what I had read, I never could have imagined her being an ordinary adult college student who had a family, friends, and a desire to work with troubled kids.

She had one brush with the law. While serious, it had been resolved and was not exactly as people painted it. By all accounts, Mangum was a good mother and involved with her children.

It was reasonable to make the ones who planned the party subject to some scrutiny if it was okay to dissect the accuser's life. Why do they get a complete pass when it comes to the significant issue of credibility? It is also curious that some argued that the partygoers' past criminal indiscretions were not a factor at all.

There has been a concerted effort from day one to muddy the waters about the case. While Mike Nifong did little to serve his cause by speaking publicly, it is not unusual for district attorneys to speak about cases. What is unusual here is how quickly and forcefully the weight of the national media, well-connected relatives, and high-priced lawyers came down on the accuser in the case.

It is true that Mike Nifong would have appeared to suffer the most fallout from the case; however, Crystal Mangum got pilloried as well. Her medical history, address,

children's school, and false information about her person quickly and dramatically appeared on the Internet. Some of that information eventually worked its way to mainstream media outlets. It became a part of a narrative that suggested she was a prostitute, drug addict, and ne'er-do-well. It would not help that Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton would wedge themselves into the middle of the case and not attempt to correct some of the bogus information being released about Crystal.

What emerges some two years later is that we can now see that the people who turned this case into a national spectacle were not the ones who wanted justice to prevail. The people who peddled the libelous and slanderous stories about Crystal are the same people who have been behind the Terri Shiavo case and worked on such causes as the Linda Tripp defense fund. Read the continual stream of columns, blogs, and opinion pieces about the Duke case and several names appear time and time again. I hate to encourage more reading of this stuff, but I must so that you can see for yourself. Look at some of the trash that has been written or appeared on television in the guise of legitimate journalism.

While the attorneys have been cautioned not to make public statements while there is still civil litigation, there is nothing to stop the so-called conservative commentators from speaking on behalf of the plaintiffs in the civil suits. Those same people who claim only to want justice were very good at turning the tide of public opinion in the original case. They were so good in fact, the pressure convinced North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper and the North Carolina Bar to take action against a sitting district attorney—something that had never been done in history.

I am suggesting that the Duke Lacrosse case narrative that you know and have come to believe is a lie. Going forward, expect to see an increase in the rhetoric coming from the flamethrowers on the political and religious right. There is still public opinion to influence.

I have recorded over 20 hours of interviews concerning Crystal's life and the events of March 13, 2006. The amount of time I've spent with Crystal is something I do not believe the police, Mike Nifong, or special prosecutors for the attorney general of North Carolina have done.

The most surprising thing of all is that when Crystal decided to write a book about her life, she was so open and talked candidly about her depression and past abuse. The journey over the past year as we completed this project has been very tough. We both have been disappointed at some of the responses that we have gotten when trying to get this story out. We've been lied to, threatened, and ignored. Despite all of that, this story is more important than many people realize. There are overwhelmingly complicated issues that need to be discussed. This book alone cannot address them all but it attempts to set a foundation on which they can be discussed rationally.

The insight gained while working with Crystal is something I could have never imagined while reading that first story sitting on that hard plastic chair at Midway Airport. Little did I know that all of the anguish I had experienced from reading the negative coverage about Crystal would become so challenging? This is the quintessential story about unfairness.

The portrait of Crystal Mangum as some delusional, drug-addled stripper is far from what I have experienced. I can say without equivocation that Crystal is not a drug

abuser. She has maintained to me that the abuse of illegal or prescribed drugs has never been one of her problems, and I believe her.

While writing this book, I have had to assist Crystal explore some serious issues about the choices she has made in her life. She knows now that there may have been a time when she could have been a normal student at North Carolina Central University and not the “accuser” in the Duke Lacrosse rape case. This project has forced Crystal to be bold and honest as she reveals her faults, personal tragedies, and just plain bad decisions that led her to 610 North Buchanan Boulevard that night in March 2006.

There is no way after reading this that you can view this case in the same way. You may still not believe that the three young men accused of rape should have been charged. We do not argue that. However, you will not believe all of the negative things you have heard about Crystal.

Because this case ended up being argued by the cable television "talking heads" you should not have expected that the truth was going to come out. I was amazed, and you should be as well, at how so many people spoke with certainty about why the lacrosse players were innocent based on what they assumed was true about Crystal. However, what is the truth? Little if anything you heard about Crystal was based on any firsthand knowledge.

Family members, lawyers, and representatives of organizations who said they spoke on Crystal's behalf could not because they were not authorized to speak for her and most had never even met her. People who sat in judgment of Crystal because they read a police report on the North Carolina Department of Corrections Web site assumed they know everything they needed to know.

It is clear to me that her story deserves to be told. She has never been afforded a safe opportunity to speak for herself, and she wanted a chance to set the record straight. Despite her desire to speak out, Crystal has managed to stay out of the spotlight for almost two years. Some will probably criticize her for hiding from the media, but if you were in the same position, could you stand up to the scrutiny and attacks?

Crystal made it clear to me that the main reason she stayed out of the media glare is because she did not want every word she said to be evaluated and dissected. It would have been especially difficult when she did not have people around her who would be working in her best interest. Crystal really believed she would have her day in court. However, since we now know for absolutely certain that there will never be a trial for those accused of assaulting her, the only choice available is for her to tell her story.

Crystal feels she has been the one on trial. This ordeal has left her a troubled soul, with a tremendous amount of hurt and torment. If the Duke lacrosse players feel their life has been ruined, it goes without saying that Crystal feels the same way and worst. The players and their lawyers have been paid millions and still seek more.

It is with a great deal of pride that I say that I worked with Crystal to put her story on paper. I am proud because I know that the account of her life transcends the night of the party. Her life is a lesson for young girls and young men about the choices they make. It is about how to discern whom means you well and what is in your best interest. It is about how to live through the fire of such an intense amount of scrutiny and still emerge as a whole person.

This project is about helping Crystal repair her damaged life and preparing her to live for the rest of it in the service of others. Her story will also help you as it has

gradually helped me put things into perspective. My life and yours are golden in comparison to millions of others who live with depression and have been burdened by years of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Now she lives with the added weight of always being connected to the Duke Lacrosse case.

I keep thinking about the lacrosse players hosting a party like the one that started this whole thing in the first place. Alcohol and scantily clad women do not make for a good mix if the men in the room cannot hold their liquor and are sexually misguided. What happened in the aftermath of the party should have caused people to consider the significant issues the story raises. Nevertheless, I know that it has not stopped more parties like the one held at 610 North Buchanan Boulevard from happening nightly somewhere in America. Young men do not have to sexually exploit women and drink themselves into oblivion to have a good time and bond with each other. Sadly, the way our culture views it, if you do not do all those things you are not having a male experience.

What does it say about our society that a person feels no shame to bare their bodies for perfect strangers? It seems like there is almost an epidemic among college-aged women to bare themselves for things like *Girls Gone Wild*. What must be missing from a person's judgment center to make it seem reasonable to take off your clothes for very little or no money? To accept catcalls and to be groped by strangers must leave a stain on your psyche. I know women have been entertaining men with sex for centuries. Knowing about Crystal will not bring the practice to a halt. Crystal's story should at least cause some young women to consider what they let men do to them in the name of love or entertainment.

I ponder what would have happened if no protesters stood on the lawn at 610 North Buchanan banging pots. What if women's groups, black separatists, bloggers, satellite trucks, and high-priced lawyers stayed at home and let the court settle this? I'd like to believe justice would have been served either way.

Most of all I wonder about Mike Nifong and the way the case was handled. Surely, he must have had some evidence as he pushed forward. How else could he have brought such a case as far as he did if there was no evidence at all as the attorney general's report suggests. If it was to enable Mike Nifong to win the office of district attorney of Durham County, then he is indeed a very shallow man. The truth is he never needed a case like this to be elected. We could easily find hundreds of other cases handled by the prosecutors who serve the 100 counties in North Carolina where bias and withholding evidence led to convictions. Even so, in the entire history of this state there has never been a district attorney dismissed from an office for misconduct.

I believe the story of the Duke Lacrosse case is about a lot of things but none of them are what we have been told until now. The attorneys for the three accused did what they needed to do to insure their clients did not go to a trial. The strategy was to find the weak link for the prosecution. Unfortunately, it turned out that the weak link was the accuser's life story and not the facts of the case. Many crucial mistakes were made during the investigation that left the accuser, police, and district attorney on the defense. The reasons, I believe, the state of North Carolina intervened in this case were all political and had very little to do with wanting to find the truth. If finding the truth was the desired outcome, then we still do not have it.

