She loves her kids. Don't get me wrong, she wasn't like this everyday all day, but it was more often than not. Plus it was getting worse and worse. It was 1985 and you would of thought that things were about to get better, but my horror was just beginning.

My brother and sister showed up at the Guardian's home a few hours after me. They looked so scared when they arrived. Needless to say that when they saw me they started crying and reaching out for me. We were fed and bathed and put in clean clothes and slept on little cots that were lined up along the wall.

The next morning a woman came and talked with me and told me that my Aunt Robin might be coming to pick us up. Robin is my mother's younger sister. She happens to be married to my father's older brother, Danny. Two sisters and two brothers. Either way they were my Aunt and Uncle. Robin was about twenty-two years old and I believe Danny was about thirty-two.

Robin didn't have any children, but Danny had three boys. I can't say that I remember much about them before this happened.

Robin arrived at the home and I felt a rush of relief when she wrapped her arms around me. "It's alright now baby. I'm taking you guys home with me." Wow, I felt warmth all over. Finally I can breathe.

She went in an office for about twenty minutes and signed some papers. My aunt walked out of that office crying and smiling. She scooped my brother and sister up, one in each arm saying, "Come, Chenelle, let's go home." Home? We have that? I picked my head up as I watched her walking with the babies and I remember thinking to myself that they are finally going to get taken care of the way I wanted mom to care for them. They didn't even look back at me for reassurance they way they usually did when anyone else picked them up.

That tells me that they felt what I felt, safe!

She loaded us up in to a big green car, a Nova. The sun was shining. Robin was singing along with the radio and the babies were both asleep like little angels. I was so happy, so comfortable.

Someone was really going to take care of us. Someone was really going to take care of me. Tell me what to do, make me dinner, and put me in the tub. That felt so good. Looking back this was something most children probably didn't look forward to but I longed for it. I needed it. I needed love. I enjoyed this ride.

We pulled up at the house. It was a big yellow double on the West Side of Indy. My cousin, Michael was sitting on the porch working on his bike. Michael was about 12 or 13 at the time. He didn't seem to notice us. He probably didn't care either way. He had his own life. I got out of the car and watched as Robin got the babies out. As we walked up to the house she asked if I was ready to eat. She was making dinner after she got us

settled. Before we got to the door my cousin, Danny came running out the door shouting how hungry he was. “Thank God you’re here! I’m starving.” Danny was 10 or 11 and everyone called him Daidan, or Ill Danny. He was my favorite!

He always checked on me, asking me if I was okay. He always made me feel welcome. Daidan had a heart like mine. Don’t ask me how I know that because I can’t tell you. It was just something I saw in him. I felt like we were the same. We had some sort of unspoken understanding of each other. We could read one another. We knew immediately when something was wrong.

I can remember the first time I ever heard rap music. It’s so funny to me now, but I felt so grown up when I heard it. He was sitting on his bed with his Walkman on his head and he called me to his room. When I walked in he was smiling and said, “Come here, you wanna hear something?”| He put the headphones on my ears and my mouth dropped open. It was the Fat Boys and I had never heard anything like it. It felt as if I was getting away with something by listening to this. He thought this was funny. He loved my reaction to the music. That moment meant something to me. Me and DanDan were very close.

So we started our new life that day. It was so wonderful. Our days were now filled with nagging and cooking and cleaning. Chores and kids, fussing and fighting. Our weekends began with horseplay first thing in the mornings. “Don’t make me come up there!” was heard being shouted often from downstairs when we jumped or ran upstairs.

It was days of hot summer play outside all day barefoot with skinned knees and bee stings. Baby Jessica was now two and she always followed and played right behind us, always trying to keep up. She was so tiny with long brown hair; her bangs always hung over her eyes. She always stubbed her toes, tripping over her own little feet. She was so beautiful.

Little Billy was three and he was a little man now. He finally acted like a normal kid. He loved being outside with dirt and bugs. He would find a crack in the sidewalk with ants in it and he would be there for hours. He no longer worried about where I was. He didn’t have to anymore; he was free now, free to run off and make a mess or hurt himself and learn a lesson, free to get lost in his imagination in the backyard, fight bad guys, and slay dragons.

Me…I loved to play house and pretend I was a teacher. I loved my life. I had a half of a block that was all mine. No brother, no sister. Just me and the sidewalk under my wheels. I had lots of cousins on the same street. Some were my age so we would play together. We loved dancing to Michael Jackson songs and running over to the corner store for penny candy.

Everything was okay. Other than the nights my uncle would drink too much. He worked all day, came home, had dinner, drank a few beers and went to bed.

The only kid I ever heard him argue with a lot was David. David was his oldest. He was about 16 and he had a girlfriend that seemed to take up all his time. He was never there. He was in a lot of high school sports and if he wasn't at practice then he was with his girlfriend. He and Uncle Danny fought a lot. Not sure why, but they hardly ever got along.

As I was saying, Uncle Danny worked a lot, but he drank a lot, too. On the weekends he would get a little out of control sometimes. He might throw my aunt around or throw and break things. I do remember Robin having a couple of black eyes. Sad thing is that all these things seemed normal to me. I figured that this happened in everyone's house. Everyone's father got drunk. I'd see them all with beers in their hands all the time so in my mind they were all the same.

The weekends are also when my aunt would do laundry. We didn't have a washer and dryer so she would load it all up in the car and spend 3 or 4 hours at the Laundromat and usually she would do this late at night.

