



JENNIFER WAGENMAKER

BECOMING

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Becoming: All That God Created Me To Be
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Introduction

We each have a story.

Story is a loaded word, both simple and also complex. It is beautiful, yet often hides a painful past. But all of humanity has this in common—we all have one. As simple and enchanting as that sounds, a great variable lies within each of us that holds the potential for great things. It is a crucial variable, that choice of whether or not we choose to share this story.

Though everyone has a story, they often look entirely different from one another. If you were to look back on your life, you would surely find some form of pain. Our past experiences shape us, and no matter how we choose to deal with them, they will continue to be part of our future.

I did not understand the healing that could take place in my heart until I was willing to share my story. But I had to choose to relive some of the pain and also begin to deal with it. I have been inspired to embrace my past, which will, in turn, help shape my future.

My prayer is that as you read this book you will be inspired to take comfort in your own past pain, knowing that it will help you to discover its purpose in your story as well as the role it plays in your future. It is my hope that you will

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recognize how close your Creator is to you as you embrace your journey. My past was painful to live through, but it did not happen without giving me a new purpose. Through it all, I firmly believe that God is in control of all things. I serve a God who makes beauty from ashes and beautiful things out of broken pieces. Through this journey, God began opening my eyes to a calling that I never imagined. It was only because of His grace that I was able to look back and remember things that I had previously blocked out. I urge you to hold fast in the knowledge that God is faithful and He has never left your side.

My journey is not over. I look back on everything that I went through and I wonder how I ever made it here. With each new day I have a better understanding of the strength that God has granted me to stay the course no matter the circumstances. He is always with me.

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Looking Back

For you created my inmost being; you knit me
together in my mother's womb.

(Psalms 139:13)

*Dear Diary—today was a really good day. My
boyfriend bought me a carnation and he came
over after church for the afternoon.*

—journal entry, April 11, 1993

I want to encourage you to take a few minutes in the near future to bring yourself back to your deepest hurt. Can you remember the first time that you experienced something painful?

When I was twenty-nine years old, I went through one of the most difficult years of my life. I was navigating my way through a divorce that felt like the end of everything God had intended for me. I believe that God wants what is very best for us, and I also believe that Satan, God's enemy and our enemy, is doing everything possible to prevent that from happening. I know that the enemy has tried to convince me to tuck away the great pain that my heart endured during different seasons for many years. Through some unexpected, but miraculous recent obstacles, God has

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helped me to reopen those dark places in my life and He continues to lead me to the truth so that I can help others who may be struggling with the same kind of hurt. I have begun to feel a true healing take place where before I was so weak and vulnerable. By revisiting my past and facing it head-on, I have begun to understand who I am and more of the purpose for which I was created.

Over the course of writing this book, I struggled many times with what to share in regard to these painful chapters in my life. I have no desire to bring any hurt to my children or to anyone else. I recognize that this is just my story and that we all have one we can tell. In telling my story I have no intention of dragging anyone else down, but I believe that sweeping things under the rug has controlled my life for long enough. I choose to live free from that. Thankfully this is a choice that I can control.



I was born on July 7th, 1977 at 4:44 p.m. 7/7/77 at 4:44.

When I take the time to reflect on my childhood, I am uncertain if all my memories are accurate or not. I have tried to think back to my earliest recollection of pain. I cannot remember anything occurring that was very traumatic, at least not serious enough to tamper with my emotions, until I became a teenager. I know that our family lost a dog when I was around five or six and that her name was Babes; she was hit by a car. I have a vague memory of that night being dark, lonely, and sad for me while I sat and watched TV in the basement of our small A-frame home. I

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do not really remember having a deep connection with our dog because we had not had her for very long.

I remember praying and asking Jesus to come into my heart when I was around five years old. I remember being at the church with my dad one day and I remember him talking with me about the questions that I had regarding Jesus. I was baptized the next Sunday.

