

A book of
 **Storms**
The story of my turbulent life

ANN YOUNG

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This book is based on the best recollection of my memories, events and experiences throughout my life. Names and places were left out, except with explicit permission or in the case of public figures, so as to protect peoples' privacy (and keep me from being sued). All scriptural passages are from the King James Version of the Bible.

I am grateful to my loving husband, for his patience and understanding, and that together our joint creation became this book.

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*I dedicate this book to anyone who finds
themselves at a place in their life when the
question of 'Why' seems unanswerable.*

You are not alone.

I hope you find comfort within these pages.



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CHAPTER ONE



RUNNING AWAY FROM HOME



Just about anybody you talk to knows a story about running away from home as a kid, either their own or from someone they know. It usually involves a dispute of some kind where children don't get their own way and decide that they'll be better off somewhere else, although where this 'someplace else' is isn't always clear. Some stories will have the child that never makes it out the door, while others can tell you about the disgruntled toddler getting all the way down the street, packed suitcase in tow. My husband, Chris, has just such a story about his older sister, but my story about running away from home is a little different. It wasn't a sudden decision to just head out the door, but a carefully planned mission that was years in the making.

Let me first say that in no way did I have bad parents. They are both European immigrants, two of the many who made their way to Canada after surviving the Second World War. To be honest, to use the word 'survive' is an understatement. My father, Czech born, lied about his age to get accepted into the Polish army, but I honestly don't know anything else about

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that experience. Despite what he went through he would never talk about that time. All I do know is that he was in Italy when it was all over and took the opportunity to start a new life in Canada. My mother's story is not so simple.

Born into an affluent family of Russian-Jewish heritage, my mother was only a young girl when her family home was taken by Hitler's army. Her mother was carrying her third child and was too far along in the pregnancy to flee the country. One of the invading soldiers had compassion on her and she, along with my mother and her younger brother, were sent to a concentration camp where they were pretty much treated as slaves. The hardship took her mother's life as well as the child that she had given birth to, so my mother's new sister never made it to her first birthday. At the end of the war mom was ten years old, and like many of the children of that time she and her brother were now orphans.

They ended up in a Belgian convent which was a common solution for war orphans, but instead of finding peace after such a harrowing experience they were treated as servants and faced with hardship once again. That went on for a few years and my mother had pretty much resigned herself to the fact that she too would become a nun, but then a married couple heading for Canada had asked to adopt her. She was elated to have a chance to leave but insisted that her brother be part of the adoption. She refused to lose her last family member. Making the demand risked her one chance for freedom should the couple decide against it, but they agreed and soon traveled to Canada as a family, settling in a small mining town in northern Ontario. Once there it was decided that, for whatever reason, education was not an option for both children. Only one could attend school and the other would have to stay home. My mother decided to let her brother be the one to go to school while she stayed at home to be a servant yet again, this time to her foster parents. It was here that she met and

married my father and was finally able to start a new life that would be her own.

You could probably say that my mother reinvented herself in Canada. Though not ashamed of her Jewish heritage it was now instinctive to keep that aspect of her life tucked away. This was also the era of the Cold War when the U.S.S.R. was viewed as the next official threat to world peace. It definitely wasn't a good time to proclaim that you were Russian. Since my mother is a natural linguist she adopted French as her native tongue and was able to pass for being Belgian. Blending in with Canadian culture was paramount for her, but she still kept a spark of her true heritage alive in the home through cooking, baking, and the stories that went along with those traditions.

It wasn't long before I was born, but I don't remember much about my early years. Dad worked in the gold mines but soon realized the dangers of the job and headed south to find more civilized work. Once he secured a position at the General Motors plant in Oshawa he brought us to our new home which he was building himself. For the first year or so we lived in a boarding house while our home was being built, and we moved in when there was only tar paper on the walls, but in the end we lived in our own brick house with a full basement on a double lot with no mortgage. My parents still live there to this day. With all of the licences and permits needed to start such a task, building a house like that nowadays is unheard of. Back then there was plenty of opportunity for any who were hard working and willing to carve their own niche in the growing Canadian mosaic, long before the generous government handouts that are doled out to today's new Canadians.

Dad quickly gained a reputation at work for being both hard working and conscientious. It also turned out that GM had a policy to reward good work ethics; the employee to suggest the best money-saving idea of the year would be given a new car. I can't remember which year it was that dad got his first car,

but it seemed to me that every year after that he was having it upgraded to the latest model as a thank-you from his bosses at General Motors. In fact, I'm sure that he would have been placed in upper-management if not for the common language-barrier that handicapped many war immigrants arriving in Canada. Speaking English came gradually for both of my parents, but reading and writing was a hardship. That's when I got my first official family job title of Translator.

Now, since we initially spoke Polish in the family home I was in the same boat as my parents. I started kindergarten without knowing a stitch of English and my teacher would have nothing to do with me. I was promptly put in the corner of the classroom and told that I would stay there until I could speak English. Can you believe that? What an injustice to place upon a child! I mean, I must have known a bit of English to understand why I was segregated from the class, but those memories are a bit hazy. I'm pretty sure that my mother advocated for me when I told her how my first day of school went, but I honestly can't recall how I eventually came to learn the language aside from interacting with the other kids when I was permitted to go outside with them for recess. All I can figure is that God must have had his hand in the matter.

My two brothers never really knew Polish to any degree because my parents resolved to speak more English in the house so that they wouldn't have to go through the same difficulties when growing up. I, on the other hand, continued to grow with both languages because every letter that came to the house was brought to my attention. "Ann, what does it say?" They would ask, and only by switching between both languages could I explain, and teach, what was written. I felt as if I had suddenly become indispensable, and for some reason that worried me.

