

The Ice Underneath

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My Passage through Loss and Faith

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The Ice Underneath: My Passage through Loss and Faith

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Note: the names of all youth in foster care mentioned in this book have been changed.

When you pass through the deep, stormy sea, you can count on Me to be there with you. When you pass through raging rivers, you will not drown. When you walk through persecution like fiery flames, you will not be burned; the flames will not harm you.

Isaiah 43:1-2



The two of us, 1987.

PROLOGUE

Almost a Day of Rain

When he dropped me off at the train station, I don't recall if we kissed. That was our ritual—we never parted ways or went to sleep without saying “I love you” and kissing each other on the lips. But I can't remember if we followed our ritual on that morning, almost ten years ago.

Monday, July 11, 2011. It was cool, overcast, and threatening rain as I went through my usual routine. Up at five a.m., a quiet breakfast with Ted, and then the drive to the train station in Camden, N.J. He dropped me off for my 45-minute commute to Trenton, where I oversaw two units at New Jersey State Prison, a maximum security facility, which housed inmates who were in acute stages of mental illness.

During the drive to the station, Ted and I chatted about this and that. The gloomy sky didn't bother me; it was my preferred weather.

I love overcast skies and I love rain. Sometimes I wish and even pray for that kind of weather, but I wasn't always that way. When I was younger I didn't like being stuck inside on stormy days, but as I grew older walking in the rain or listening to its sound cleared my mind and cleansed my soul. Rain was a healing force, a chance to breathe in and out, to take stock of things and get a new start.

Yet it remained gloomy all that day and the rain never came.

Ted had gotten me so spoiled and comfortable in our marriage. As I settled in at my desk, I knew it would be only a couple of hours before he called me at mid-morning to see how my day was going. Another call at mid-day, and then a final call about an hour before I was on my way home: “*Hey baby, what would you like for dinner tonight? I’ll be at the train station to pick you up. Love you, honey.*”

But mid-morning came and went with no call from Ted. When I called him, he didn’t pick up. My message was short and simple.

“It’s me and I’m thinking about you.”

I didn’t ask him to call me back.

My work day at the prison went by fairly quickly with no major operational problems. I enjoyed working as the departmental manager for the in-patient unit serving inmates with mental health problems. I felt our department made a difference in stabilizing this vulnerable group, enabling their return into the general prison population to serve out their time.

Ted would call me in the middle of the day, every day. *What would you like to eat tonight?* When I came home the table was set, my cup of tea waiting for me. The meal prepared, with all the silverware in place. *Please sit a while, Wanda, and relax before we eat.*

But there was no mid-day call. In the early afternoon I called him again.

“Hey, where you at, baby? I’m missing you. Is everything okay? Call me when you get a chance.”

All through the afternoon I tried to concentrate on my work as I waited for Ted’s end-of-the-day call. Five p.m. approached and I hadn’t spoken to him in nine hours, since the train station. Very strange. So unlike Ted.

Just before leaving work I called and left another message.

“Honey, I haven’t heard from you. I’m on my way to choir rehearsal. I’m really concerned.”

Choir rehearsal was at six p.m. My sister Joan picked me up at the McDonald's near the prison and we drove to the church, about ten minutes away.

I didn't think about Ted again because our rehearsal was so dynamic. Our choir was cutting our first CD that night and we were high-spirited—our praise and worship were off the hook, as if we were flying. I was deeply touched in a way I hadn't experienced in a long while, literally filled with God's spirit, anointed by an angelic feeling that I can't adequately describe. I left the rehearsal in a spirit of lightness and joy.

I asked Joan if she would drive me to the Trenton train station for my ride back to Camden.

"I'm concerned because I haven't heard from Ted all day," I told her. "It's not like him."

Sometimes there wasn't good cell phone reception on the train, but I was able to call him on and off during the ride.

"Baby, I'm on my way to the train station. I'm concerned about you. Please call me."

The ride seemed so much longer that night. It was now around 8 p.m. and no Ted. As I stared out the train window, not quite seeing the darkening landscape, anxiety and worry, which had been nagging at me off and on all day, now entirely flooded my mind.

"Baby, I know you're going to pick me up at the train station, but something's not right. I'll call you once I get off the train."

When I got off in Camden it was pitch dark. The train station wasn't in a good area, with homeless and drug-addicted people hanging around. Ted would never let me wait alone, late at night, in such an environment. He was always in his car sitting by the curb, listening to his music, on time. Fifteen or twenty minutes ahead of time.

But no Ted.

I absolutely knew something was wrong. I walked back into the station and called my sister Penny, who lived nearby.

“Oh Penny, I’m so afraid right now. I haven’t been able to contact Ted all day. He must have fallen and hurt himself and just can’t get up.”

