

## Introduction

**I**t is July and the year is 2004. I started this journal three years ago to help me cope with a time in my life where I felt the need to write my thoughts, not really knowing where this would take me. You wonder during your lifetime if something dramatic will ever happen to you. You think that it can never be, because it only happens to others. I used to think that until almost three years ago. Things have a funny way of falling into or out of place. We just exist for the time and hope for the best. . .

On February 17, 1990, I came to visit my mom, who lived in Orlando, Florida. Being a computer graphic artist in Cleveland, Ohio, I decided to come to Orlando to see if I could land a job here. My mom had told me of a job fair that Universal Studios was having that weekend, so I went. After I went to the job fair, I found out that it wasn't for professionals, but instead for hotel and park workers. I was disappointed. My mom and I decided to enjoy our visit together and went out that night to a new place that had just opened called Mannequin's at Downtown Disney. My mom thought it was a big-band-music place for her age, but soon found out it was a dance place. We decided to stay for a little while, because she probably wanted me to enjoy myself while I was here. We sat down and had a drink. A guy came up to me with a group of his friends, gave me a line, and asked me to dance. I wasn't really interested in him but felt it wouldn't hurt, so I did. We fast danced and came back to our table. His name was Jay and he lived in Daytona. He then said he had to look for his friends and would be back. My mom asked if I liked him and I told her he was nice, but one of his friends really caught my eye. Jay never came back, but his friend was standing at the bottom of the stairway while I was at the top, and he just kept staring at me.

Finally, he walked up to me and asked me where Jay was. I told him I didn't know, but then he started to talk to me. I was on cloud nine because I never thought someone like him would be interested in me. My heart just melted, and I knew at that moment he was someone I really wanted to get to know better. His name was Chet.

He had a wonderful personality, which I was very much attracted to. We talked for a while. Chet and I talked about where we lived. He was from Daytona Beach, but originally came from a small town called Greene in New York. He was a little older than I was; I was twenty-three at the time and he was thirty-four. I never really dated anyone that much older, but even with our age difference we had so much in common – and most importantly, we just clicked in every way. He asked for my number at my mom’s place and said he would call me so that we could go out before I went back to Cleveland. My mom and I left. I felt like a schoolgirl, all mushy inside, and couldn’t wait for his call.

The next day, he called and wanted to take me out that night. Chet took me to some place called Church Street Station, in downtown Orlando. It was similar to Downtown Disney, but much bigger and more city-like. We had so much fun together. I didn’t want the night to end. He later took me back to my mom’s and gave me a respectable kiss goodnight. I thought maybe he didn’t like me because I was so used to the men I dated before trying to take advantage of me. It was a nice change, but I still wondered.

Chet called me late the next morning and asked if he could come by and see me, since I only had a couple days left here. I was ecstatic and knew then that the kiss he gave me the night before was just his way of showing his respect toward me. That night, when he kissed me, my whole body just melted. I felt so safe with him, and it was a much longer kiss. After I flew back to Cleveland, our romance started to bloom. Chet called me every night and we talked for at least two hours at a time, neither of us wanting to get off the phone. Since the phone expenses were so high, he decided he’d rather see me than talk to me. So he flew me, sometimes standby, once a month to see him in Daytona Beach for the weekends.

We did this for a while, until I decided to move down with my mom in August of 1990. Chet flew to Cleveland and drove down with me with all my stuff packed in my car. After a couple of months, I landed an art job – not as great of a paycheck as I wanted, but it was money coming in to pay my bills. After more than a year of dating, Chet and I got married on May 4, 1991 in Las Vegas. Chet moved from Daytona to live with me in Orlando. We had an apartment in

Altamonte Springs, about twenty minutes away from my mom. He worked as a carpet and furniture cleaner, while I worked as a computer graphic artist. It was hard for us at first, because we didn't have the support from his mom. She felt as if I had taken her son away from her. About six months before I met Chet, his dad died from cancer at the age of sixty-seven. He had worked for GE in Binghamton, New York and had just retired after thirty-some years. Chet always felt it was so unfair for his dad to die at a young age and not be able to enjoy any of his retirement. Chet's mom felt that her boys, Chet and Bob, were all that she had left, and she didn't want to share them with any other women. Chet came from a small family, while I came from a large Italian one. So our family philosophy is "the more, the merrier." I never could understand why she felt this way – until now.

On October 24, 1991, I gave birth to our son, Jonathan. Chet was so proud of him and just couldn't believe that we made this beautiful living thing together. Two years later, on September 9, 1993, I gave birth to our daughter, Kristina. She was a spitting image of Chet in every way. I remember when Chet and I were dating, he would look into my eyes and tell me that he only wanted to have children with me and couldn't wait for that day. Well, that day came and he got his wish.

In our ten years together from 1991 to 2001, we worked hard to build our lives for our family. We bought our first house together in 1995 and Chet bought a steam-cleaning business. Then a tragedy happened. On September 26, 1996, his mom died from congestive heart failure at the age of sixty-five. She was a diabetic and had been in the hospital for a couple weeks just before. She was getting ready to go home the next day to Bob's place when the hospital called at 1:30 AM to tell Bob that his mom had died. Then at 2 AM, we got the call from Bob. Chet got off the phone, and for the first time, I saw him cry. Chet isn't a very emotional person, and he never wants others to see him at his weakest. I leaned over, put my arms on his shoulder and told him I was so sorry. I sat down next to him and let him be. He needed his time by himself. I felt so bad for him because this was his mother. He said that when his dad died, it was different. Sure he was sad and missed his dad, but this was his mother. It was just so different, he said.

The years went on and we had our ups and downs, as with anyone's life. The kids kept active in school and in different sports activities. Kristina did cheerleading and gymnastics for a couple years and now loves softball. Jonathan was into football and a lot of baseball. Chet actually coached Jonathan's baseball team when Jonathan was five years old, then started again when he was eight. He didn't like how the coaches were coaching Jonathan, so he felt the desire to take matters into his own hands. Chet had played professional baseball while in college with the New York Yankees and was in the A League, just a step below the majors. He loves baseball and loves kids, especially when teaching them a sport that he has loved so much throughout his life. So that is when Chet started his coaching career for Little League ball and AAU – a higher level of baseball for kids that involves travel. It was a decision that changed his life for the better. Chet is an awesome coach. I'm not just saying that because I'm his wife, but because every time he is out there on the field with those kids, a light just clicks inside of him and you can see him shine.

Everything in our lives was going pretty well, then on May 12, 2001, we met with a doctor, not knowing that from that point on our lives would change forever. . .