If people were willing to tell the truth they would acknowledge that people produced to discredit Crystal were facing their own legal troubles and were represented by lawyers who were members of the players' defense team. They would come forward and tell why Crystal's medical records were leaked to the public to imply she had mental health problems. Others will say how they floated stories implying Crystal had been sexually promiscuous immediately before the alleged events when there was no proof she had been. Perhaps there is one person who will admit they were influenced to turn against Crystal for their own gain.

This is not an episode of "CSI" where everything is resolved in an hour and packaged for a 30-second promo. The intent of this book is not to prove that those who had been previously indicted did anything. What you will know at the end of this book is that Crystal Mangum is a human being above all else. She is not evil, a drug abuser, or a criminal. She has had a difficult life and circumstances brought her to that place and time where things went terribly wrong for a lot of people. There was never any plan to hurt anyone or to cause any suffering. Now you will finally know Crystal Gail Mangum.

You will hear Crystal's story from her because she is capable of expressing what she wants to say. Throughout you will hear from both of us but mostly from Crystal. The way she talks about her life is dramatic and compelling. You will be moved to rethink what you have heard about her and the case.

During the past two years, many people associated with Crystal have been threatened and harassed. So, for their safety, some of the names have been changed when mentioning certain people and events in Crystal's life that do not have anything to do with the Duke Lacrosse case.

This is this first and best opportunity to hear Crystal's voice, and you should take the opportunity to listen.

For Press Review Only

Meeting the Devil

My freshman year was not turning out to be anything like I had hoped. I never dreamed that things could actually get worse, but they would. A chance encounter while leaving school one day set me back even further than where I was.

Because my father had once again failed to pick up my sister and me from school, we were forced to walk home. I stopped at the edge of the schoolyard and let her walk ahead of me and fade into the distance. I walked slowly because I felt tired plus I saw no need to rush to get home.

I stepped into the intersection in front of the school to cross the street. A truck slowly approached. I wasn't sure the driver was going to stop so I froze in my tracks. I looked around to figure out how much time I would have to cross and, to my surprise, Nikita was standing beside me.

The sight of Nikita caught me off guard for a moment. I was just so happy to see Nikita. My first thought was that maybe she wanted to make up. Maybe she just didn't know what to say.

As the truck pulled along beside us, I noticed immediately that there were four guys in the truck. They were whistling and making catcalls, and I assumed they were looking at Nikita. I assumed she was the center of the attention but to my surprise one of the men leaned out of the truck and directed his attention towards me. I made one of the biggest mistakes of my life when I didn't walk away. That afternoon, I met Frederick Thomas.

“Hey, what's up, girl? Where are you going?” Frederick asked.

I stood there transfixed. I felt a grin come over my face.

This boy was talking directly to me and not Nikita. “Do you need a ride, somewhere?”

I was tempted, but I knew better. If my mother and father found out I was riding with a group of strange men, I would be in a world of trouble. “That's okay,” I replied.

Frederick looked at me from head-to-toe. “Come closer and let me talk to you girl.” His funny accent indicated he was not from around here. I learned later he was from the Caribbean.

Something about him was seductive, and I moved closer to the truck. All my inhibitions went away as the sensation of being noticed made me feel warm all over. I was completely trusting as I gave no thought that he or the other men might have meant me harm. I was overwhelmed because no boy and certainly no man had ever looked so

intensely at my body and into my eyes. Frederick spoke to me. “Do you have a phone and can I call you?”

Without hesitation I gave Frederick my phone number. I was floating on a cloud as the truck disappeared.

Nikita had been standing on the other side of the street and watched my encounter with Frederick. I rushed across the street to tell her about what happened because it seemed as though she had been waiting for me.

“Hi.” It was the first time we had spoken in months. I was out of breath with excitement. “How are you?”

“I’m okay,” Nikita replied back. It was as if we had never stopped talking to each other. Nikita never said one word about the incident in the library or gave an explanation about her behavior. I didn't want to bring it up because I was afraid that I would hear something I didn't want to hear. Nikita was back in my life and a boy actually asked for my phone number. We continued to walk home together and were so caught up in our conversation that we didn't realize we were approaching Nikita's street. She took a left and I continued on to my uncle's house. My sister and I usually went there when our father forgot to pick us up.

All of a sudden, I was overcome with a feeling of dread. I had just given a stranger my phone number and let Nikita back into my life without challenging her for hurting me. Could the guys in the truck be following me? Did Nikita talk to me just to get into my business and use what she saw against me? Now I was concerned.

When I got inside my uncle's house, I saw that my sister was indeed already there. I felt even more relieved that she had not gone home without me, where she would have

made a big deal about my not being with her. Of course she had already called ahead and made up a story that I was being held in detention. Consequently, it was a surprise for my father when he arrived a few minutes later to see me sitting waiting for him.

Under normal circumstances, I would have been angry with my sister for lying about my whereabouts. It didn't matter this time because I could reflect back on something positive. I had met a boy, he paid attention to me, and he even asked for my number. I felt like I did when I was dancing. Not knowing any better I immediately connected the feelings I was having with love. I was feeling that now for the first time. I just might be in love with Frederick. It didn't matter that I didn't know the first thing about him. I had no concept of dating and relationships. This was as close to being with a boy as I had ever been.

Marella and I climbed into our station wagon. My sister sat in the front as she always did. I did not feel the least bit resentful this time. That meant I would be in the back and could concentrate on replaying my meeting Frederick repeatedly, without interruption. I smiled uncontrollably at my good fortune. Wow, someone noticed me.

When we arrived at home, it was already time for dinner. We were running late and my mother was not happy at all. We were told to wash up and sit at the table. The meal seemed to go at a faster pace than normal. My sister still talked about how great she had done at school that day, my brother talked about his job, and I said nothing. After dinner they disappeared into their separate directions. It was just like every other dinner we had.

Shortly after we ate, my sister began to watch television. I'm pretty sure my brother went off to play basketball. I had stuff to do for school, so I went to do my homework. I

completed my homework and got ready for bed. Then it hit me that I had given Frederick my number. I thought, “Would he really call me? What could he possibly have to say to me?” I figured it was all just a joke, and perhaps they were getting their kicks out of making me think that anyone would want to talk to me.

I had been in bed for some time when the phone rang. Something told me that it was Frederick. I was going to be in big trouble if it was because it was 10 p.m. The phone was not supposed to ring after 8:00 pm for any of the children. My mother answered the phone.

“Excuse me,” my mother said. “Just who are you and how do you know Crystal?”

Apparently there was an answer on the other end. Frederick was going along with my mother’s line of questions.

“From school,” she shot back sarcastically. “And just how long have you known her? Where do you live? Did she tell you never to call after eight? What time do you go to bed?”

The questions came in rapid succession. Apparently he was answering to my mother’s satisfaction. I heard her ask one last couple of questions about why he lived so far away and still attended the same school. I was shocked when she handed the phone over to me without asking me a single question.

It was Frederick on the other end. I didn’t know what to say. I had never had a conversation with a boy like this. Frederick knew exactly what he wanted to talk about. In the almost two hours we talked, his conversation was focused—sex.

Almost immediately Frederick told me how much he wanted to lick me down there. He wanted to taste me and show how good he could make me feel. I had no clue about

oral sex, but he told me not to worry he was an expert. He made every woman he was with feel good. He could do it for 24 hours straight and make me feel like a woman. He would teach me how to accept the pleasure of his tongue. There was no way to even imagine how it would feel to be with a man. I was a virgin and I tried to make my body feel the sensation he was talking about, but it didn't seem to make any sense. Why would he want to lick my private parts, and he had just met me? I wasn't completely naive and had heard people talking about sex but this was so hard to understand. I also knew that I had felt sensations in my own body. Perhaps if I let him rub his tongue against my vagina it would feel good.

Unexpectedly I heard a female voice giggling on the other end of the line. It was my sister who had been listening to the entire conversation.

Shocked and embarrassed, I wanted the conversation to end. Because my sister was giggling, I knew there must have been something wrong with the way Frederick was talking to me. I didn't like the new feeling I was starting to have—shame. Nevertheless, he liked me, and I had to like him back. That's how grown-ups love each other, but I couldn't process it all. "Why won't he just hang up the phone?"

