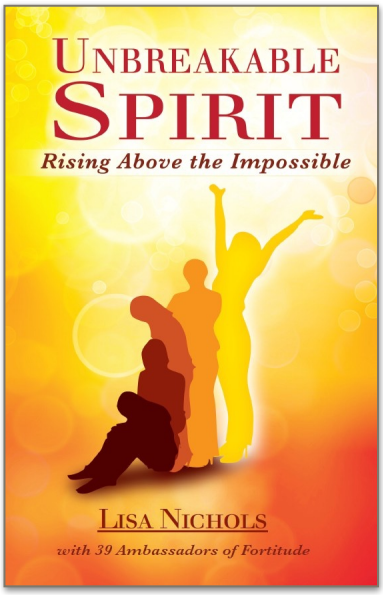
Right Where I Needed To Be

by Millicent St.Claire, an Ambassador of Fortitude



Jail was no place for a woman like me—a mother, the wife of a respected doctor, one who simply acted in self-defense.

During the three months I spent in county jail, waiting to be transferred to prison, I did anything I could to get out of that dank, stinky, smoke-filled dorm. All around me women wailed against their pain and made one collect call after another, trying to get bond and looking for a way out of their self-created misery—and that included me. But for me, bond was not an option.

I attended every group meeting: bible study, church service; and although I didn't have any substance abuse issues, I even attended AA and NA meetings just to get out and get a breath of fresh air. At the close of one of the AA meetings, a facilitator said to all of us, "Just remember, your best thinking got you here." Bam! Her words hit me like a ton of bricks. I was crushed by and stunned by the truth of those words.

Up until that moment, I had convinced myself that I was the victim, even different than "those women," my fellow inmates. Yes I shot and killed my second husband—but it was either him or me, and he'd been abusing me for way too long. In the end, I was convicted of voluntary manslaughter, but they were wrong. *So wrong. I didn't deserve to be here.* Hearing the facilitator's words snapped me right out of my internal psychobabble, and I started to accept my reality.

I said to myself, *Whoa, my best thinking really does suck, because this is where it landed me*. That statement made me stop and take a hard, cold look at my life. I knew deep down inside that it wasn't one thing that led me here; it was a series of bad choice, and it was time to face the music.

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Michael was a tall, charismatic and fascinating man who treated my two children and me with love and kindness—at first. He said, "Let me help you have the life you've always wanted to have. You don't have to struggle." He sold me a dream, and I brought the deal—but didn't read the fine print. After a whirlwind three-month romance, I married a psychiatrist, but had no idea I had actually married a true-to-life Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Three months into the marriage, Michael's dark side showed up. "Mr Hyde" was a drug addict, sex fiend, and abuser. At the end of his working day, he would get high, drink to excess, watch pornography and masturbate for hours on end. He wanted me to join him. I didn't mind a some fun and a little puff now and then, but all of the excess was frightening and I remember saying to him, "Jesus Christ Michael, a little bit of fun is fun, but this isn't a way of life that I want to create and not what I signed up for. I'm a mother and a person, not just an everyday sex toy. I just want to be married and live a normal life. What's really going on?

Whenever I resisted, things went from bad to worse and Michael got violent. The police came to our home many times on domestic violence calls. His drug abuse and bizarre sexual antics because overwhelming for me and I would realize once again that the fantasy of being married to a doctor was not all it was cracked up to be. I'd pack up my kids and leave. A few days later he'd call and beg me to come back with promises that things would change. I would listen to his pleas, too caught up in the fantasy of the life he promised, of the love I so desperately wanted him to give. As a shrink, he knew my psycho-social history and he had my number.

The worst part was, nobody acknowledged my cries for help. Not the police or his colleagues, whom I begged to do an intervention. I was shunted aside and accused of being a hysteric. It wasn't until he had to be admitted into his own hospital that his colleagues tok notice. He had overdosed at his drug dealer's house and on his way home, vomiting blood and convulsing. Now drastic measures had to be taken, because his medical community's reputation was at stake. While he was in the hospital, a tiny hope opened up inside of me. *Maybe now that his colleagues see what's happening, we can get him some help and salvage this marriage.*

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A day and a half after he was admitted to the hospital, Michael checked himself out and showed up back at the house. Wasn't he supposed to be getting treatment for his drug addiction? He hung out for a bit and then said, "I'm going out." I knew exactly where he was going—to Cody's house. Cody was his drug dealer.

Michael came back in the middle of the night and continued on his drug binge added with liquor and porn, and the whole nine. He ranted on about suicide and I'd usually plead with him not to talk like that, but the scene was all to familiar, right down to his ranting about Dr. Nicewander and his wife. Dr. Nicewander was a psychiatrist whose office Michael now occupied who years before, killed his wife and then killed himself. This time, with a crazy look in his eye, Michael said, "We're going to end up just like them." *I don't think so*, I thought. But somehow I had the feeling that this was the night he would actually try to act on this insane notion.