Penny and I were one year apart, the closest in age of my 15 beautiful sisters. We had always been inseparable: we went to school together, graduated together, lived in the same college dormitory, and shared so much laughter and heartbreak together. Not just a sister but my closest friend and transparent confidante. She loved Ted like a brother. We were always there for each other.

“Sis, it’s going to be okay,” Penny said. “I’ll come pick you up at the train station with the kids and Ruben will go to the house to see what’s going on.”

“Okay.”

“Just wait for me.”

“Penny, something happened.”

“Just relax, Wanda. This is going to be okay.”

I tried to do as she said but my anxiety level was through the roof. *Was he in the hospital? A heart attack? Why hadn’t I been contacted?*

I called Penny again. Ruben picked up.

“Did Penny leave yet? I’m really concerned. It’s not like Ted.”

“Penny’s on her way. I’m heading over to the house to check on him and I’ll meet you all there.”

I paced and prayed, waiting for Penny to arrive. *Please God, just let him be okay. Lord, please let my husband be okay.*

I knew he was hurt in some way, but my mind couldn’t go any further than that.

Somehow I felt it was appropriate that Penny’s husband Ruben was going to the house to check on my husband. The two of them were very close, speaking in codes of language that only brothers-in-law

could understand, an inside humor that kept the rest of the family in stitches.

When my 11 living sisters and I got together, it was hard to separate us. All the brothers-in-law were done with the conversation long before we were. Ted and Ruben would grab their coats and announce they were leaving, but the sisters kept on talking. Another hour would pass as Ted and Ruben exchanged exasperated looks: *We're still here? Will we ever escape?*

Ted would finally stand up and make his announcement.

"Okay, we're leaving. The rest of you guys want to leave too, but you don't have the strength to say it. The sisters got you in control!"

Ruben and Ted would burst out laughing.

One night after leaving a family gathering, Ruben passed us on the highway beeping his horn.

"Look at him!" Ted cried. "He's finally escaped! He's gonna break the speed limit!" The two of us broke up, nearly in hysterics.

No one could tell a joke or a story like my husband could.

I kept pacing. The station was deserted except for someone sleeping on one of the benches. I waited forever for Penny to arrive.

Finally her blue jeep pulled up outside.

I walked out. Her daughter Savannah, 17, was in the front passenger seat, and I got in the back with Ruben III, her 24-year-old son.

"Penny, something's not right, something's happened. I'm so afraid, so afraid."

"Wanda, it's going to be okay. Ruben's on his way to the house."

We got on the highway. My heart was racing. I was panicking.

"Penny, something's not right."

"Just breathe, Wanda, just breathe. Deep breaths, in and out."

Penny's phone buzzed. I held tight to my nephew's hand. My sister was silent, the phone pressed to her ear.

"No way," she said.

PART ONE



CHAPTER ONE

Love Finally Found

I looked up and he was standing at the bar with a friend of his, having some drinks. My first thought was that he was part of the jazz band performing that evening because he had such a glow about him, a secure but open presence, an unmistakable combination of modesty and strength.

My girlfriend Jean and I had come to the hotel in Philadelphia to celebrate her birthday. We drank champagne and ate a great dinner. We hadn't planned to go to Zanzibar Blue, the jazz club adjoining the restaurant.

"Hey, we're here already," Jean said. "Why not make a night of it?"

So we got a table in the club, sat back, and enjoyed the live music and each other.

We were there for about an hour when Ted and I caught eyes. The atmosphere in the room changed. The way he held himself. The way he smiled at me. The shine of his shoes, which says so much about a man. I couldn't wait to meet him, to find out all about this handsome, middle-aged gentleman.

At that moment I knew he would be my husband. It truly was love at first sight.

I wrote a note and asked the waitress to take it to him: *What would your mamma say if she knew you were out like this, enjoying yourself?*

When I looked back to the bar, he smiled again. He sent drinks over for us. When he walked to the bathroom I got a good look at him, and knew I would be taking him home to meet my mother and father.

When Jean and I were leaving, he met up with us at the door. We made our introductions and he walked me to my car.

“Do you mind if I share my number with you?” Ted asked.

“I would love it.”

For our first date we had dinner in the same restaurant. He had reserved a table for us and ordered a bottle of champagne, because that’s what Jean and I had been drinking.

We talked about our families. He was born in North Carolina, but as a young boy his family had moved to Chicago, where he grew up. I was struck by the close relationship he had with his mother and how highly he spoke of her. I found out he was divorced and had joint custody of his 10-year-old daughter Khalia. I told him about my sizable family, my 15 sisters and five brothers, and how I was a preacher’s daughter.

I was impressed that Ted had a deeply loving relationship with his daughter and a friendship with his ex-wife, that he had made the divorce work for everyone. He was able to make sure his child was not affected in any way. You can tell a lot about someone from how they parent their children when a marriage ends.

We had this wonderful eye contact and mutual comfort level. Ted said he felt like he had known me for a long time, that he wanted to plan a life together.

