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*"Penicillin cures, but wine makes people happy."*

ALEXANDER FLEMING

I often remind myself of the moment when my normal life changed and became abnormal. When I was six years old, my mother became ill. She often locked herself in the bathroom for hours with the lights off and the shower running. The one time I knocked on the door is forever ingrained in my mind. She opened it just enough to peer through the crack. After yanking me into the bathroom by my arm, she held me in a bear hug and screamed.

That was the beginning of her sucking the youth from my life.

What once was just a whisper about my mom and her "sickness" became a loud voice that spread like wildfire amongst the town gossips. Mom never recovered. Nor did I. She stole my childhood and ran off with me to southern California. We left my dad, my dog, the daisy bushes we planted, and all my friends when we moved to the concrete jungle of Inglewood.

Every morning was the same — until the next indelible marks of trauma. Rising from my small twin bed in the corner of my room, I threw off my thin pink coverlet, put on my best thrift-store purchase of a worn-out tee shirt and shorts, then stepped into the old dark, dank hallway and made my way to the kitchen. I hadn't wanted to use a light to help me find my way because it only reminded me of what I didn't have anymore — life on a large farm with a father, family, and the closeness of a small community in the green hills and Yosemite Mountains as a backdrop.

Stepping out the front door into the alley wasn't any more delightful; garbage cans were always strewn with remnants of food and rat droppings. But this school of hard knocks gave me three valuable lessons in my formative years.

First, walking was only used when indoors; jogging was the preferred method for outside destinations. Living in Inglewood was like being a