He wanted me to have sex and get high with him, but I was turned off. When I refused, he became enraged. He kept coming into the room and leaving, like some revolving door, and he was considering his next move. Covered in goosebumps, my whole body gripped with fear, and I shouted, "Leave me alone! I just want out of this marriage!" He started choking me, shouting, "I'm going to kill you!" I struggled and managed to get away. I ran and got my gun. I didn't want to kill him, but I got the gun to keep him from killing me. In a rage, he stalked me through the house. He threw a drawer at me. I ducked, cowering near the bed. The drawer hit the bed and then I pointed the gun. It was the point of no return. "Don't come at me! Don't you come at me!" I shouted.

He laughed and then roared, "What?! A gun? Go ahead and shoot me because I'm going to kill you bitch." Shouting bazaar obscenities, he lunged at me and everything went into slow motion. It was probably just a few seconds, but it felt like forever. I pulled the trigger and shot him, and then I watched as his body slowly collapsed on the bed. Fearing he would fall on me, I jumped up. Then I just stood there in horror, looking at his body and caught in the impact of what had just happened.

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With no self-defense laws in my state, I was up the creek. Despite the many police reports I had made for the many crimes committed against *me,* the relevant evidence I had was not included in the trial and the tables turned. *When did I become the bad guy?* I was sentenced to twelve years for voluntary manslaughter. I thought *Our legal system is a sham. I'm lucky I didn't get a life sentence.*

Your best thinking got you here. I kept hearing the facilitator's words replaying over and over in my head as I reviewed the events of my life. For months I stewed in jail, believing justice had not been served. But it was time for me to come out denial and face the music. It was time to take total responsibility for my decisions that led up to that fateful night.

I bought into the dream he had offered me, of a comfortable life for me and my two kids and a happy marriage; and my need for safety and security was so huge, I endured beatings, bruises, sexual humiliation, infidelity, and pain. I wasn't a wife, I was a sex slave and a maid. Now I know that it wasn't just what happened in that marriage that went wrong for me; I had to accept all of of the rotten choices that led me to prison. I arrived at a moment of complete and utter acceptance of my life when I realized: *It's not one thing that leads to a place like this, its a whole string of events and a whole lot of stinking thinking.*

At that point, I couldn't blame anyone for my life: not the District Attorney, not the judge, not the jury, not Michael's parents, not even him. It was all me. In a moment of clarity, I released the blame and accepted responsibility—and I felt as light as a feather. Telling the truth is strangely liberating, but no one said it would be pretty.

I look around me at "those women," my fellow inmates, and I saw that their best thinking had gotten them here too. I came to understand that they were wounded, just like me, vulnerable and in pain, and looking for a way out of their self-create misery, just like me. Although the names and faces change, we're all having the human experience and the crap is all essentially the same. I realized that I too was an addict, but of a different sort. I was addicted to negative thinking and drama. There was no denying it as my life was a product of that negativity and its effects.

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After three months in county jail, I was transported to prison. I remember being led to a group of raggedy old trailers surrounded by barbed wire—like an old army barracks or concentration camp. The guard pointed to my bed, one of fifty rusty bunks with a gray wool blanket on it. She shouted some orders and then left. Everyone was gone out to their work detail and I was alone. I walked over to an open window, looked out past the fence and barbed wire and noticed a cow grazing in a beautiful green glen. It was a perfect scene. Dumbstruck by the contrast between the beauty on the outside of the fence and the ugliness on the inside, I was moved simultaneously by the irony of the metaphor—I too was beautiful on the outside but felt ugly on the inside.

Then I felt a breeze caress me, and in that moment, something came over me. I felt as if God had taken me in his arms and held me. I heard a soft whisper in my ear, "I've got you baby. You're right where you need to be." In that moment, I surrendered. I had made a mess of my life and it was true. In this ugly prison, I was in the perfect place to clean up my act and recreate myself.

I felt that God had put the brakes on me to help me realize that I had exercised my free will to create something other than life. I had created destruction. I asked myself, *If I created this, what else could I create? I have known the worst in myself, and now it's time for me to see the best. I can create destruction, or I can create something life-affirming and meaningful.*

For the next four years, until my release from prison, I worked in the law library Monday through Friday. This gave me time to read, pray, forgive and release my ridiculous past. With every thick, bound book I returned to the shelves, with every legal form I helped my cohorts fill out, I envisioned the life I would create and the change I would bring about in the community. As my fingers turned the pages of one law book after another, I was careful to take responsibility for every thought, word and deed. My new mantra was, "self -correction, self-approval and most important, self-love."

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As strange as it was, I knew I was right where I needed to be. I was on that straight and narrow path to discover my true self and learn to create a life of joy and contribution in our world.

Millicent St.Claire is an AWE-THENTIC author, trainer and presenter. Clients learn faster and better in her sessions and have fun while learning to LIGMO! — Let It Go Move On! She specializes in Accelerated Learning, Neurolinguistic Programming, Hypnotherapy, HeartMath, and other human development technologies. As founder of the LIGMO Institute, she travels extensively internationally, offering one-of-a-kind, life-changing educational workshops and keynotes that get results. Sharing these programs is what she loves and is her personal "occu-passion." Millicent provides unforgettable presentations that will touch your heart, expand your mind and leave you wanting more! She is the author of the groundbreaking Negativity and Drama is Simply Ridiculous which is the foundation of her Ministry of Love and Forgiveness. Connect with her at www.MillicentStClaire.com or www.LIGMO.com