"Would you like to come to my house and see my purple light?" Frederick asked.

My sister burst into laughter. She couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't believe she was still on the phone listening. She was humiliating me again. Would Frederick think I was laughing? He must have thought it was me because he kept pressing ahead, and I wasn't saying anything back. So, I decided not to reveal that my sister was the culprit. If I did, he would have been angry and maybe not called me back ever again. Nervously I told him to end the conversation. I thought my disinterest in talking about sex would

keep him from bringing it up again. He asked one more time, and I again told him I was not going to come to his house. He offered an alternative instead; he would come to see me after school the next day. I supposed that was a reasonable compromise. It would allow me to get to know him, and I wouldn't have to have to talk about sex until I was ready to discuss it further. I mistakenly thought I could be in control of the situation.

I let Frederick know that he could call me anytime, but he had to be mindful of the rules about calling so late. I also told him that it would be a good idea to meet me after school. The prospects of seeing him again were so exciting that I totally forgot my sister was still listening on the other end.

The next day after school, Frederick was waiting for me beside a purple Nissan. He was taller and huskier than I imagined. I had only seen him sitting in the truck. He also looked much older. He hugged me easily as if we had done this before. My heart pounded uncontrollably as I was both nervous and excited. Almost immediately he brought up his desire to perform oral sex on me. I stood there in silence and tried to let it pass without responding. Instead he decided to ask me another question, "Would you like to go for a ride with me?"

I did not answer that question, but I knew what I wanted to do.

I had already made up my mind and I could already picture myself riding with him, but I knew it was wrong.

"What's wrong?" His questioning was not forceful. "What's your reason for not wanting to ride with me?"

“My mother would be worried,” I answered. I knew she was already concerned. She wanted to know how old he was. I wanted to know the same thing. I could hear my mother’s voice in my head, “You sound much older than Crystal.”

I tried to ask in a way that wouldn't threaten our new relationship, “How old are you?” I was already conscious of his posture. He carried himself in a way that let me know he was authoritative and much more like a man than the boys I saw around school and my neighborhood. I had the feeling I shouldn't question him because I was taught to respect adults, but I needed to know this one thing. Something told me the age gap was much more than my parents would ever approve.

“I just turned 19,” Frederick said.

It couldn't be because he definitely looked and seemed so much older. I wanted his attention so badly that I had to believe him. He was so attractive and I had already fallen for him. I pressed him again and asked straight out if he was telling me the truth because I had to know if anyone asked me.

Frederick assured me again that he was only 19. His voice was sincere and soothing. He assured me that he could not and would not do anything to hurt me. The prospect of my moving forward in this relationship was dependent on my doing something positive. If I would not let him perform oral sex on me, I would at least have to take a ride with him.

I suspended all of my concerns and got into the car with Frederick. Thinking back now, it was a completely crazy thing to do. Frederick could have easily overpowered me and done anything he wanted to me without me being able to fight back. On top of that, nobody would have the slightest clue as to where I was. My sister heard the conversation

over the phone the night before. Nikita saw me talking to this man but no one knew anymore about him than I did.

As we rode, I was on top of the world. Finally, this was my chance to have someone who adored me and saw me as beautiful. He cared about me and I could adore him back as long as he treated me like the most important person on the face of the earth. He even told me he loved me right then and there and he would treat me like a queen! I had nothing to worry about.

When the car stopped in front of a house, Frederick told me his friend Marquis was there and wanted me to meet him. I sat beside Frederick on a couch. I noticed the room was filled with men who looked much older like Frederick. A heavy cloud of smoke hung over the room and the scent of reefer smoking was strong.

It was apparent that I was drawing a great deal of attention as the only girl present. It made me feel uncomfortable to see men staring at me.

I sensed that Frederick felt the same way I did concerning the looks from the other men in the room. His attitude seemed to turn defensive and angry. He let it be known to the other men in the room that I was his girlfriend. I was so taken by the jealousy he was expressing that I failed to realize that being his girlfriend would be a terrible mistake. I felt special right at the time I should have been on guard.

Frederick hung very closely to me, complementing everything about me. He told me that he loved me more than I could ever imagine. He even offered me a token to show how much he cared; he gave me his brand new hat and a gold chain. As we were leaving his friends' house, he hugged me again, and kissed me gently on the cheek. He

didn't bring up sex at this moment. Instead he told me he wanted to take things slow and get to know me better.

Leaving that house I was on cloud nine. Things were just getting better and better. I was so giddy and caught up in conversation that I didn't realize that the car had stopped. When I did finally notice we were not near my house but several blocks away. I was thinking, "Why doesn't he take me to my house?"

Without my saying a word, he offered, "I know you are wondering why I can't drop you off at your house." He didn't give me time to respond. "I know you said your mother would be worried if she knew you were with me, so it's a good idea to let you off here."

I couldn't let anyone in my family know I had been riding around with him. He told me to think up a reason why I was so late getting home. It could be because I took the city bus home and the route was much longer. I trusted that he was telling me to do the right thing because he was trying to make sure that he could love me without interference from my parents. I remained silent and reluctantly got out of the car, dreading going home. Here in Frederick's purple Nissan I was somebody special. I walked slowly away with my head down and glanced back. Frederick motioned for me to come around to his window. He held on to my hand and gazed into my eyes, "I'm glad I met you, he said." I just smiled.

Lord knows I was so young and naive. I also know that there are girls having the very same encounter everyday. Before I knew it, I was in far too deep to get out. There are many days when I wish I had listened to my mother's advice, but I thought she was trying to keep me away from something I needed. My father knew there was only a limited chance to find something good in a relationship. Neither of my parents knew

how to convey the reality of love. Perhaps if there had been one caring conversation to warn me. I felt so unloved at home by my parents and siblings that I could have never made good decisions on my own.

Frederick knew from the time he saw me that I was lonely and confused. He took advantage of my lack of experience. I did not realize what true love was about and neither did he. I would have to go through a living hell with Frederick to see that even though my parents made serious mistakes raising me, they did not take me through the levels of abuse that this man would. My emotions and sensitivity had not allowed me to appreciate the things that I already had—a haven at home safe from a world filled with cruel people like Frederick.

It would not be long before my new boyfriend would show his true colors. The relationship between Fredrick and I blossomed. As we grew closer, I let down my guard and he became just Fred. We spent hour after hour on the phone, mostly talking about nothing. It didn't matter what we were saying. I finally had someone of my own. Our relationship helped me rekindle my friendship with Nikita. Fred acted as a go between and helped us work out our differences. I was willing to let things go because I had someone to occupy my time. It helped that Nikita now had a boyfriend of her own; his name was Darvis. Our relationships gave us something in common. She could talk about how things were going with Darvis and I with Fred.

Soon kids at school noticed I was in a relationship, but it was positive. However, they could tell that Fred was far too old for me. I got weird looks whenever he showed up to the school to pick me up. Nikita on the other hand never seemed to worry about the age difference. Besides, I felt comfortable with Fred and that's all that mattered to me. I

had never had anyone to pay that much attention to me like this and there was no way I was going to give him up over the age difference.

I became more eager to open up to Fred, and he seemed more willing to listen. He stopped the constant sex talk for the moment, and would hear me out whenever I wanted to say something. I talked with him a lot about why I hated being at home. I told him I felt that I was either being totally ignored or always felt picked on, or that I was being fussed at for things I did not do.

Fred was always there with soothing words, “You don’t need them to make you feel special. If they don’t love you for who you are, then forget them.”

That was incredible. Fred always managed to say exactly what I was longing to hear. How did Fred know just what to say? The more we talked, the more I wanted to be away from my family and just have Fred in my life.”

Fred had taken complete control of my life in no time. He wanted me to drop everyone and everything unless he approved. That meant that sometimes I could be around Nikita but that was all. I didn’t even think about dancing. It seemed childish and silly. I was to be solely around him and totally dependent. He was to be the only one I could show any affection towards or give any attention to. I was at the happiest point in my life and God had come through after all.

Despite that all seemed to be going right, the relationship was mostly about me. I wanted to know something about Fred. He said he was living with his mom that seemed reasonable if he was as young as he said he was. He also told me that he had been married with his own place, but he was divorced and the wife took their son and the house. He had gotten his ex-wife pregnant at age 17, and he did the right thing and got

married to support her and the child. The only thing I could think was that he was very sweet and thoughtful, and she must have been a terrible bitch for not seeing how great a man Fred was. Fred knew how to make me feel sorry for him. I wanted to know where his family lived, I asked, “Where is you son now?”

