

*She  
Believed  
She Could  
So  
She Did  
A Memoir*

*Stephanie Burley Jones*

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To my Lord and all of my loved ones  
who guided me through the darkness  
and back into the marvelous light.

## *Introduction*

Before you read this story about my journey, I want you to understand why I wrote this book.

I felt a calling to write my story long before I actually began to do it. I broached the idea of writing this book to a few people and was discouraged. I was told that it was too cliché and that my story was a dime a dozen. This advice almost kept me from making this book a reality.

But one thing that I learned which I will share with you in my story is that you can't always listen to, and do what other people tell you. You have to rely on what you know to be true and your gut instinct. People can always look at something from the outside and have an opinion, but unless that someone is you and is experiencing things for themselves, they can't fully know what your reality is. We are ultimately responsible for ourselves and the choices we make.

I suspected that the book writing process would be cathartic for me. This was the case. Writing this book added to my healing, my sense of peace and helped to further release me from the trauma I went through when I was sick. This is one of the reasons why I wanted to write this book.

The other reason that was at the forefront of my mind was that maybe, just maybe someone else could benefit from reading my story. Maybe this story could make a difference in someone else's life. I know if I had a

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book like this to read during my journey it would have helped to propel me forward immensely. I want others who might have to face similar circumstances to know that they are not alone, that it may be tough and unfair, but nothing, simply nothing is insurmountable when you place it in the arms of grace. When you trust, have faith in Jesus and you give everything you have got there can't be failure. We can't plan ahead for what we will have to face or what will come our way but we can make sure that no matter what we exhibit determination, dignity and persistence in our trials.

I made a promise to God that I would spend my life making a difference in the lives of others. Maybe this book is one avenue for me to do just that.

God Bless.

- Stephanie

*The journey of a thousand miles begins  
with one step.*

-Lao Tzu



## *In the Beginning: 2013*

So many of the things that I had hoped for and dreamed of in my life had come true. I was so blessed.

I had an extraordinary childhood. My sister and I roamed the neighborhood on a daily basis with many of the other children that lived on Stowe Drive. We celebrated birthdays together, had sleepovers, played school, and even had car washes to raise money to go to Chuck E Cheese's. I truly believe that I had a childhood that could not have been more special.

My parents could not have loved me more. They did everything they possibly could to support me and to help me be successful in life.

In middle school and high school, I played basketball. One of my dreams was to play basketball in college. I was able to make that dream a reality. I played two years at Clark State Community College in Springfield, Ohio, and two years at Urbana University in Urbana, Ohio. My parents were my biggest fans and were at my games religiously. Their love, support, and encouragement have helped carry me through the peaks and valleys in life. Simply put they are two of the great loves in my life.

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Their actions motivated me and caused me to be driven to be a success and to strive to be the best I could. They could not have given me a better foundation than what they did.

In the spring of 2008, I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior and got baptized. For as far back as I could remember, I had I known who was in charge of my life and who guided me. I felt His presence in all that I did and felt the Lord was at the core of me. Getting baptized in my mind was really the decision to be more public about who I belonged to, Jesus.

In 2008, I also married Steven. We were excited for all that the future had to offer us.

By 2013, we had been blessed with two beautiful children. Tyce, our son, was 3 and our daughter, Aven, had just been born earlier that year in April. I had always hoped for a boy and a girl, in that order, and that is exactly what God had given us. The joy and happiness that our children had brought us was greater than what I understood prior to being parents. There isn't anything I can think of that had been more important to me than to become a mom. From my earliest age, I remember wanting this and actually being fearful that it would not happen. For it to become reality was surreal and filled me with joy.

Another dream of mine had been to build a house. In 2011 we made that dream reality. We built our dream house in Moraine, Ohio. This was centrally located in relation to where I worked and where my husband

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worked. We were so proud and excited to have had the opportunity to do this.

I had a job I had always dreamt of. I was a first grade teacher in the Sycamore Community School District in Cincinnati, Ohio. I absolutely loved teaching first grade and this district was the one I desired to work in the most. I felt honored to be able to make a difference in the lives of my students and to be in a career I was passionate about.

Although things were going so well in my life, that is not to say there weren't bumps in the road. My husband Steven had been diagnosed with severe clinical depression. His life was and is constantly about battling this mental illness and working to function at a high level.