These days, being the oldest child and also being the only girl in the family can grant you a special status above your other siblings. For me, however, it was only a double whammy. Being

the oldest meant that I was responsible for both of my brothers, and since my mother became quite sick after giving birth to my second brother I was responsible for them more often than I would have liked. Being the only girl meant that I was the one to help my mother with the cleaning, even accompanying her on her part time job of cleaning nearby houses for the affluent. While it was never demanded of me I could feel the expectation to help, and I did so willingly, but to this day I feel that I was robbed of my childhood or at least the same type of childhood that my two brothers had.

Perhaps it was the ‘old European’ way of thinking, but my parents never held me to the same esteem as my brothers so my feminism was more of a burden than anything. When it was time for a haircut my father would walk all three of us down to the barber shop, and all three of us were given the same, generic haircut as if I were just one of the boys. It wasn’t until I went off to university that I was able to grow out my hair and start to gain the appearance of a young woman. Clothing me was treated in the same manner on most occasions, but the skirt and stockings were brought out now and then and I suspect that was my mother’s doing. To be honest, those who remember women’s fashion in the sixties will understand that I didn’t complain all that much about the simplicity of dressing as a boy. This ruse, however, only lasted for as long as it was convenient.

Every time there was a domestic problem, usually involving cooking or cleaning, the boy was gone and suddenly it was remembered that Ann was in fact a girl. Heaven forbid that the two boys should take care of themselves! Being able to carry on the family name was asking enough of them apparently, and this became more and more evident as the years wore on. When I wanted to take piano or violin lessons I was told that there was no money for that, but there was money for both of my brothers to get into any sport that they wanted. When I asked for money to go to university it was the same story.

“Why do you need to go to university?” My father would ask. “You’re just going to get married and have a family.” Again, the old European way of thinking. If I wanted to further my education then I’d have to find the money on my own. I thank God that my mother and I did house cleaning for a GM executive who could help me with this dilemma.

Normally only department managers could get their kids in for summer work at GM, and only after their first year of university, but I was determined to be the exception. The executive and his wife were a kind couple who didn’t have children of their own, and they had watched me grow up over the past five years as I helped my mother. They both knew the strong work ethics of my parents, but I’m sure my pleading played an important role as well. I earnestly explained that I needed the GM job before my first year of school or I wouldn’t be able to pay for the tuition or residence. Perhaps he saw me as a surrogate for the child they never had, but he told me that I would have this summer to prove myself and that I was only given the chance because of my parents’ reputation. So without doing so intentionally my parents did help me get to university, but it was up to me to carry on the hard-working reputation of our family name which is exactly what I did for that summer and the next four after that.

Some might think that a few years away from home would satisfy the craving of independence, and perhaps under different circumstances for different people it would have, but nothing could change my father’s way of thinking. Doing well at school didn’t bring pride to his heart, only confusion as to why I was working so hard at what he thought was a waste of time. After all, why would a house wife need to be so highly educated? The confusion continued when it came time for me to buy my first car.

In the summer of 1973 I had the opportunity to buy a new Firebird at factory cost. It was a chocolate brown special order

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that the original buyer backed out of for some reason, so it was offered up to the workers. We're talking about the nice hood emblem and everything! It was a dream come true for any student and I begged my father to loan me the money which I promised to pay back. His response had nothing to do with a concern for getting paid back, only that he didn't understand why I needed the car at all. "Why do you need a car? Your boyfriend can just drive you around." To this day I'm not sure what boyfriend he was thinking of since I would rarely let a boy near me until I got into university. You see, all through high school my mother had me convinced that if a boy so much as kissed me then I would become pregnant. You're laughing as you read this, but it's true!

Discouraged and heart-broken about the car I resorted to bumming rides from anyone I could during my university years and biking down the highway, in my work boots, to my summer factory job when I wasn't on the same shift as my dad. It was hard not to feel resentful towards my brothers when the money pot seemed endless for their post-secondary education, and each being given a car to boot. So it really isn't a mystery that after completing my final glorious year of university (with Honors) I felt that my destiny was finally my own. You could say that I hit the ground running and never looked back, and can anyone really blame me?



STARTING A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

As I reflect upon these years and the ones that follow, it has occurred to me that running from my parents resembles the way that most of us run from God as well. Early in a relationship with our heavenly Father it's easy to be disgruntled, not with what He does in our lives but with what we feel He *isn't* doing. The beginning of this relationship is hard because His ways are new to us. Living up to His expectations is not only

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difficult but also confusing at times. Why does it need to be difficult? Why do I have to do that now? Why can't He give me what I want? Why can't I do what I want to? Sticking it out with this new commitment can be taxing for most and usually results in little, if any, obvious reward in the beginning.

My parents had always provided for me, were never cruel to me, and I know to this day that they always loved me. Unfortunately they just didn't understand me. To be more accurate, we didn't understand each other. They couldn't fathom why a girl would need, or even want, to look after herself or have a career when she could just get married and have a man to do all that for her. They couldn't, or maybe wouldn't, see the drive that I was born with, and I couldn't understand how they could be so blind to what I was. However, I have come to attribute all things to God's wisdom, and my parents' constant denial to my wishes only ensured that I would leave home to go on the journey that He needed me to. And when God needs you to do something, no matter how hard, it's always for our benefit no matter how obscure the task may seem. The lifelong lesson is to figure out when a difficult task is His bidding or just the enemy trying to waste your time.