Fred said he couldn't talk about it. The whole saga made him too emotional. It was best that we didn't discuss that any more. I bought the story, hook, line, and sinker, believing that he had gone through all he had told me. He stuck to that story about his age—19—and what his life had been like, and I had no way to prove otherwise. I could have checked his driver's license but he was so good for me, why doubt what God had provided for me.

Fred came to pick up at school more and more. I relished these moments because it gave me the opportunity to flaunt my boyfriend in front of the people who still thought I was ugly. One day when Fred came to pick me up, I remember taking my time to walk slowly to the car. I wanted to make sure I got the maximum exposure possible. I fumbled with my purse pretending I was looking for something to drag the time out even more.

Fred had gotten out to open the door for me like a gentlemen. He let me take as long as I wanted to get in the car. He was happy to make the girls feel a little envious of my man and me. He played along with me, “What did you forget?”

Everyone seemed to stand still and wait for me to answer Fred, but I said nothing and got in the car.

When I got in the car we had a good laugh and talked about how our day had been. Nothing had happened; it is what we always talked about. Of course we said how much

we missed each other. Sometime during Fred's end of the conversation, I drifted off and stared out of the window. Fred continued to talk; I had completely spaced out but wasn't concentrating on anything in particular.

At the moment I realized I wasn't listening to him a young man happened to walk up along the side of the car. I paid little attention to pedestrians walking next to the car but Fred thought differently. I tried to apologize for drifting off. "I'm sorry," I said, "I think I was daydreaming. What were you saying?"

Fred was not buying my apology, "What the hell was you looking at?"

I tried to avoid an argument and repeated that I was just daydreaming.

"Don't lie to me!"

"I'm not lying," I pleaded. "I really wasn't doing anything."

"Don't ever lie to me," he spat out again, this time violently hitting me with a crushing backhand blow to the face.

I immediately began to cry. Fred had been so nice to me. Why all of a sudden would he not believe me and think that he needed to hit me?

He stared intently into my eyes. I was fearful and confused. His voice was threatening, "Don't ever lie to me again, I mean it".

I cried harder than I had for some time. Fred's behavior left me confused and wanting to run. I could neither look at him nor speak to him. When I managed to stop crying, complete silence filled the car. I sat motionless for a long time.

Fred was the first one to speak, "What's wrong?"

I remained silent. How could he ask such a question? He had just hit me for no reason. He was overreacting and being jealous for absolutely no reason. I was the one who just been hit across the face. It still stung.

“Why are you so quiet?” He paused as if he thought I was going to answer. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” I could see him forcing tears to well up in his eyes. “Sometimes I get so jealous and I am afraid that you might leave me. I don’t want to lose you.”

I was so invested in Fred’s nonsense already. I barely knew him but he could turn things completely around so that I started to feel sorry for him. Instead I should have been demanding that he apologize for hitting me. I really believed that I was the cause for hurting him and putting our relationship at risk.

“You don’t have to be jealous about anything because I love you.” The deal was sealed. I had given in to Fred and now was offering him comfort for battering me. I felt powerless again just like I had before I met him.

Once Fred realized he had me where he wanted, he started the conversation about going to his house again. “You know I have a purple light in my room. Don’t you want to see it?”

I did not feel like saying anything. I remained quiet.

“You’re so beautiful and I want to make love to you. You know the way people do when they are in love.” I am sure he thought I would give in.

I still had no intentions on having sex with Fred. I really did like being with him up until now, but I was not ready to lose my virginity. My heart raced anyway, and I thought I was in love with Fred. I had not lost sight of my Christian values but this was

tearing me apart. I really did fear being punished by God if I gave in to my boyfriend. It went against everything I had been taught. I was just not ready to sleep with Fred or anyone else. All I had heard from the girls around me was useless. Maybe, I could pretend like I was experienced but still have a convincing excuse for why I would not sleep with him? I did not know how to pretend that I was not a virgin.

Fred was going to continue to press me until we had sex. He asked me directly this time. "Are you a virgin?"

I was speechless. Why was I feeling ashamed for what was really true? I hadn't been with anyone. I was only 14 and Fred was my first anything. Reluctantly and very softly I said, "No. I haven't...." I could feel his disapproval.

Fred then made a sudden move towards me. "Come on, I will do it good," he said.

I tried to convince him that my body was immature; that he would not find any pleasure in being with me. The more I protested the more he pressured me. What had I done? I guess I had led him on by trying to be something I was not. I wasn't ready to have sex and I wasn't ready to be Fred's girlfriend, either. I prayed to myself that he would let this go. "Please believe me now," I thought to myself.

He argued that I had nothing to be ashamed of. He kissed my neck and face. I felt sick and weak but there was nothing I could do. Fred's hand went between my legs, and I tried to push him away. He was on a mission and things had progressed too far. I knew I could not handle this. My boyfriend was bound and determined to have sex with me. I was far too small to fight his advances, but I still tried to resist.

Fred got visibly angry but did not raise his voice. He spoke slowly but firmly, "Stop being spoiled, or I'm not going to love you anymore." I did not respond so he tried again,

"You know I can't do this if you don't want me to." He paused, "I was just playing with you anyway." Fred leaned over and gave me a hug. Maybe I had resisted just enough to get myself out of this jam.

Fred spent the rest of that day trying to convince me that I was making the wrong assumptions about him. He did love me and everything had just gotten out of hand. He tried to tell jokes to put me at ease. He tried to tell me that he hadn't really been angry with me at all. I started to think that he really did understand me and stopped because he respected my desire not to have sex right now. I even felt comfortable enough to kiss him passionately. I had been doing that for a while, so I didn't realize how that was sending mixed signals to a man who was obviously manipulating me. Having handled this crisis, I thought I was ready to handle anything in our relationship. Nevertheless, Fred still had every intention of having sex with me. He would have to wait for a better opportunity.

Some weeks passed and I started to let my guard down again. Fred asked me to ride with him to his mother's house. I did not hesitate. We had patched things up, and I had forgiven myself for causing problems in the relationship. I was still innocent. I really wanted to believe Fred could love me no matter what the circumstances were. I had denied him sex, but he was okay with that. At least that's what he said.

As soon as we arrived at the house I realized that his mother was not there. Fred had been exceedingly nice to me during the entire drive. He paid special attention to me after we walked into the house. He brought me a drink, and we sat on the couch. He put his arm around me, and we kissed. I had kissed him many times but never alone in a house.

I started thinking about the incident in his car. I wondered if he was thinking about it too. It had caused so much strain. I had rejected him when he said he wanted to make love to me. I was starting to feel weak and afraid, and looking for words that would get me out of having sex with him. It was easier before because we were in the car and very public. This time we were alone, and it would not be so easy. I thought maybe we could play sort of a game. I could let him get close, touch me a little more than he had before, but then push him away and still be in control. He told me when we had the incident in the car that he respected me, and I would not have to do anything until I wanted to. Playing my game would allow Fred to still desire me, and I would not have to completely give in.

My plan backfired. He began to grab me and handle me roughly, calling me a tease and claiming I was lying about being a virgin. "Why? Why?" he asked repeatedly.

He pressed his body hard against me with all of his weight on me so that I could not move. I asked him to stop.

"You know you want me, girl," he said. "You know it's going to be good too. Don't you?"

"No, stop," I pushed back, unable to control him.

Fred pushed down with his chest and managed to pull my shorts down from my waist. My bottom half was naked and my legs forced apart. He thrust his penis so hard that the pain felt as though my stomach was being ripped out through my vagina. He shoved even harder now that he had a firm grasp on my legs. He pulled them onto his shoulders for more leverage and when I thought it couldn't hurt anymore he began to

thrust at a harder and faster pace. The more I begged and cried for him to stop the more he was determined to inflict pain on me.

“You like for me to go up in your guts?” he laughed. “I’m going to smear your blood on the walls so my boys can see it”.

He laughed at me the more I screamed.

I don't know how long it lasted, but it seemed like an eternity because it has had an effect on me since then. When it was finally over, he didn't try to offer any comfort. My first instinct was to reach between my legs where I felt a wet, sticky mess. The pain was excruciating. When I pulled my hand away to see what it was and I realized that it was my own blood, I felt sick and started to cry again.

“I love the hell out of you, girl,” Fred said to me. He was so happy with himself and what he had done.