“You know, when I met you that first night,” I replied, “you seemed so different from my past relationships. I could just feel that from the start.”

It was a done deal that we would see each other again.

About a month later I took him home to meet my parents and siblings. At the time I had 11 living sisters, and I think nine of them were on the couch when we walked in.

Ted was amused. “Good lord, Wanda, what are you getting me into?”

Not long after he met my mom and dad and they absolutely adored him.

We dated for quite a long time, about six years. He asked to marry me about four years into our relationship, but I was afraid to give up my independence. I liked to travel and had my own interests. I hadn’t been much of a dater. I had a couple of men in my life, which didn’t turn into anything. I owned a beautiful condo off a golf course and was busy working on my fourth degree. It was very empowering to attain the tools I needed for a competitive edge in my profession. My mom always said, “Get as much education as you can, while you can.” Although I wanted to meet that special someone, life was good for me as it was. I wasn’t thinking much of a husband and children.

All of my 11 living sisters were married and my five brothers as well, but some of them had married prematurely and didn’t have the best lives. And I saw that same pattern with some of my friends. I had always wanted to mirror my parents’ wonderful marriage. And so I was afraid to give up my single life. Afraid of the risk of marrying a man who would turn out to be incompatible, despite the fact that making a commitment to that right man was my ultimate objective.

I believed in the biblical Word of “stand together.” I wanted to “stand together” with the right man and have children with him. I also knew it had to be the right man at the right time and that I would get only one chance.

So I wasn’t yet ready to commit, although I felt very close to Ted.

Then, one brilliantly sunny day, he was down on one knee before me on my deck, tears running down his face: “Will you marry me?”

And I said yes.

I was 36. Ted was 47. I thought I would never find the right man, someone as remarkable as my father. If I hadn’t been as patient

as I was, I might have made the wrong choice. Sure enough, I found him when the time was right—the only piece that was missing in my life.

And so in 1989 I became the last of my siblings to get married.

The wedding was at my family's church in Trenton and it was huge, with about 250 guests. Ted's family came from Chicago. The Trenton-born musical artist Grace Little, lead singer for the group *The Amazing Grace and GLB*, sang for us, accompanied on the organ by Tye Tribbett, founder of the Grammy-nominated gospel group *Tye Tribbett & G.A.*

My father walked me down the aisle, almost like in a dream. Our wedding was "divinely appointed," everything I wanted it to be.

The reception was held at the Old Masonic Temple in Trenton, originally constructed in 1927. The interior featured elaborate murals and decorative finishes in the first floor ballroom. A lot of love was felt in the room.

It was his third marriage, but we both felt it was our first.

I was so glad I waited. I finally had everything I wanted.

Ted was a gentleman, a humble, generous soul with a warm temperament and a good heart. He was considerate, a good listener, and put the needs of others ahead of his own. He wasn't just a talker. If he said he was going to do something, it got done. He hadn't had much formal education beyond his Associate's degree, but he was very smart, a thinker.

He had a magnetic personality. People gravitated to him wherever we went. The way he carried himself, people would ask: "Are you an actor? Have I seen you on TV?" He lit up the room with his smile and stories and infectious personality.

He had an easy way of talking with everyone, especially young people. When we went to my parents' house for Sunday dinner after church, all the kids in the family would surround him at the dinner



Our wedding, 1989.

table like he was the Pied Piper. He talked to them one-on-one, telling them how special they were. Some adults dismiss kids or talk down to them or don't take them seriously, but that wasn't Ted's way. He treated everyone the same, whether it was his six-year-old nephew or an elderly man he had never met before. He was always

so encouraging and positive. Sundays at my family's home were not complete without Ted's spark and joy. He called his brothers-in-law "the senators," and to them Ted was "the vice president."

He had a huge influence on my sister Joan's son Chad. She was a single parent when he was 12 and Ted was like a father to him. Chad went to a predominantly white school and while he was certainly able to cope, Ted was his ear, his listener. He talked to Chad about how any difficulty was also an opportunity.

"Get what you can from that situation and use it as a steppingstone in life. It may be hard now, but it will prepare you for the future. You'll be able to interact with anyone because of the experiences you're having now."

Ted was able to tune into the natural gifts that Joan's son had. Chad enjoyed sports, but Ted stressed that he keep his focus on academics. When Chad brought home good grades, Ted had some money for him along with advice on how to save it. He had a passion for redirecting young men and getting them on the right track. Through our church, he took young people on trips and mentored them in how to dress for job interviews.

Unlike a lot of adults, he never had anything negative to say to a young person; he never raised his voice or embarrassed anyone. If Ted heard a teenager using profanity, he'd say, "You need to check yourself and think about what you're saying. I know you're angry, but we can address that at another time."

He was always focused on what could be improved or changed. He had a gift for sharing what he went through in his youth in a way that connected with people, especially young black men.