A lot of the time the boys would never be home on the weekends so it would be just my uncle and us three little ones.

We were all three upstairs playing and he called me down to the kitchen. Once I got down there I saw that he didn't have the kitchen light on. There was only light from the dining room.

He was standing at the counter by the sink. He said, "Here's some pineapples for you guys." There was three bowls. I could smell him. He smelled like beer. He had a raspy deep voice and I could tell something was strange. He was looking at me funny. He said, "Come over here, honey." And he picked me up by my waist and sat me on the counter. He told me to be still and be quiet. I was scared. I had a bad feeling like the one I would get from some of the strange men that used to come over to mom's house. He pushed me back. My legs were hanging off the counter and he pulled my underwear off. I had a nightgown on still. He said, "I'm not going to hurt you, so don't tell nobody." He put his head between my legs and I wanted to scream. I felt so disgusting. I wanted this to be over so bad! Why was he doing this? What did I do to make him do this to me? Please let the phone ring, let someone knock on the door, anything. Please come home, Robin. After about 10 minutes he groaned and picked his head up. He was holding himself in his hands. I was so scared that he was going to put his ugliness on me. I didn't want it anywhere near me. He put it away and put me down off the counter. I put my underwear back on. I felt so nasty but all I was worried about was getting away from him. I took off. He yelled; I turned around and he said, "I never want to hurt you so keep your mouth shut. You understand me?"

"Okay, Uncle Danny" I replied. He was looking me dead in the eyes and he told me to take the pineapples with me.

I remember watching my feet as I walked up the stairs. Not to be careful but to be quiet. I didn't want him to hear me. I wanted to disappear out of his mind. I was scared to fall asleep that night. That same week my aunt took us to visit my mom at the Indiana Women's Prison. She walked in and I remember thinking, "Wow! She's so beautiful." She looked so healthy and bright. She was herself again!! This was great. She hugged me and started crying. She told me she was so sorry for putting me through everything. That was the best day I had had in a long time and I could see how happy she was with the babies in her arms. She covered them in kisses and tears. God, I love her. She looked at me and told me to be the big girl and help Robin like she knew I was. "When I come home, I'm gonna take care of you, Vali." She called me by my middle name when she wanted me to know she was serious. For the next hour I felt like I was safe and nothing could go wrong. I was on a cloud. But on the car ride home I realized that things weren't going to be okay for a while.

This was when I had first realized that things were gonna get worse before they got better. We pulled up at the house and I dragged my feet the whole way. I never wanted to be in the house anymore. Every chance I got to stay outside or go play with cousins, I jumped at it. He was getting braver and touching me more and more. Sometimes my aunt would only be in the next room.

He would say foul things to me, things that my little ears should never have heard, things my mind should never have understood or known what these things meant. I felt filthy all the time. I felt like people could see this on me. Like everyone knew I was a Nasty little girl. I started staying to myself. I didn't want to play with other kids anymore.

The first time he hurt me was on Christmas night, 1986. The whole house was sleeping and I was woke up by him carrying me away from my bed and downstairs. I was tired. I didn't feel like doing anything he asked me. He smacked me in the mouth and covered my face and mouth with his hand. He was very upset with me. He had never hit me like that before so I was very scared and did as he asked.

I was 7 years old the night he stole my spirit like a thief in the night. I've never felt as much pain as I did this night. He was very drunk and kept me right they're on my own bed. I woke up because I couldn't breathe. He was on top of me, crushing me like I was nothing. So arrogant. He feared nothing anymore. I was playing by his rules and he came to take my all. He became a monster that night. He filled me with his sickness and I was completely helpless. It hurt so bad! I was crying and reaching. I don't know what I was reaching for. I wanted out from under him. I felt an extreme amount of pressure and it felt like I was wetting myself. Shocking pain shot through my stomach and after a minute I couldn't feel my legs any longer. What was happening to me? How can he do this?

I was hurt really bad after that. I was bloody and broken. I needed help but was too afraid to show anyone what had happened to me. After a few days I started to get better. When I think back I wonder how in the hell did this go on unnoticed…. How??

I was changing on the inside. I was becoming mean and bitter. Angry at the world, angry at my mom and dad. Angry at my aunt for being so blind. What do I do with this? There is no way out so I do what I've always done. Suck it up and take it day by day. After all I couldn't risk losing the only home my brother and sister have left. At least they are taken care of. This wasn't just about me. It's never been about me.

Over the next year a lot of ugly things went on in that house. Some are so ugly that I've never spoken a word of them. I'm ashamed of myself and I don't know how to blend in with other kids anymore. I can't fake it anymore. I don't even have the energy to try.

DanDan would try to talk to me all the time. He didn't like it when I looked at the ground and talked. But I felt so guilty all the time, unclean and disconnected from everything. I was starting to starting to rebuild after the neglect of my mother. I had come so far only to get knocked back down in the worst way.

I remember wishing for his death or the sudden release of my father who would come save me from all this.

It would end about a year later, but not before it got worse. Could it get worse?…Yes. Much worse. In fact I had to be hospitalized. I had to have surgery and a lot of people got into some serious trouble including my Aunt Robin.

Daddy did come home and save me but not soon enough.

I'm sure this has left some marks and left behind a lot of hurt and pain.

However this is my story and it's why I am who I am today. I choose to take what good I can find away from this past.

I'm smarter, stronger after liv`ing through this. I am still beautiful even after my Beautiful Tragedy.