What he had done to me did not feel like love at all. This hurt. This was far worse than the slap across my face. Worse than the fight with my sister. Worse than the leather belt across my back. Worse than seeing my mother in the psych ward. Worse than being poor because of my father’s accident. Fred had managed to damage me more than I had already been.

I lost most virginity to someone who took advantage of me—the first man who had gained my trust, someone whom I loved unconditionally. Fred showed his love by taking from me. Taking everything he possibly could in one moment of selfishness. He took my trust, dignity, innocence, and the strength I would need to stand on my own without him. This was not going to be easily undone if it ever could be.

I believe that losing my virginity opened the floodgates to years of more abuse and self-destructive behavior. On the one hand, Fred said he loved me. I had nothing else to go on but his word, so I accepted that what he had done was normal and I should expect this every time expressed our love for each other. How sick does a person have to be to do this to a child? Because that was what I was. Despite how I felt, physically and mentally, I was in this for the long haul.

He took me home that night. I had mixed emotions about what happened. Nothing felt right about it yet I did not see any choice but to wait for my boyfriend to make love to me again.

A few days later the phone rang, as I was getting ready for school. I was going to be late again if I answered it. I quickly grabbed my books and headed for the door to meet my father. Suddenly, I stopped and decided to pick up the receiver. It was Fred's voice on the other end. I didn't want to talk to him. He promised that he loved me and what he had done to me was okay. I was too inexperienced to realize he had raped me. I was terrified and could never tell anyone.

"I have to hurry. I'm late for school," I said annoyed that he was still trying to talk to me after what had happened at his mother's house.

"Meet me outside the school," he said as if he was already there waiting for me. His voice was confident. He knew I would meet him no matter what had happened. Just hearing his voice made me reconsider being angry with him. Fred was right even after everything that had happened. I agreed to see him when my father dropped me off.

As I got into the car with my father, I slipped into one of my daydreams. I tried to imagine what kind of mood he would be in when I saw him. Maybe he missed me and

would be happy to see me. His tone during our brief conversation was the one he used when he wanted to treat me nicely. Frankly, I missed him. There still was not enough abuse to make me go away. He was not going to be unpleasant. I imagined that he would not yell at me or hit me in the school parking lot.

As soon as my dad pulled in front of the school, my sister seemed to jump out of the car before it came to a complete stop. She was never going to be late if she could help it. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Fred's car parked a few spots down from where my father had pulled in. I carefully gathered my books and said my goodbye. I walked slowly in the direction of Fred's car to give my father time to leave the parking lot. As I saw the family car disappear around the corner, my pace quickened and I approached Fred.

I was late for school again. Any more time spent with Fred was going to make me even later. Nevertheless, he got out of the car and opened the door for me like he always did. I was afraid to turn down his invitation to get in.

It was awkward at first, and I knew I had to set the right tone. I chose my words carefully. I needed to say something that would show to Fred that I wasn't rejecting him. I had been trained already without realizing it. "I missed you." I needed to stroke him. "I can tell that you missed me too."

"Yeah, it's been three days since I've seen you," he responded, not showing any hostility.

It was now safe to tell him that I had to go. "I can't miss school, Fred." The love of my life had managed to turn my brief academic success completely around. I was failing and I was on the verge of being expelled because Fred had taken me from school a lot

during the grading period. I decided to keep explaining. “I have a test today, and it’s very important that I do well.”

“What time?” He didn’t believe me.

“Third period,” I responded quickly.

Before I could get out of the car he said, “Don’t worry, I’ll have you back in time.” Fred pulled from the parking space, and we were on the road headed for goodness only knows where.

As I sat there I thought about how Fred had often encouraged me to skip school. He was not pushing me to do my schoolwork, either. He seemed to be happiest if I didn’t mention school or think about anything other than being with him. However, I needed to make sure he wasn’t angry because I told him I needed to take that test. “What do you want to do?” I said, partly to reassure him and also to figure out where he might be taking me.

“I have to go home. To my house and take care of some business,” he said. We were headed back to Creedmoor and his mother's house. The place where he had just hurt me so bad, and I couldn't do anything to stop it.

Things started to spin out of control at home while I had been seeing Fred. The initial calm immediately after I met Fred had gone and life had reverted back to the way it had been. In hindsight, it was actually much worse because my behavior was completely out of whack. For as much as I felt like my family was mistreating me, I was only adding fuel to the fire by skipping school and letting Fred stay in my life. I missed school more than I should.

On that trip to his house, Fred did not ravage me. This was about trying to convince me to forgive him. He had to work on me to get me to consider leaving my family. I had to be willing to buy into his promises that he would make things better. He treated me better than he ever had. I was now full invested in his plan to separate me from family.

Several weeks passed and one Friday, as I arrived home from school, I made the decision that I was going to leave and never return again. The only place for me to go would be Fred's house. I wanted to be with him forever. I called him up and told him to come get me. I slipped out of the house and was gone just like that.

I do not remember much about the ride to Fred's house. I was just glad to be away from home. I do remember Fred telling me that his mother was in the hospital, and we would have the house all to ourselves. I had met his mother before. She was a sickly woman and had no control over Fred, who ran the house the way he saw fit. I remember overhearing her ask Fred how old was I. She told him that he was wrong for bringing a "baby" in her house and doing what he was doing to me. He obviously did not give a thought to what his mother thought. Everything was about him and he was not going to listen to anything she had to say about me.

When we got there, he told me that I could help him run his business. I would stay there while he ran the street operation. You can guess what kind of business he was running. How could I be so oblivious to the fact that what was going on was completely illegal? It didn't matter because I was going to be able to have nice things that the money Fred made could buy.

I did not like the idea of being in the house alone with strange men because there was a steady stream of customers that came by. I started to meet his friends, but I knew

he had not stopped being jealous so I kept my distance from anyone who came by. Although I had settled into my new home, three weeks after I had been there things were about to come crashing down again.

Fred received a phone call and shortly afterwards three of his acquaintances arrived. When he met Sam, Lamont, and Terry at the front door a brief argument ensued. They wanted to come in the house but Fred suggested they stay outside.

I could hear Sam over everyone else. “Fred don’t want us to come in because he doesn’t want us to see the little bitch he got up in there!”

Lamont chimed in, “I ain’t stud’n that girl!”

Fred eventually let the three of them in and they came into the living room where I was already seated. I was on a large sectional couch and the three positioned themselves there as well. Fred made a little small talk and then left the room to head upstairs to retrieve something. While Fred was gone, the three talked among themselves about me. I just sat there not wanting to cause any trouble.

When Fred returned, Lamont pulled out a plastic bag with what appeared to be cigars. I had been around long enough to know what kind of business Fred ran—these were not the ordinary cigars. Lamont called them baseball bats and they were the biggest he had ever seen. We all started smoking the extra large joints while we watched music videos on television. I had gone on one step further away from the values I had been taught at home. To be sitting in a room full of people who had no regard for the law and participated in the sale of illegal drugs would have horrified my mother.

We all sat there for some time doing absolutely nothing useful and yet nothing seemed unusual. Then all of a sudden Fred asked me to come upstairs with him. We left

the three guests downstairs as I followed closely behind him. Fred made a path to his bedroom. In a flash he grabbed me around the neck and pulled me close to him. He told me he wanted to have sex right then, but I protested. There were people in the house, and I didn't think it was right. Fred pushed me forcefully on to the bed and slapped me hard across the face. My first instinct was to scream and I did.

I continued to wrestle with Fred and cry out loud. The sounds of our struggle caused Sam to bolt up the stairs to find out what was going on. Fred hit me again as Sam entered the room.

Sam tried to intervene on my behalf, "Fred, why you hitting that girl?"

Fred laughed, "Mind your own business and go back downstairs."

Sam complied immediately. Fred got off me and went to close the door. "Just wait until they leave," Fred said menacingly. "When I go up in you, you will know it. Cause I'm going to try and go all the way up in your guts."

He calmly opened the door and strode back down stairs as if nothing happened. I followed him not knowing what else to do.

"Man, that's fucked up," Sam offered as we reentered the living room. "Why did you have to hit that girl?"

Fred denied hitting me to Lamont and Terry. The tension in the room continued to mount as Terry teased Fred. He then suggested that he had some drugs that Fred wanted, but he wouldn't give them up. Fred was fed up with our company and told them to leave. Sam seemed the most upset about being asked to leave. As the three left, one of them suggested that if they came back it might be with pistols since Fred was going to be an inhospitable host.