And one of the things that I admired most about him was his ability to laugh at himself. Ted never took himself too seriously.

I was truly blessed to have married a man who loved me unconditionally. He put me on a pedestal and catered to me. He taught

me a lot about life and its struggles. He had made money, lost it, and gained it back because he worked very hard. Ted had lived through the civil rights struggles of the 50s and 60s, and had experiences that weren't very pretty. He was real smart when it came to people and the games they played.

He shared those lessons with me. I had always been an emotional person. Ted taught me about necessary boundaries, that I couldn't give to everyone or always reveal my emotions because people could take advantage of that. Even though my heart was still open, he helped me pull it in a bit to prevent me from suffering hurt or disappointment.

Ted was able to retire about five years into our relationship, and every day he went grocery shopping and cooked me dinner. He called me in the middle of the day, every day. *What would you like to eat tonight?* When I came home the table was set, my cup of tea waiting for me. *Please sit a while Wanda and relax before we eat.* The meal was prepared, with all the silverware in place.

He was a gentleman. He would open the door for you, pull out your seat, take his hat off in appropriate settings. He walked on my left side on the sidewalk, between me and the street. He was from the old school. And he was chic. Even in retirement he dressed well and smelled good.

He did whatever he needed to do to be a good husband. I was deeply in love with the man I had been waiting for all my life.

The only thing missing from our relationship was that I wasn't sure whether he accepted my spirituality and how I worshipped. Spirituality was central to my life and had powerfully changed my life. I wondered whether Ted could fully understand that part of me.

Growing up in Chicago, he had an uncomfortable experience with religion. He found that the churches were politically driven.

Sunday worship wasn't about your heart or mind or soul, but who you were, what you wore, and what you owned. Some of the ministers were talking a good sermon but not walking it. And that caused him to get a little cynical, a little bitter, about organized religion.

So Ted wasn't going to church when I met him. He had accepted Christ as his personal savior when he was younger, but his life had changed and he had gotten away from that foundation.

"Why can't I pray at home, Wanda?" he said to me very early in our marriage. "I don't need to go to fellowship."

But there's a line in the Bible about not hesitating to come together in fellowship because there's something powerful about people joined in belief.

I believe that everyone has what they need to accept Christ into their hearts, to transform and have eternal life. It was very important that my husband also believe this.

Before we got married, Ted met with my parents to ask for my hand. I was upstairs sleeping, tired from my work day, when my father sat with Ted and told him about his personal transformation through Christ. My father had arrived at a crossroads one day, where he was sick and tired of being sick and tired. He was drunk and literally stumbled into a church. The preacher asked my dad if he was willing to pray. He rose to his unsteady feet and accepted Christ into his life.

My father's story had a profound influence on Ted. He was shaken by it, to the point of crying. He knew his life could stand for some change. Ted started going to church with me, to Sunday service and sometimes to Friday night praise and worship.

But it wasn't until about a year into our marriage that Ted underwent a deep spiritual transformation. He was talking one day about how some people in our church should live their lives when he stopped right in mid-sentence.

"You know, I'm talking about what they should be doing, and I'm not doing it. I'm being a hypocrite."

The next time the preacher called out for those who wanted to open their hearts and accept Christ, Ted got in the line, just like my father had done so many years before.

Later he told me, “I feel like a changed man.” And I saw that change.

When I met Ted, he had some things going on. He wasn’t a perfect man; no man is. He and his friends loved playing the casinos in Atlantic City. He gave that up completely because I didn’t particularly care for gambling. He also gave up his habit of smoking a half pack of cigarettes daily. Mind you, I would never allow him to smoke in the house. He stopped even casual drinking. God had transformed his life.

He began to get closer with the men in the church, which became a very supportive network for him. In a short amount of time, he made a great impact. He became an usher and eventually president of the ushers. He joined the men’s choir. He was the pastor’s right-hand man in the church. Sometimes there were conflicts among the congregants, as there are in any organization. Ted was the peacemaker, trying to make everyone respect each other’s feelings in the way that Christ would expect of us.

Ted was also our pastor’s right-hand man in helping with the church’s renovation. He worked closely with the architect in redesigning our bathrooms and the new banquet hall in the lower auditorium.

He became even more beautiful in my eyes. Something was shining from within him, a glow that had become brighter, as he went through these shifts in his heart and mind. Our beautiful bond became even stronger.

That was the secret of our marriage—we gave our lives to Christ and we depended on Christ. We prayed before we had meals or when we had a big decision to make. And sometimes we would just hold hands and pray. Just because...

I was so grateful for Ted's transformation.

We took up golfing, which was very relaxing. We traveled to our favorite islands in the Caribbean—the Cayman Islands, St. Thomas, the Dominican Republic. We went to his family reunions in Chicago. We did everything together. He was my best friend.