In 2013, our son was diagnosed with high functioning autism. Even though we knew there were areas where he was having difficulty, this was still quite a devastating diagnosis for us. After we found out the diagnosis my husband put it into perspective for me when he said, "This is our son and putting a name to what we see from him does not change him or how we feel about him. Who would he be if he did not have this disability? This is the son we know and love and getting this diagnosis does not change that." Point taken.

By and large our life was so good. I was a mother, wife, daughter, teacher, and lover of Christ. It was hard to imagine with all of these blessings how anything could go wrong.

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But as they say things can change in the blink of an eye. Little did I know that my life as I had known it was going to change drastically and that I was getting ready to face challenges that were unimaginable.

## *The Reaction*

In 2013, I started experiencing intense itching on my elbows and on my shins. When it started it stayed and didn't seem to be going anywhere.

Since the itching was so persistent, I decided to make an appointment with an allergist to see if she could determine the cause of the itching.

When I was in high school, I started having allergy problems. I started getting allergy shots and taking allergy medicine. You name it and I was allergic to it - grass, pollen, trees, dust, etc. As my allergist told me, I am allergic to earth. I used to have to go each August and get a steroid shot to help me handle my allergies during that time of the year. Otherwise my sneezing would have launched me into orbit.

For quite some time I had not had severe issues with my allergies. They had become very manageable, so I was not overly concerned about the itching I was experiencing. I thought I might be able to get a cream to help with the itching and that would be the end of it.

Upon arrival at the allergist office, they had me sign a waiver to have allergy testing done. By signing this it would allow them to prick my skin with common allergens to see if I had any type of reaction. I had this

type of testing done when I was in high school, which is how they determined the different allergies I had at that time. So, I was familiar with this type of testing for allergies.

I really was not in favor of having this testing done at this point and time, but I figured the doctor probably would not be willing to do much to help me if I declined. I went ahead and signed the paperwork to have the testing done.

The doctor came in and talked to me about what I was experiencing. She then told me a nurse would be in to start the testing and that after the testing she would be back in to discuss the results with me.

I laid down on my stomach and the nurse proceeded to prick me all over my back with what are known to be common allergens. Afterwards, she said I would have to wait for a bit to see if I had any type of reaction.

I had brought along a book with me to read. I sat in a chair for about 10 minutes and read. While I was waiting, I started to have a very strong urge to scratch my back, but I was told by the nurse to not touch the area where she pricked me. The nurse came back in to examine my back and look for reactions. She said that I had many reactions all over my back. She left the room to go and share this information with the doctor. Upon the nurse's return she said that because I reacted to so many things the doctor wanted to do some further testing. In other words, more skin pricks.

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I was starting to feel tired and my time was running short. I was supposed to be meeting my husband in a relatively short amount of time and I was getting worried that I was going to be late. Reluctantly, I agreed to them doing more testing and to prick me some more with common allergens.

Since my back was pretty well covered at that point, she continued with the testing by pricking my arm. Again, the nurse said she would be back and that I would wait to see if I had more reactions.

I went back to reading my book again. A few minutes after the nurse left, I noticed that I started feeling funny. The words on the page I was reading appeared to be fuzzy, and I was having a hard time comprehending what I was reading. It was difficult to think. I felt tingling and felt like I might pass out. I was also feeling anxious in a way I never had before. I had never experienced any of what I was suddenly feeling.

I went out in the hall and saw a nurse standing there. I told her that I was not feeling well and that I thought I needed to see the doctor. While she was getting the doctor, I started having intense itching, stomach cramping and feeling as if I was freezing. My tongue was tingling, and I was shaky.

The doctor came in and upon examining me and listening to me tell her what I was experiencing she immediately gave me some Zyrtec, which is a medication used to treat allergies. She told me that I was having a severe allergic reaction to the testing they had done.

Things continued to progress in a negative direction. I developed hives and the tingling continued. The doctor then had the nurse administer an EpiPen and a steroid shot. An EpiPen is given only when it is felt that a life-threatening allergic reaction is happening. Steroids are also given to diminish allergic reactions. My allergic reaction continued to persist despite being given Zyrtec, an EpiPen and steroid. The nurse was checking my blood pressure and heart rate every ten minutes. Thankfully, it did remain stable throughout the reaction. Because I didn't seem to be getting any better, I was given a second EpiPen injection. At this point, because the doctor had given me a second injection, she determined that I needed to go to the hospital via ambulance to receive further care and treatment.