As soon as the front door was closed, Fred turned to me. The look in his eyes made it clear that he was angry with me. “Are you ready for your beating?”

I dutifully marched up the steps and stripped down completely nude. Fred barely gave me time to finish taking my clothes off before he set upon me. He pushed me down on the bed. This time he didn't slap me. He grabbed both of my legs behind the knees and hoisted them high into the air. The insides of my knees rested on his shoulders giving him the maximum leverage to punish me again. I braced my non-lubricated self. Fred never hesitated. Every thrust was deep and vicious. He had promised that it would get better each time he “made love to me” but this hurt worse than the first time. He pounded harder and harder, the more he sensed I was hurting.

When Fred ejaculated, he was finished. He never once tried to pleasure me in the way he explained in that first phone conversation. When he got up, I could see blood everywhere. The sheets were covered as well as my inner thighs. Had I waited for God to give me this?

Fred tried to comfort me using only the logic he could use. He said that this was what happened to everyone who was with him. They all bled because his penis was so big. What happened to me was normal, and I needed to get used to it.

I wish I had known then that his story was just his twisted way of controlling me. I was giving him everything I had of me. I showed Fred nothing but love, but the only thing I got in return was a terrible pounding whenever he felt like it. He kept telling me he loved me and that he cared. For the time being I would have to let this pass. I could not just pick up the phone and call home.

Terry, Lamont, and Sam returned later on in the evening. I suppose they had patched up whatever differences they had with Fred. I was sitting on the couch again when they came in. There was no confrontation at the door like before. They sat either side of me and tried to strike up a conversation. I didn't say anything. I was still terrified for the punishment I had received. Apparently, I deserved what I had gotten because I had sent signals that I might be interested in any or all of the guests.

Lamont seemed to be the provocateur this time. He sat near me and looked me over from head-to-toe in a provocative manner. He meant to cause some trouble. Talking to Fred, he said, "Oh, my fault, I forgot this is your girl."

Terry moved his hand to the spot on the couch behind me, and I arched my back to avoid his touch. Lamont watched him closely and they both chuckled as I tried not to call any attention to what they were doing.

"What are they laughing about," asked Fred?

I dared not say anything. I was sure he would blame me for being flirtatious instead of them for being too forward. They began to talk about their past and their many sexual exploits. I kept silent. Out of the blue, Fred told them I was cheating on him. I didn't confirm or deny his allegations because it would only provoke a confrontation. Even so, there was no way that could be true. I was trapped in Fred's mother's house in Creedmoor. It was just Fred's sick delusion and obsessive jealous streak that made him fear me being with someone else. I was too brainwashed to know how to take the first steps to get out of the situation.

The three expressed their disbelief that I was doing anything behind Fred's back. They talked about me openly as if I wasn't there. They commented on my body without regard to how it would make me feel. I felt like a piece of meat.

"Would you turn her down if you had a chance?" Fred asked.

"Hell, yeah," Sam said. I suppose he was thinking about how jealous Fred acted over me.

Just then one of my favorite songs was playing in the background. Fred got the idea that I should dance to the song and entertain our guests. I had been so thoroughly indoctrinated with Fred's sick view of the world that I didn't mind dancing. I liked it and since being with Fred, I had danced for his friends before. They would throw money at me while I performed, and it gave me my own money to put away. It didn't occur to me that it was exploitative for a 14-year-old girl to be dancing for grown men, but they wanted to see me perform.

As I gyrated to the music, they all seemed to be getting excited. Fred joined in the conversation. Our three guests wondered aloud what it was like to have sex with me. I heard every word of their conversation but never thought they meant it. Fred would never let another man touch me. He had told me often that I was not to even think about being with another man, or it would cost me dearly.

When the music finished, Fred suggested that I go up to the bedroom with him. I declined. I was still sore from earlier in the day, and I didn't want to go through that again. Not a wise decision on my part. Fred slapped me again but this time he did not care if anyone saw what he did. He demanded that I go up to the bedroom. I dutifully consented.

When we got up to the bedroom, Fred just yelled at me, telling me not to embarrass him in front of his friends ever again. He sat me down on the bed and told me not to move. Suddenly he left without a word.

To my surprise, Terry entered the room, sat down beside me, and began to touch me as if we were alone. I thought Terry must have gone completely crazy. He must have known that he was putting my life and his life in danger. If Fred found out I would get the worst beating of my life. I couldn't scream to call attention to what was happening so I just sat there.

In no time Terry managed to pull up my shirt. I didn't resist. Now he was kissing and sucking my breast. His hand reached beneath my skirt and moved towards my vagina. I was terrified. I tried to whisper as quietly as I could to warn Terry to stop, but he kept going.

"Be quiet or Fred might find out," Terry told me.

Lamont entered the room as Terry continued to fondle me. He spoke loudly as if to draw attention, "Terry, what are you doing?"

Terry didn't answer. He kept touching me all over and sucking my breast. Lamont joined him on the bed sitting on the opposite side. Lamont reached under my skirt and pulled my panties off.

They both laid me back on the bed and I was still too frightened to protest. Terry removed his pants and started to penetrate me. Fred walked in the room. Lamont and Terry stopped for a moment as Fred walked towards us. Fred was smiling and laughing.

Terry moved out of the way as Fred came closer. Fred drew back and hit me hard against my face. It wasn't a slap this time. He punched me and sent me reeling.

“That’s a little freak you got, Fred,” Lamont said. “She likes it rough.”

Fred slapped me in the face several more times. He told me to be quiet because I brought this on myself. He said that when they were talking about having sex with me earlier, I didn’t object. That meant I wanted them to all take turns with me. I did not say anything earlier because I did not want to make Fred angry. Now he was angry because I did not speak up for myself. I was confused and thought that there was no way to win with Fred. Was he letting them have their way with me just because they said they wanted to? What about his being so jealous of every man that even looked at me?

Fred removed his clothes and the three of them were naked and eager to abuse me. Each one of them took their turns on top of me. All pounding at my already damaged vagina. I couldn’t feel anything anymore. I just lay there and cried. I wasn’t able to scream. It would not have ended the torture. Each time it appeared to end, the rape continued for almost eight hours.

When they were finally finished, my hairline was soaked from my tears. I couldn’t move and I felt numb from the waist down.

“Did you think you were going to have sex with my friends and get away with it?” Fred slapped me again. “You’re a nasty slut!”

I could only turn my face away. I was not going to be able to stop Fred from doing whatever he wanted to.

Lamont tried to reason with Fred, “How can you hit her? She’s just a little girl.”

“It’s easy,” Fred said. “You do it like this.” Another heavy blow landed.

I touched my face, and it felt like a water balloon about to burst. My eyes were swollen and puffy and my ears felt as if they were stuffed with cotton. Every word they

said was muffled. I tried to get up. I wanted to get away in case Fred wanted to hit me again. I was disoriented and rolled out of the bed onto the floor. I couldn't escape because I could not even get to my feet.

"Get up!" Fred demanded. He must have known that I was already in terrible pain from what happened. I was faced down and totally at his mercy. Fred began to kick me with heavy blows to the side. "Get up!"

I could only moan and try to tell Fred that he was killing me. Clearly I thought I was going to die there. He continued to laugh at me as I begged for mercy.

"I'm not going to sit here and watch you kill her," Lamont said. "It looks like she's dying."

Fred laughed even harder. "She'll be alright." Then he addressed me, "Cris, are you alright?" Fred got close to my face as if to check to see if I was still breathing. I could feel his breath as he watched me closely. "Don't scare me like that." He seemed to be worried that I was not responding. "We will be together forever."

I was fading out and could not stop the sensation of passing into unconsciousness. I could see everything I had done since meeting Fred pass before my eyes. Coming to be with him had been a terrible mistake.

I don't know when the three scumbags left the room. I only remember sitting in the corner with my head down and my arms covering my head. I was crying and saying, "leave me alone" again and again. I opened my eyes and realized I was already alone. The room was dark with only a tiny lamp shining on the far side. I rocked back and forth to comfort myself but rocking only made me hurt worse. Every inch of my body ached

and with each movement, I could recall each thrust. I could not clear the thoughts out of my mind.

The way Fred had sex with me was pure anger that he was expressing as a result of some mental illness he had. No matter what he tried to tell me, I knew then that Fred was using me for his own sick pleasure and amusement. He was a pedophile and sadist who preyed on me, and likely on other young girls before and after my time with him. I knew the difference now between sex and making love, even if I couldn't do a thing about it.