My parents bought a video camera when I was around eleven and I now wonder if re-watching our home videos has altered my childhood memories. I wonder if the funny young girl in front of the camera was acting or not. I think the tapes caught my true personality. It seems as though I was not afraid of the camera and that I quickly learned how to get a laugh from those in the room and from the one behind the lens.

I was the second child in our family of six. My dad was a fiery Baptist pastor filled with passion, and my mother was a sweet soft-spoken woman of God with amazing faith. Together they had a strong desire to raise a family who loved each other and the Lord, and they wanted the world to see that family.

I had a brother almost two years older than me, and then a younger sister two years after me. We also had two younger brothers, one of whom died from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome when I was three and a half.

The fact that we were homeschooled for a few years and that I wasn't able to wear pants does stand out in my mind. Because we were homeschooled, our family was in-

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credibly close. My siblings and I learned to defend and love one another, and we built strong relationships during our elementary years. We were able to take family field trips together and many of my favorite memories come from this time.

My 6th grade year, my parents decided to send us to a Christian school. Some of the families that attended this school also held the same standards my family did, so I was able to make the adjustment well. I know that having my siblings there with me helped in the process of fitting in. But by the end of that school year we learned that the school was not offering a high school for the following year, which meant we had to find another school. My parents decided to transfer us to another Christian school, which was also a Baptist school, so again the transition seemed pretty normal for me. Not only did I have my siblings with me, but also half of my previous school made the switch. As I prepared to start my 7th grade year, I know that my interest in boys became stronger.

At our new school there was a dress code that followed the same standards my family embraced, so I felt “the same” as the girls that I went to school with. I didn’t stand out for any particular reason.

Everything changed in 8th grade. The school adopted a new policy that allowed girls to wear pants to school. I remember feeling different and wanting to be the same as everyone else. This is when I began to understand hurt. No one ever said anything to me about my not wearing pants,

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but I was sure they noticed, and so I began to revert and hide my feelings. I knew that my parents loved me and that they wanted the very best for me so I continued to strive to understand their reasoning for this conviction. It was just something that was not talked about in our home. It was my father's rule, so I knew that I needed to respect and submit to him as my authority. I wanted to have the right heart about this matter.

Not being able to wear pants was not the only rule in our lives. The school that I attended also embraced many of the same dos and don'ts that my parents followed and so the checklist of measuring-up began very early. A short list of the rules we lived by: no movies, no dancing, no drinking, no smoking, no sex, no rock music, no dating an unbeliever, and no swearing. Everything seemed black and white. There was no gray area. My parents probably had good Biblical reasons for each of these rules, but I don't remember the explanations for why we weren't allowed to do these things; I just know that the feeling of defeat swept in before I even had a chance to try. I had a desire to try all of them and that made me feel like I must be really bad.

When I entered my teenage years, I wanted to find love more than anything. Although I was receiving it at home, I also saw other teenagers holding hands. I think I had a different crush every week. My first few diaries would confirm that.

Even though I had begun to desire for a relationship, I know that by thirteen I still had not learned what "sex"

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meant. I was a very shy girl when it came to anything that seemed uncomfortable to talk about, so a conversation about something like this probably would have made me run away. Eventually, a friend of mine told me about sex one night when she stayed over.

During the next few years, I had little crushes on neighborhood boys and coworkers. I wrote down a new last name for myself on a piece of paper with my love of the week. I tallied up the “True Love” scores, which one of my friends had taught me how to do whenever I started liking someone new. I mean, if anyone understood love it was me. At least that’s what I believed in my head.

When I was fifteen, I fell head over heels for a young boy that I had met in my youth group. My dad thought that maybe some one-on-one time with me would help me understand that there would be a future outside of my current crush. My dad and I went away together for the weekend, and we had some good conversations while we were gone. We drove a few hours away to walk around the campus of a nearby Christian college and to visit some family on that side of the state. My parents had met on a similar campus many years before.