Five years into our marriage, Ted retired. While I was in school for three years, studying for my Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) with a focus on Leadership, Ted was a “househusband.” He washed, cleaned, grocery shopped, and cooked. He relocated our flower beds every six months, something he loved to do.

Through it all, he had a sense of humor that didn't take a lot of work. He was the life of the party.

On Super Bowl Sunday in 2011, when the Pittsburgh Steelers were playing the Green Bay Packers, my sister Penny and her husband Ruben invited Ted over. Reluctantly, because they knew Ted was a rabid Chicago Bears fan. Sure enough, throughout the game, Ted couldn't stop talking about his beloved Bears. Ruben was a real diagnostician when it came to football, wanting to analyze every play, but Ted didn't give him a chance with his chatter.

“Chicago, they're the midway monsters. They could beat either of these teams in the same day.”

“Ted, I'm trying to watch the game.”

“If Walter Payton was playing, he'd rip right through these guys!”

“Chicago is not in the playoffs! Forget Chicago!”

Back and forth they went all night.

Needless to say, that was the last Super Bowl at Penny's that Ted was invited to.

Our church was very active in the community. Ted and I found out about a donation program sponsored by a non-profit. If our church was approved, we could get monthly donations from a

charitable organization. The organization's mission was to help major companies donate excess merchandise to non-profit charities instead of discarding it.

We talked to Mark, my brother, who succeeded my father as our church's pastor.

"Wonderful," he said. "How much does the church need to get it started?"

Ted said, "We got it." By donating our own money, the church didn't have to pay a cent for the application, the entrance fees, or the monthly pick-ups. We covered it all.

Ted used our SUV to pick up donations from all over South Jersey. Each year, our church community members donated at least \$30,000 worth of goods to the community—blankets, sheets, towels, toys, and small furniture. It was Ted who made this happen and who sustained it. He kept on top of the necessary paperwork and had a great relationship with the donating stores, who loved him.

Our church is on the corner of a busy block. We would put the donations out front and allow people to take whatever they needed for their families. We also used our church's oversized vehicles to transport donations into some of Trenton's most needy and vulnerable communities. In addition to clothing and small furniture, we distributed various kinds of meat, fresh baked goods, and fruit. We invited the families to share in Christ at our church, letting them know that God loved them and that we loved them.

This is how Ted devoted his time in retirement. He did the driving, none of the heavy lifting. He had a back problem and I'm sure it bothered him at times. The other volunteers loaded and unloaded the SUV for him. In fact, a doctor had once recommended that he give up volunteer work because of his back, but that was out of the question for Ted and I never heard a word of complaint from him.

That's the way my husband was. If he was in any pain, he kept it to himself and put his attention on the needs of others.

CHAPTER TWO ---

Fostering Hope

After we got married we bought a larger home, a five-bedroom colonial. Our finances were in good shape, Ted was retired and had time on his hands, and we started talking about taking in a foster child.

He had worked in the railroad industry for almost 30 years, in his later years as terminal manager for a major railroad company in the eastern U.S. and Canada, but he had always wanted to be a teacher. That dream never came true because Ted couldn't afford to go to college and earn a teaching degree. But that didn't hinder his gut feeling that he was a natural for guiding and mentoring young men. He had a gift for connecting with them and he wanted to use it. He wanted to give back to young black men, to try to save them and pull them up, to teach them the lessons he had learned, as he never forgot our history and his history.

Ted told me about how hard his mother worked to keep the family together. As a cook for Jewish families, she was able to take food home for her kids. Since Ted's dad wasn't around, it was her responsibility to make sure he had clean clothes, a tie, and ironed pants when he went to school.

His father was an alcoholic and not too responsible, but he loved Ted. He once told me a story of running into his father at a club in Chicago. Ted must have been in his 20s at the time. His father was with a much younger woman. Ted got a conversation going with

her and his father started to get a little jealous. The woman invited Ted and his father to another party. The three of them got in the front seat of his father's car and were driving down the road.

"Did you hear that sound?" Ted's father said.

"What sound?" Ted said.

"That sound just now."

"I didn't hear a thing."

His father said, "Get out and check the engine."

When he pulled over and Ted got out, his father took off with the young woman.

With his dad mostly out of the picture, Ted's mom and his aunts worked hard to make sure he grew up to be the best he could be. His mom, in particular, tried to instill Christian values in him. As a result, Ted had a pretty stable and happy childhood. He did have his first drink when he was 17 or 18, which might not have been a good thing, and he loved the young ladies when he was younger, but by and large he stayed out of major trouble.

He served a tour of duty in Vietnam. When he came back, his father tried to get him a job in a slaughterhouse, but that wasn't the work for Ted. So he eventually wound up working for the railroad, which became his career.