When Fred finally came into the bedroom, I looked up at him and his expression had completely changed. His facial expressions and demeanor were foreign to the monster I had witnessed only a few hours before. My heart pounded and I could feel a single tear roll down one side of my face.

“Why are you still on the floor?” Was he serious? Did he not remember what he had just done to me? Calmly, he said, “Do you want to get up?”

I shook my head yes and Fred reached down to lift me up and place me on the bed. He left and returned with several ice packs. I jerked as he placed one on my face. The cold stung and offered more pain at first than immediate relief. He also brought me something to drink, orange juice as I recall. I sipped juice slowly. It made me throw up.

I finally stopped thinking about the attack and my mind wandered to my parents. Did they care about where I was? Were they looking for me? For the first time since I left, I wanted to be at home.

I eventually drifted off to sleep, but it was a fitful and restless sleep. Each time I awoke, I could feel my entire body aching. My head, between my legs, my stomach, and every inch of me was bruised from the assaults.

I'm not exactly sure how long I rested but decided that I needed to get out of the bed and take a shower. The smell of the rape was still on me, and I needed to wash it away. Each time I tried to stand, I would fall back on the bed. It was difficult to get my balance at first. I kept trying until I could stand. The walk to the bathroom was an ordeal, but the shower was a great relief.

Now it was time to make my way down the stairs as I was starving. When I reached the kitchen, Fred sat at the table smoking a cigar as if he didn't have a care in the world. I didn't look at him, but walked right past him without a word. I was so angry and wanted to lash out, but I came to get something to eat.

"Cris, I'm really sorry about last night. You know, we were all high, and we want you to know that we didn't mean any of it." He paused, "Cris, are you mad? I won't let you hang with us anymore. I'm afraid you might get hurt."

I thought to myself, "get hurt?" This was no accident. What did he mean? Was he trying to minimize what they had done to me?

He was trying to make this my fault like every other time he had abused me. He made it seem that he could only control himself if I would just "do better." But how was I supposed to prevent him from being provoked? He was in a constant state of provocation.

I have never stopped feeling ashamed of what happened to me. I started to pretend I was a tough girl and could take anything. Deep down, I have been too ashamed to

admit the lasting impact of my time with Fred. I pushed those feelings back to the far reaches of my brain. My soul would grow dark and my heart hard at times in my attempt to deal with what happened to me. I put on a front with people for so long and never mentioned the rape. Consequently, in my effort to hide my trauma from everyone, I never allowed myself to grieve. I have found it hard to grieve about anything.

I did not bolt from the room or call for someone to come and get me immediately because I was still in love with Fred. It's so difficult to get away from someone while you are being abused. I'm sure people don't understand the dynamic. I don't fully understand it myself. You are crushed mentally as well as physically. I do think you can put things aside and move on. That is what I tried to do, forget the incident, but it is always there. Subconsciously, the gang rape continues to have a lasting effect on me. It was especially troubling back then when I had no experience in the world. It made me think that every man was like that. Worse, it made me feel like I was dirty and nasty. Not just the next day but everyday afterwards and for years. I couldn't get the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings out of my head. It permeates your entire life and determines how you interact with people and the choices you ultimately end up making.

I was a difficult person to deal with and, frankly, it was hard for me to live with myself. I internalized the blame for what had happened to me. Fred was excellent at manipulation like most abusers. Carrying the burden of the shame for being involved in this kind of trauma left me in a perpetual state of depression for years.

Fred took me back home but there was no way to be normal again. Having been introduced to a very hard and fast life and suffering from major depression set me on a course for my first encounter with the mental health system.

Still not able to tell anyone about what happened, I hit rock bottom in the second week of December 1993. My depression was debilitating and I didn't eat. I could only manage to lie in bed and cry day and night. My mother grew particularly concerned with my behavior. Perhaps she knew something had been done to me because of what had happened to her as a child.

I remember the moment when my mother made a decision to take me to Duke University Medical Center's Emergency Department. It was and still is a very sad day in my memory. The doctors at Duke diagnosed me with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). They also felt the best course of treatment would be to have me institutionalized. I was placed in back of a police car for the first time and transported to John Umstead Psychiatric Hospital as if I was a criminal. I was the one who had suffered so much, but now I was being taken away.

I would be in the hospital for two months of intensive therapy and medication. I was talking to a steady stream of people all day, everyday. It did make me feel better. I felt less overwhelmed. I was instructed to end communications with Fred. Even so, I was constantly tempted to reach out to him. I had access to a phone, and I wanted to take care of the unfinished business I had with Fred. I was beginning to understand how much damage he had caused and wanted to confront him about it.

As soon as I had a chance, I called Fred and he seemed happy to hear from me. I knew my family did not want me to have anything to do with him, but I went back to seeing him clandestinely as soon as I got out of the hospital. The good feelings I was having were only short-lived as he became violent and abusive again.

Getting out the relationship with Fred this time wasn't just a matter of walking away. When I told Fred I could not continue on with him he told me that he would rather see me dead than be with another man. Coming from Fred, that was a serious concern. He had shown his capacity to be evil, and I believed he was capable of killing me. I regret that I ever met Fred.

For Press Review Only

New Beginning

With the writing of this book, my healing process begins. Whether I can go on with my life will not be important to most people, but it is to me because I plan to go on, be productive, and offer better chances for my children. I believe I have to find healing for myself. I also want to provide healing for those who feel they have been hurt. I know there are many people who are suffering from some kind of trauma and my story may provide a point of common ground where they can start their process of reconciliation. I can only talk about my life. The good, the bad, and the ugly parts have been what I have lived and they have brought me to this place in time. I know how each moment of the life I have lived has had an impact on who and what I am today.

Others have tried to tell my story for me, but they do not have that right. Only I have that right and, due to the circumstances, I believe I have that responsibility to try to set the record straight about a lot of things. I have had to endure almost two years of constant negative talk about my life by people who were only trying to hurt and discredit

me. It is as though my life was destined to be intertwined with Durham, NCCU, and Duke University. My family and I had been patients at the world-renowned Duke University Medical Center several times throughout our lives and so there will always be a connection to Duke. My sister graduated from NCCU, and proudly I have too. I graduated with honors and earned every point of my GPA.

Everyone knows that Duke is a place to get a great education. As much as people know about Duke they know little or nothing about my alma mater. North Carolina Central University is the home of the Eagles and was founded in 1909. It accepted its first students in 1910. Back then it was known as The National Religious Training School and Chautauqua. By 1923 the school started receiving support from the state and became the Durham State Normal School. One of the great ironies—Benjamin Newton Duke was one of the school's early benefactors. He is the same person who would grant money to Trinity College, which would later rename itself Duke University in his family's honor.

Duke and NCCU share a past in playing some of the first interracial college basketball games in the South, even though it was under the cover of darkness and in secret. That occurred when NCCU was the much better team. The Eagles produced some of the greatest athletes in all sports in this country.

The law school at NCCU, while not as renowned as its cross-town cousin, is consistently ranked as one of the best small law schools in the United States and is recognized as a great place for women to attend. It has also produced a governor of North Carolina, Mike Easley, and many of the state's top lawmakers and politicians.

Overall NCCU has been a great institution and produced many outstanding graduates. I felt I had to say something about that because my school has been the subject of bad press because of what people think about me.

I know the people at NCCU tried to show the better side of the university when they had a chance, but they never should have been put in a position to have to do that in the first place. The story became about everything it was not supposed to be. The students at NCCU who came out in support of me were not asking for anything other than to let the system work the case out. Instead they had to endure some of the same treatment that I got. I am sorry the people who had nothing to do with the case were dragged into the middle of it.

Has anyone stopped to think that I did not start the media frenzy? Why would I challenge the reputation, money, and resources that Duke University possesses? Would anyone make up this incident in some misguided and elaborate plan to sue Duke, as some have postulated in the blogs and on some irresponsible media outlets?

I wondered why the media did not add a qualifier to the description of the people who hosted the party. Why not say they were drunken, out-of-control party boys? There was a criminal case going on and the court is the place where things should be decided, not on Hannity and Colmes.

