

A N E X C E R P T F R O M C H A P T E R O N E

# A Story To Tell



Things had gotten blurry. *I'd* gotten blurry. My forty-fourth birthday was just around the corner, and I was realizing, for the first time, that it meant I was nearly halfway through this life of mine. I looked around at what I'd built with equal parts gratitude and exhaustion. I love my life, and I love my family—deeply. But some of the ways I'd gotten here, some of the qualities I'd always relied on—like being really productive, superefficient, always running at high capacity—were beginning to turn on me. The last twenty years have been a heck of a ride, but I knew I couldn't keep going the way I have. My adrenaline was slowing, revealing in its absence insecurities and unhealthy habits from way back when that I'd been moving too fast to deal with.

It's hard to explain how I was feeling. I was grateful beyond measure, but exhausted. Loved, but feeling unworthy. Full, but running on empty.

I started to experience anxiety for the first time in my life. It was taking me longer to be inspired but less time to become tired. And because my world kept me busy, I could still feel the wheels of my life humming. What became harder to tell is where they were headed.

I could also sense that I was nearing a bend in the road. My oldest son was touring colleges at the same time I was touring preschools for my youngest. Lately, life had felt like a twisted game of tug-of-war—not knowing what I should let go of and what I should hold tight to. My little corner of the world was turning, quickly, and I feared I'd miss it completely if I didn't start living differently.

For a time, I figured the fix had something to do with my schedule or a lack of something—focus, inspiration maybe? So I made space in my calendar to nurture things that filled me up. I took more days off, and I made more meals at home. I got a few facials, took a few naps. I decluttered closets and put away my phone more often. These things helped move the needle, but it wasn't the turnover I was looking for.

I needed to figure out what, about the way I'd been living, was wearing me out. I was ready to catch my breath and look closely at my life. To retrace as many moments of pain and regret and grief as there have been moments of beauty and grace and joy. To slow down enough to celebrate the wins and learn from the losses. To navigate all that I'm carrying here and now—noting what needs to be left behind so I can move forward a little lighter, a little freer. To learn what was holding me back and what would inch me closer to the kind of life I was building in my dreams.

So I started to write—again. This time also combing through years

of journal entries. I had, spread out before me, a mighty collection of memories and moments and prayers upon prayers. Lots of wishful thinking and plenty of hang-ups. Pain I was trying to forget among dreams I didn't want to. Journaling is something I've tried to do every day for I don't know how long. It's always been a reliable way for me to work things out. I'm an introverted type, and sometimes talking in a group only makes things cloudier in my brain. Writing is how I can make sense of things—problems, ideas, the world, and my place in it. My journal is where I talk to myself and to God. It seems like I don't really know how I feel about something until I've written it down. Sussed it out. Until I've given my thoughts a chance to arrange themselves in a more purposeful way.

After a while, I could sense that I was writing *toward* something. What, exactly, I wasn't sure. But there, among the scribbles and notes and my heart poured out, it was starting to read like a story—like my story.

Sure, there were some random thoughts, some ramblings and lists and wishes, but in between the marks of to-dos was the whole of my life, written in my hand.

It was messy and winding and beautiful, and graciously revealed about a million wonders. Some of it broke my heart—and some of it pieced it back together. But every part, every note, every memory was woven into whatever came next—and it all felt so well-played. No matter how shameful or embarrassing, how happy or joyful, each chapter was the bridge that led me to the next place I was meant to go.

The truth I'd been missing was right there on those pages: my life *is* a

story. A *good* one. And for as many moments I've lived that brought me to my knees, more moments have made my soul sing.

The other truth? I wouldn't have to change my life completely. I only needed to learn how to hold it all differently. I *can* feel gratitude and slow down long enough to savor it. I can be loved and find myself worthy of it. I *can* feel full and not just in glimpses, but in long-lasting ways that satisfy the life I'm craving.

It started with that picture you see on the cover of this book. Because that little girl, the one with the missing tooth and messy hair— she knew who she was before the world chimed in. And part of writing down my story has been in hopes of finding her again.

It felt like a rescue mission. For that, I told no one about this writing project except Chip and a couple of close friends. It was too personal, too vulnerable, too unpolished to know if it was meant to mean something to anyone but me. I wanted to keep this idea close to my chest until I was sure about how and when I wanted to share it. *If* I'd ever want to.

My heart changed about halfway through writing down my story. It could have been because I started with all the painful, hard stuff first. Stories that brought shame and my soul's deepest insecurities to the page. Past hurt resurfaced and so did pain I've prayed to forget. And yet, slowly—emphasis on *slow*—I was starting to feel healing in places I'd felt broken. I was beginning to have some clarity in areas that had felt cloudy for years. I was, finally, standing in the fullness of my story. I felt hopeful. I felt full.

Our story may crack us open, but it also pieces us back together.