I liked to tell people that Ted was an historian. He knew a lot about the arts, about sports, and about music. He was thoroughly familiar with blues and jazz (his love of jazz brought him to the hotel the night we met). When he heard a piece of music, he could invariably name the song, the artist, even the year it was recorded.

And he was thoroughly familiar with African-American history. This wasn't history out of a book, but what Ted had lived through.

He was born in 1941, so he came of age in the fifties. He was 14 in 1955, the same age as Emmett Till when he was murdered that year. Ted asked his mother if he could go to the funeral and was told

he could not. It was being held in a Chicago neighborhood far from his, she said, and he was too young for something like that. But Ted wouldn't be deterred. He got together a few of his young friends and they went to the funeral that Labor Day weekend, part of the line of thousands of mourners, almost all of them African-American. He told me that he couldn't forget the dignity Mamie Till showed in the face of her pain. And he also couldn't forget what she insisted on showing to the world. Ted said he had nightmares for weeks after.

He witnessed the rise of Malcolm X. He was in his late teens when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was organizing in the South. He vividly remembered the racial violence of that era. Protesters attacked by dogs and pounded by water hoses. Segregated stores, movie theaters, and bathrooms. He was profoundly influenced by these experiences.

He was in his 20s when Dr. King moved to Chicago and took up residence in the Lawndale neighborhood to lead his fair housing campaign, called the Chicago Freedom Movement. Ted may well have been in the crowd at Soldier's Field on July 10, 1966, when more than 30,000 braved the 98-degree heat to hear Dr. King speak.

"We are here because we're tired of living in rat-infested slums," he said. "We are tired of having to pay a median rent of \$97 a month in Lawndale for four rooms while whites in South Deering pay \$73 a month for five rooms. We are tired of being lynched physically in Mississippi, and we are tired of being lynched spiritually and economically in the north."

The crowd followed Dr. King to City Hall, where he taped a list of demands to an entranceway. They included increasing the supply of housing options for low and middle-income families, rehabbing public housing, and Federal supervision of the nondiscriminatory granting of loans by banks and savings institutions.

Dr. King faced a fierce backlash from whites. A mob of protesters hurled bricks, bottles, and rocks at a fair housing march in August

1966, and Dr. King was struck in the head and knocked to his feet. He would remark that what he experienced in the north was far worse than the south: “I have never seen, even in Mississippi and Alabama, mobs as hostile and as hate-filled as I’m seeing in Chicago.”

Ted wasn’t surprised by the reaction King got because he was well aware of how racist Chicago could be. There were certain sections of the city where black people couldn’t go without putting their lives in jeopardy.

But he was also well aware of the dichotomy in the city he loved—while there was racism and poverty, there was also a vibrant and thriving African-American community of doctors, teachers, lawyers, and entrepreneurs who owned their own businesses and grew their wealth. Ted shone the light on what African-Americans had achieved despite all the obstacles in their way. He absolutely loved Chicago and had a wonderful childhood.

He would often say, “If you don’t know your history, you don’t know who you are, and you can’t begin to move forward.” When he mentored young men and women of color, he’d quiz them about what they knew about the past. Whenever he spoke in a group, the whole room would be listening because he was on target. He grabbed people’s attention with his insights and passion.

Much of my history I took for granted coming up as a young woman. My knowledge was poor. I hadn’t lived through the turmoil of the 50s and 60s. Ted filled in those gaps.

When Obama was running for president in 2008, Ted was adamant from the start that he was going to win hands down. And when he finally won and all the obstacles were being thrown in his way, a lot of people were convinced he wouldn’t win a second term or might not even run again.

“No way,” Ted said. “He’s going to run again, he’s going to win again, and then you’re really going to see his power.”

He never doubted it for a moment.

What I knew of my history was based on the stories my parents fed me as a child about growing up in Mississippi, about the terror black people lived with, their lives continuously at risk. Stories about the hazards of traveling in the south, of being harassed by the police when their car broke down along the highway. The looks and body language they encountered. How they carried their meals in shoeboxes because they couldn't eat in restaurants.

Unlike Ted, I was too young to remember the civil rights era, yet I experienced much of what he did.

In high school my guidance counselors, who were Caucasian, steered me away from higher education and suggested I go to a vocational school. I felt judged by their preconceptions and assumptions. I was African-American and had 20 siblings. Was I just a stereotype in their eyes? I'm not sure, but I was told I wouldn't be able to make it in higher education.

As an educated black woman, I've encountered people who were intimidated by me or insecure around me as I got my degrees and moved up the corporate ladder. There were people who doubted my hard-earned credentials and professional expertise, who posed awkward questions: "Where did you go to school?" or "Do you have copies of your degrees?" Questions that wouldn't be asked of a white professional.

Racism is real, and it's been a struggle all my life to deal with it. I have to meet it where it finds me, and at the same time try to be intelligent about resolving and dealing with it.

