



Growing up in my home was a nightmare from which there seemed to be no escape.

The nightmare began with my father, a musician who rang of success and fame.

His musical ascent began at the age of 10 at the Cadek Conservatory of Music in Chattanooga, Tenn., where he studied classical piano.

By the age of 14, he was working with Charles Young and the Pace Setters Band. In adulthood, he would play alongside jazz greats like Stanley Turrentine, Freddie Hubbard, Grover Washington Jr., George Benson and others.

But behind the music was a man of violent behavior and many schemes, intensified by drug and alcohol abuse. As you read, the stories will seem unreal, but they are indeed true.

In the beginning, I was a poor little black girl who needed a way out. Today, I'm a practicing sleep physician, wife and mother of three who overcame the psychological trauma of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and want to help others conquer their demons. I am not perfect nor an expert in all things, but I have learned what not to do by making a ton of mistakes along the way.

The house smells of mama's salmon eggs and grits and daddy's music plays in the background, competing with the whir of the fan, a poor substitute for the broken air conditioner.

The vibe was lazy because we knew we would start the day free.

"I have the car!" I exclaim, sweat beading on my face.

"Let's play the long version," my brother said.

Sure, why not? All we had was time and space, and everyone was safe for now.

For that, I was grateful.

The sound of tires rolling onto the unpaved driveway interrupt our blissful state.

Oh no, daddy's here!

"Hurry," Mama says. "Turn the music off! Put the game away!"

The keys rattle and the door opens.

“I smell salmon eggs and grits! Where’s mine?” Daddy shouts, heading toward the kitchen. “There’s nothing left for me?”

“You’re a day early,” Mama nervously replies. “I can cook more.”

Instead, Daddy orders me to make him a sandwich. I frantically search the fridge, only to find bread, mustard and cheese. I hurriedly prepare what’s available and present it to my father.

Smack! The slap echoes across the room.

With a pounding heart and stinging cheek, I try to explain.

“There is no more meat, daddy!”

“You should’ve thought about that when you ate all the salmon eggs and grits, leaving none for me,” he says, flinging my dictionary into the wall.

Daddy snatches mama and drags her – flailing, kicking and crying for help – down the hallway. He orders my brother and sister to retrieve the wires and extension cords from his music room.

Shivering with fear, I instruct them to stay calm. We huddle in a corner and I hold them as tight as I can as both cry into my shoulders. But mama needs me, too, so I cautiously make my way toward the bedroom.

“Stop, Daddy! Pick on someone your own size,” I scream, but terror overtakes

me and I return to the corner, hoping he didn’t hear me.

Daddy stomps back down the hallway and grabs me by the neck, pinning me against the wall and nearly choking me to death.

“You want be brave, huh?!”

He steps on a Monopoly piece and roars.

“What the hell is this? Y’all want to play games while I’m working hard to feed the family? You should be reading your dictionary!”

“I can’t now, daddy! You threw it in the wall!”

“Oh, you’re trying to be funny. Well, let me show you funny,” he said, yanking me down the hallway.

Limp and beaten to a pulp, Mama is bound with duct tape around her wrists, ankles and mouth. My tears roll faster.

He binds me as well and lets the wires and extension cords fly. My mouth covered in tape, I let out a breathless scream of pain. The welts spread and begin to crack open and bleed. Tortuous minutes later, I hear my father ask my brother and sister to find the scissors so he can let us go. Little did they know, he hid the scissors, convincing them it was their fault he could not release us. Seconds turn to minutes and minutes to what feels like hours. Finally, the tape is cut.

Welcome to hell. I did not pass go or collect \$200.