We were only gone for a few nights but I do remember wanting to make the right choices after that. I knew the life that I wanted to have one day required making the right decisions along the way. It was a wonderful trip and shortly after we returned home, my dad gave me a beautiful purity necklace. I wore it around my neck with pride.

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Shortly after this visit, my father reconsidered his dress code and let me know that I could now wear pants if I wanted to. I had been begging for this change, and he saw my hurt and responded to it during a conversation with me in our family's living room. With tears in his eyes, my father told me that I was more important to him than any rule. I saw his heart that night and it helped me understand that this conviction of his was deeper than I knew and rooted in love. The problem is that I was already set on a course of rebelling against a list that I couldn't measure up against. Although I was now allowed to wear pants, I also wanted to try all the other things that were forbidden.

I had just started working for a restaurant in town where I had met people that did all the things that I had been raised to believe were wrong. They swore, drank, smoked, had sex, danced, went to movies, and listened to rock music. But they were also nice and fun and accepting of me too. They had no lists to follow and I liked it.

My church boyfriend and I broke up after dating for a year. We had grown more promiscuous, and I felt tainted. I wanted to do the right thing. I really did. I ended up dating another boy for a short period of time, only to have it end with another broken heart.

During the end of my junior year of high school, my manager at the restaurant would often hit on me in a way that made me feel uncomfortable. He was much older than me and married, and I remember feeling very confused about my feelings toward him. I knew that I shouldn't like

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him, but I was also flattered by his attraction toward me because I was so much younger than he was. His flirtatious behavior really altered my understanding of reality. This twisted relationship played with my mind and carried on for months.

In the first few weeks of my senior year, a high-school friend and I went to visit another friend at her college in Ohio. During that visit, I met a young man from Chicago. He had a desire to serve the Lord and he was interested in me. I told my parents about him. At first, they were resistant because of his age but after he came to our home for a visit, they did allow us to begin dating. He commuted back and forth to visit me and I did the same. I told him about the predator from my work, although I didn't use that word then. He seemed surprised, and he encouraged me to stand up for myself. I remember quickly ending the secret relationship that had formed with my manager once I started dating my new boyfriend. I felt a new sense of power following that conversation, and I never really spoke of this situation again for years to come.

My family grew to like my new boyfriend more and more, and we started talking about marriage even though I was still in my senior year of high school. Although I thought I was ready, it also created a great fear inside of me. I think that the shame from my last relationship needed to be dealt with.

When I visited my boyfriend in Chicago, we spent time with some of his old friends. They lived a rough life.

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He and I would go to church when we were together, but an attraction to life outside of the church was inviting too.

The summer after I graduated, I began making arrangements to get an apartment with a girl who had also graduated from my school. I was making decent money at the restaurant and feeling independent. I had opened up my own checking and savings account and had developed good financial discipline by depositing the money that I was making. I began to build up my bank account and purchase things for our new apartment.

I knew that my boyfriend was disappointed that I was choosing to not go to college, and I didn't like that I was letting him down. After he went back to school in the fall, the idea of a long-distance relationship with him became too difficult to think about, so I started to give up. I was scheduled to get my new place on October 12th, 1995, and I was busy buying furniture and collecting decorations while dreaming of not having any rules.

I remember going out for pizza one night with friends. I heard someone say Kyle's name. Kyle was a boy who had been in my class my 6th grade year. His family had moved away that same year, and I heard that they had all recently moved back to town. I remember wondering how he was doing and I found myself asking questions that night about him.

Just a few weeks later, I attended his sister's wedding, where she married my cousin. I knew Kyle would be there.

About the Author

Jennifer Wagenmaker is the visionary founder of Legacy Ministries. She shares her story boldly and transparently with women all over the world. Raised in a pastor's home, Jennifer learned of the Savior's love for her at a young age, and she is filled with a great passion to share this love with others. She'll inspire you to dream God-sized dreams for your life.

Jennifer lives with her husband, Eric, and their four sons in West Michigan.

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