In college I studied social work and went to work for a state agency as a family service specialist, investigating homes where children were at risk of neglect and abuse, with the goal of keeping the family intact and preventing foster care placement.

I'll never forget my first removal of a newborn child from a mother who was unstable and suffering from post-partum depression. We had substantial information that the child was at risk.

The police met me at the home. The mother came to the door, her baby in one arm and a knife in her free hand.

“You’re not coming in here to take my child!”

Luckily, she put down the knife. The baby was crying and the mother was drinking alcohol at the same time, completely distraught and unstable.

I sat down with the mother. I didn’t want the police to physically restrain her. I was able to calm her, explaining the concerns we had and how her child would be temporarily placed until we were able to offer her some services and stabilize her situation. We ended up taking the baby from her without any violence.

And then to find out six months later, after going through the court system, that the child was back with the mother. A mother who was clearly unstable. Who was ready to pull a knife on us to keep her child. Who was drinking while she held her infant.

I couldn’t get my mind off that innocent baby in her arms. I realized I couldn’t do that type of work. I just wasn’t ready to deal with those kinds of deeply painful problems.

Emotionally overwhelmed by the experience, I had to leave the agency after a year. I ended up returning to school and obtained Associate’s and Bachelor’s of Science degrees in Nursing. I worked in correctional centers for many years with incarcerated young men.

Sometimes they would share with me what they had done or been accused of doing. They’d say to me, “I was just sitting on the steps when the crime happened and they took me in. I didn’t do a thing!”

I knew it might not be the pure truth, because taking ownership of your behavior is the biggest problem behind bars, but I truly believe that there are some who are falsely incarcerated. They’re in prison because they come from impoverished backgrounds and don’t have the best legal support. While many if not most of them probably should be in prison, I don’t believe 100% of them are guilty. They just didn’t have the resources to survive in our society.

Because of our backgrounds, both Ted and I were deeply committed to doing what we could to help young men, the foundation of our society. We knew that young black boys were at high risk. Our society didn't extend them much forgiveness or understanding. They were stigmatized, labeled, and had "only one chance to dance." Other young people got chance after chance, but black kids didn't get that leeway, either in school or on the streets, from teachers or from cops. So when we found out about a program that offered young people a second chance, it seemed a natural for us.

The program worked with "worst case" teenagers who had been in foster care a long time, bounced from home to home and who had exhausted every option. They were at risk of being institutionalized in residential treatment centers and juvenile detention centers, but the program was designed to give them another chance by placing them in homes with specially trained therapeutic foster parents who could provide a higher level of care. The program combined specialized treatments with structure and supervision to increase each young person's chance of living successfully in the community, with the focus on rewarding positive behavior.

If we signed on, Ted and I would be trained to deal with kids who had more difficult behavioral, educational, and psychological needs. The children would have extra support from a team of case managers, clinicians, behavioral specialists, mentors, therapists, and licensed psychologists.

It wasn't a very hard sell for us. Yes, there was financial reimbursement involved, but that was not our motivation. We had the resources to help and we wanted to use those resources to make a difference in their lives. Although we eventually took a couple of Caucasian boys into our home, our primary focus was on young men of color. We could provide a two-parent family, as well as an extended family to nurture them. We could expose them to travel, sports, and cultural events. We could provide them with experiences they had

never had. Most of all, we could provide attention, understanding, and love.

My husband and I did our homework about the program, and decided to get certified and trained as therapeutic foster parents. I'll never forget the excitement on Ted's face as his dream of becoming a teacher, mentor, and role model began to come true.

The training lasted about a week and I took time off from work to go through the process. The training facilitators talked in detail about the various behaviors a child might manifest.

They talked about the stages of child development, which weren't new to me but were to Ted. We discussed the challenges young people face when they come from dysfunctional backgrounds, where there is no safety or consistent rules, where boundaries are violated. How parental substance abuse impacts a child's behavior. How developmental stages are delayed when the children's parents are addicts. How abused children redirect their anger outward or act it out sexually. How trust is a huge issue when a child has been neglected by adults.

We learned how to deal with those behaviors in effective ways. While we were taught to correct negative behavior, we were instructed to give more attention to positive behavior and reward it with activities and incentives the child enjoyed. It seemed a much better approach than focusing on the negative. Every child has positive qualities that may never have been recognized or reinforced. Our job was to help build the child's confidence and belief in those qualities, to hone their natural gifts and assets.

We discussed crisis situations—what to do if a child ran away or harmed himself or became violent. We were taught to avoid a back and forth situation where we responded verbally in kind or became physical with them. We roleplayed various physical positions that we could use to restrain a child and deescalate a confrontational situation without causing harm.

Ted was impressed by the training. He was touched by what he learned and very empathetic. He felt sure he could make a difference.

We had short quizzes each week to test our knowledge. We watched videos about how to deal with a child who was self-destructive and how to report that behavior.