I called Steven and he rushed to the the doctor's office. He was then able to ride with me in the ambulance to the closest hospital. Once I got to the hospital the worst of the reaction was over. They kept me in the emergency room for a few hours to monitor me. I was then released to go home.

In a follow-up visit with the allergist, I was told that the most likely cause of the itching I was experiencing on my elbows and shins was due to corn consumption. I had shown that I was allergic to many things, but one food that I had a major reaction to was corn. Because of this I had to eliminate corn from my diet. The doctor said I would have no long term or ill



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effects from the severe allergic reaction I had. But I do not think that ended up being the case at all.

## *A New Normal*

The allergist that I had seen told me that she had never seen someone have a life-threatening allergic reaction from allergy testing. People have life threatening allergic reactions all the time, but it is not usually from allergy testing. It is more often because of coming into contact with one specific allergen that a person is highly allergic to. Having the severe reaction that I did to the allergy testing is supposed to be very rare and is an indication of how severe my allergies are. From that point on I have always carried an EpiPen in case of another severe allergic reaction. Thankfully, up to this point I have not had to use it.

After having had that allergic reaction in the doctor's office, I can honestly say that I have never quite felt the same. Things started happening that were really not able to be explained. I started having random and unexplained itching all over my body. I felt sick all the time as if something was very wrong. Foods that I had always eaten and that had never caused me any issues now caused me to itch and have diarrhea. I went back to see the allergist as well as a host of other doctors, but no one seemed to be able to explain why I was feeling the way I was. It seemed as if none of the foods I was eating

agreed with me. I tried a variety of different medications including allergy medication and none of it improved the way that I was feeling.

In the summer of 2014 I got to the point where there were only 3 different foods I was eating. I had read a lot of information about how many of the foods we eat are not meant for human consumption and that eating a lot of these foods could be the cause of why I was feeling the way that I was. So, I changed my diet and it consisted only of sweet potatoes, grilled chicken and hamburgers. Those were foods that I trusted and felt I did not have any adverse reactions to. Having a diet that consisted of only these 3 foods lasted for an entire year. During the course of that year, I can honestly tell you I did not consume anything else. If I were going to be away from home for a while and even while we were on vacation, I packed these foods with me and stuck with only eating them.

I was getting very frustrated with the situation and the fact that nobody could tell me what was going on with my body. Why was I reacting to so many things and feeling the way I was? One theory my primary care physician had was that my body was anxious after what had happened during the allergic reaction. So, my doctor had me try Lexapro, which is a medication commonly used to treat anxiety.

The timing of me taking this medication was terrible as I decided to try it when we were right in the middle of our vacation at Disney World. The first night

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that I took it it was about an hour before bedtime. The medication caused me to have my first panic attack. Being that I had never had one before, I had no idea what was happening at first.

I started to feel as if I was going to lose consciousness. My heart started racing and my head felt as if it was spinning. I immediately told my husband, who knew what was happening as he has had anxiety accompanying his depression. Our children were asleep, and my parents were in our vacation unit with us. My parents and Steven helped talk me through it and get me to calm down.

After having had that experience with taking the anxiety medication, I was very hesitant to take medication for anxiety again. But I was feeling so miserable all that time that I decided to give it a try again.

The next medication my doctor put me on was Paxil. It is another medication used frequently to treat anxiety. I tried this medication for about a month as I was told it takes time for your body to adjust to it and get used to it. This medication made me feel sick on a daily basis. I almost always felt as if I was going to pass out. I was lightheaded, and it did not seem to be helping me feel any better. I developed a rash on my leg that left a scar. I was very fearful of the medication because I had read about how if you take it for a long period of time it can be difficult, if not impossible, to get off of. The last thing I wanted on top of dealing with how I was feeling

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was to be on a medication that I would never be able to get off of. So after having given the medication a fair chance to make a difference for me, I weaned myself off of it. I can remember it being so difficult for the rest of that school year for me to teach because I constantly did not feel well.