Additionally, I believe in the rape shield laws. It would not have made any sense for me to go public because I believed that it put too much strain on a person who is already traumatized. It was hard enough to go through this in private and alone. Just imagine if I had made appearances on television trying to explain my side of the story. I would have been eaten alive and suffered even harsher ridicule. I was engaged in activities and

living in a lifestyle that few people would approve or would understand. It is true that the people you hang around with will influence what others think about you. I was hanging around people who did not mean me well. Despite those true things, I wanted everyone to know the real me. No news outlet on their own was going to look for the real me.

Now that there has been almost two years since the case began, I can read with a new perspective some of the characterizations of me. My first reaction is always to be angry. The things that were said about my background, my school, and my city were hurtful. What I have found there is hardly a flattering description of any aspects of my life.

So without any reservations or hesitation, I define myself as a mother, student, and daughter before all else. I know others have descriptions of me that are not anything I would use to describe myself.

As I think about some of the people who made it a point to hurt me, one of the greatest disappointments is to know that there were people in my own community undermining me and creating the worst rumors. One was a prominent Durham attorney and sports agent who said about me, "C'mon, kids. She wasn't this little poor North Carolina Central student working the fields. She was a whore."

I was not disappointed because he is a big-time lawyer and respected in the community. It did not matter that he was black or from Durham. I was disappointed because he asks people to give his clients the benefit of the doubt all the time. He wants to set aside the records of the criminal defendants he represents so that they get a fair

trial. This is the same attorney who was on the defense team helping to represent Michael Vick and served on the team of attorneys for some of the Duke Lacrosse players.

This attorney turned out to be representing one of the men who produced a videotape allegedly showing me dancing days after the party. The only problem is the tape was from months before the events of March 13, 2006. CBS and other media outlets played the tape over and over. It found a home on the Internet. People argue to this day that the tape somehow proves that I am a liar. Even though people now know better, they have never wanted to go back and correct that kind of attack on me.

So I was supposed to remain silent forever and let everyone else have the last word about me? I freely admit that the jobs I was paid to do are not what I want my daughters to grow up and do. I cannot recommend exotic dancing to be anyone's first choice for a profession. Because of a serious mistake that I made in the past, my job options were limited and I worked in an industry that does not help a person build a stellar reputation.

There were and still are many Web sites and blogs that purport to know every detail about my life, spelling it out authoritatively with charts, graphs, and timelines, but have no compulsion to check the facts. Those people have anointed themselves the repository of official information about me. I talked to only one media outlet about my life and that was very early on in the case. It was an act that I regret very much doing. I did not realize at the time that it was probably best not to say anything at all. Samiha Khana of *The N&O* said she wanted to help me, and that telling my story to her and her colleagues would help bring the people who hurt me to justice. The information I provided to *The*

N&O was only a sketch of my life. I never could have really detailed all the aspects of my life when I gave them limited access through my screen door.

It was not until I began writing down my thoughts that I even thought about some of the things that have happened in my life. It would be much later before I would sit down for extended recorded interviews. After my experience with *The N&O*, I refused to talk to anyone because I could never trust any of the people who said they wanted to help me.

The only time I purposely tried to get my side of the story out to the public was well after the attorney general's report. I allowed CNN to come interview me and spend time with my family in January 2008. I let them follow me to class, come to my church, and even videotape my children. We even sat down for a four-hour interview in a hotel suite near the Raleigh-Durham Airport. There I allowed Soledad O'Brien to ask me whatever questions she wanted. I had nothing to hide and believed if people finally saw and heard me, I could finish the process of making this part of my life truly a part of my past.

Throughout the entire process of working with CNN, I felt they were disappointed that I was not a drug addict and on welfare. They had the opportunity to see me and the people around me, but they would never talk to anyone I mentioned to them or put anyone I suggested in front of the camera. It was as though they did not want to hear from anyone else—my pastor, my professors, my advisors, and experts on North Carolina law that I knew were not important to CNN. I was honest and candid in the interview, but apparently it was not good enough.

After allowing them into personal life and my home, someone at CNN decided this reporting was not something they wanted the public to see. I had even let them read an

early manuscript of this book, but they have refused to share with me any of the video footage they shot of me and my family. I was used again. Now, when I call CNN, no one will take my call. They have nothing to say about what they saw. When I asked why the footage was not going to be shown, I received no answer.

In a world where there is wall-to-wall coverage of the Peterson case or of Natalie Holloway, surely there was a place to show my interview. Even if they did not believe a word I said, they were not protecting me by not showing it. I believe they were protecting other people. If I am not crazy and on drugs, then many of the things other people have said about me are open to liable and slander suits. I'm not the least bit concerned about any of the footage being shown. I presented my life as an open book.

The entire process of working with CNN was not negative. The cameramen, producers, and Soledad O'Brien were all nice to me. Everyone was professional and they went about their work in a serious manner. What I have concerns about is what was the real motivation for spending all that time and money to interview me if it was never going to be aired.

My suspicion is that people who have an interest in the civil cases feel that any portrait of me that is *not* negative will have a harmful effect on their suits in reference to Duke University and the city of Durham. Not airing the program was one more poke in the eye for me. Another attempt to work in good faith with someone and then to be let down again.

Another aspect of the telling of my story by the media and the bloggers that bothers me is their portrayal of the city of Durham. The stories made it seem as though there was so much racial tension as a result of the case that the city was under siege. Durham

is like any other city in America with a significant black population. There are always factions within a city who attempt to care for their own interests. Groups in Durham such as the Committee on the Affairs of Black People have existed since black people were not able to muster enough political or economic power to improve their condition because of overt racism. North Carolina has had to deal with the legacy of segregation and Jim Crow.

Durham has had to transform itself after the death of the tobacco industry that once flourished in the town. The Lucky Strike Tower is the centerpiece of the new downtown revitalization. It was with tobacco money that the city of Durham came into being. It was also cheap black labor that made the industry profitable. The construction of the Durham Freeway did substantial damage to the solidarity and prosperity of the black community.

Durham gets singled out as a community with high crime and bad place to live—these are the Durham working-class people that I come from.

I have experienced the kind of life I do not want for my children or anyone else. I do not want to be remembered as a troubled girl, who ends up being a troubled woman, who ends up saddling her troubled life on the backs of her children and grandchildren. Being the matriarch of a dysfunctional family is a terrible legacy that many women of all races have to live with.

While my story has components of race in it, there are multiple narratives dealing with more than race. However, I am not afraid to acknowledge that the motivation on the part of some who participated in discrediting me was racist.

Perhaps the telling of my story will give us an opportunity to discuss racism calmly.

There are also clearly issues of sexism that exist in my story. Many have criticized my choice to be a dancer but find it hard to condemn men who use women for entertainment. This is despite the fact that men conceived of and hosted the kind of party that had all the elements of bad taste, alcohol abuse, racial animosity, and a sexually charged environment that could lead to nothing but trouble.

Being in the public eye and under so much scrutiny has been difficult. Even as I try to move on with my life, I still find it necessary to take one more stand and fight. I want to assert, without equivocation, that I was assaulted. Make of that what you will. You will decide what that means to you because the state of North Carolina saw fit not to look at all that happened the night I became infamous.

When I spoke, I was accused of changing my story repeatedly. I emphasize now that the story has never changed. The fact is I did not make it to court to state my case because the focus became one of discrediting me and exposing my personal life instead of finding the truth. So I am left to defend myself. I am not looking forward to opening old wounds. I have never in my life intended to hurt anyone; it is the same with me telling you about my life and what happened at 610 North Buchanan.

You already know a lot about me. More than I ever wanted people to know. On account of this incident I have shared with you some things from my past that are very difficult to talk about but necessary. I am not trying to please everyone, but perhaps I can finally please myself.

For all the women who have been beaten by their partners and labeled battered women, for those like me who will forever be despised and dismissed as just someone who made up things, I am writing this book. I am also writing for those women who

have been labeled accusers like me, women who may have not been able to move forward with their lives because of the double violation that they had to suffer—once at the hands of their attacker and then at the hands of the institutions that have the power to ruin lives and enrich others at the stroke of a pen.

So, when I walked across the stage at graduation to receive my degree at NCCU, I knew I was finally putting what had happened behind me. The whole reason why I was at that party in the first place was to pay my tuition. Here I was graduating with honors, and I did not need to dance to accomplish my goal. That is the lesson I learned. There are no short cuts.

On account of what has happened to me, I feel more inspired. I am working as hard as I ever have to help my children grow up to be better people and contribute positively to society. I will show others that there is a way out of misery and an easier path to take to a happier life. If you stumble, it does not mean you will fall. My dreams, my heartache, and my desire to carry on have become the basis for my strength.