But the emphasis was on the positive. By embracing the best in each child, we could help them blossom. That was our philosophy of child rearing and we knew wholeheartedly that the program was for us.

Our first foster child was Alex, 17, who came into our home in 2007.

He had been homeless, stealing to survive on the streets, and was terribly withdrawn. He wouldn't talk to us and blew up whenever he tried to express his feelings. Stormed off to his room. Slammed the door. He was holding a huge amount of anger and distrust.

It took a lot of patience, but we waited out his negative behaviors and worked with him until he was able to change. He began writing and drawing in a journal; this artistic expression enabled him to open up about how he felt. Slowly but surely he came out of his shell. He began to trust Ted and then he began to trust me.

Alex stayed with us for one year and stabilized enough to transition to his own apartment, which was awesome.

Larry, who was 16, came to live with us before Alex left and they overlapped for two or three months. Unfortunately, they didn't get along. They fought and stole from one another. They were late to class, skipped school, and bullied other students. We had to make multiple trips back and forth to school, but once again our patience won through. The boys got along better until Alex eventually transitioned out.

Larry had substantial challenges. He constantly threatened to kill himself by cutting his wrists and we made numerous trips with

him to the emergency room. We had to respond at any hour of the day or night if he expressed any intention to self-harm. This was a low point for us.

He had a lot of anger and self-hate because of his past. He blamed himself for what happened in his life. We didn't know the details of Larry's past, but we knew he considered himself a failure, and that's all we needed to know.

"You're not to blame," we told him. "There are a lot of people involved in your life who have some responsibility for what happened to you."

Larry began to talk about his feelings rather than threaten to harm himself. As the only child now in the house, he got our full attention. He saw his therapist, and we supported his love of music and got him some headsets, which soothed him.

We emphasized his positive qualities. He was a big, tall, handsome kid who was very articulate. He was a little sloppy when he first came to us, so we helped him wear his clothes a little better and made sure his hair wasn't all over the place. We tried to bring out the best in how he presented himself and it worked.

We talked to him about why we wanted him to stay safe and the importance of coming to Ted or me if he wanted to harm himself. Larry agreed that he would do that. He even knocked on our door in the middle of the night just to say hi and see how we were doing. No longer did we have to constantly take him to the ER.

It was a lot of hard work, but to see Larry change in the last three months he was with us was extremely rewarding. He attended a vocational school, where he used his mechanical skills to work on cars. Eventually Larry was able to take a giant step forward and transition to independent living in the community.

Next we had Jay, 13, a temporary placement who stayed with us only five days before he transitioned to another therapeutic foster home. Then Michael, 10, another temporary placement for about

three months. We worked with his behavior issues until he was able to move into a permanent placement.

None of the four boys stayed with us until age 18 or longer than a year. For the most part, we were able to nurture them enough so they could transition to a higher level. We didn't know what happened to them two or three years down the line. All we could do was help them as much as we could and then let them go.

We tried to expand their worlds, to let them touch things they had never touched before. We took them to sports tournaments, Broadway shows, live entertainment, and to youth activities at our church. We celebrated Christmas together, decorated the tree, prepared a bountiful holiday dinner. My family welcomed them with open arms.

Sometimes they were uneasy with new experiences. We took some of the boys to the finer restaurants in Philadelphia, where everyone was dressed up and the servers pulled out the chairs to seat you. They were looking around—*am I doing this right?* We helped them order off the menu when they didn't recognize the food. I could tell that they weren't used to it, but they adapted to it very quickly and it was all joy.

These kids had not had any real love or connection. They had no one to listen to them or to take the time to understand them. They didn't understand that feelings could be expressed in ways other than silence or anger.

Ted and I tried to give them the love and connection they never had. We ate meals around our table. We made eye contact as we spoke. We asked about their days. Often we didn't have to say anything. They just needed someone to be there, an adult who cared for them and accepted them unconditionally.

It was very gratifying for us to have a family in this way and to see the changes that love and attention could bring.

Were there fleeting doubts here and there? Yes. During yet another trip to the ER in the middle of the night. When frustrating behaviors reared up again and again. When all we received for our efforts was sullen silence or a slammed door.

But by following the approaches and protocols we had been taught, and by putting our values into action, Ted and I got through those tough moments.

We didn't know much about their pasts when we took them in. We were in the dark about their families and what had happened to them. We knew they had been neglected and abused in some way. Why else would they be in the system? We saw the tip of the iceberg—hints of the past in their habits and behaviors—without knowing the exact details of what lay beneath.

But this was never a concern until we took in our last child.

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All of us together, 1980.

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In her spare time, she enjoys mentoring young women, singing in her church choir, participating in family events, bowling, shopping, visiting various tasty restaurants, theater, reading a good book, and volunteering time to support the community, which gives her an opportunity to grow as a person and to better understand how she fits into the world around her.

