

My Story – Part One (2007-2010)

Your journey has molded you for the greater good. It was exactly what it needed to be. Don't think you have lost time. It took each and every situation you encountered to bring you to the now. And now is right on time.

~ Aasha Tyson

When I was a little girl, I always wanted a baby doll with dark skin. I never told my mom, my aunt, my grandma – it was sort of my secret. Reflecting back, I'm not sure why it was such a secret. 5 year ago (2006), Santa brought me a wonderful dark skinned baby that smells of a hint of vanilla. She has curly black hair and a smile that I wish every child had. She is my constant reminder of a passion so deep in my heart and my soul that over the years has strengthened and become a beacon, guiding me and keeping me wishing, hoping and praying for a "right time" and the "right direction".

What I know for sure (thank you Oprah for this line), is that all of my work and experiences over the last 43 years has delivered me the tools and given me the space to prepare for a Journey that I know will have a significant impact. There have been five markers on my journey in the last 13 years that were pivotal in illuminating my path and getting me to where I am today.

1. Having children, becoming a parent
2. Supporting families in my role as a Postpartum Doula
3. Working for Bringing Baby Home – specifically my work on the Attachment Toolkit (A Vulcan Sponsored Program)
4. The Book "Start Something that Matters"
5. My dear friend and former client Carrie Morris. Thank you for giving me inspiration and concrete objectives to get this journey started!

So what is it that I am so passionate about and why?

The health and wellbeing of babies & children – The answer is simple but the challenges in the World are so complex specifically when it comes to those children who are orphans. An 'orphan' is defined by the United Nations as a child who has 'lost one or both parents'. Worldwide, it is estimated that more than 16 million children under 18 have been orphaned by AIDS. Around 14.8 million of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa. According to UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS, *in some countries badly affected by the epidemic, a large percentage of all children, for example 16% of children in Zimbabwe and 12% in Botswana and Swaziland, are orphaned due to AIDS. Even with the expansion of antiretroviral treatment access, it is estimated that by 2015, the number of orphaned children will still be overwhelmingly high.*

What do these percentages really look in numbers? You will be amazed! According to a 2010 UNICEF/UNAID Report the number of orphans due to AIDS, alive in 2009 look like this:

Nigeria	2.5 Million
South Africa	1.9 Million
Tanzania	1.3 Million
Uganda	1.2 Million
Kenya	1.2 Million
Zimbabwe	1.0 Million
Zambia	690,000
Mozambique	670,000
Malawi	650,000

My heart aches knowing that so many children all over the world (even in this country) are without a loving and nurturing mother and/or father or consistent caretaker. For years, I would find myself drawn to information and articles about orphans in third world countries. I was inspired by organizations that were doing their best and making some difference in these orphans' lives but I always wondered what more could be done. In 2007, while working at The Relationship Research Institute for the Bringing Baby Home program, I was involved in a project sponsored by Vulcan called "This Emotional Life". More specifically, I worked on an Attachment Toolkit called "Early Moments Matter: Small Steps, long-lasting effects". While doing some background research for this project, I came across article after article about the unfortunate conditions of newborn orphans and the emotional and developmental impact they suffer years later. It struck an emotional chord with me that gave me a feeling of ah, ha. That is what I want to help with; but how? I am not a celebrity figure and I don't have a lot of money. How can Tina Millican, from Kirkland, Washington begin to help these children?

It wasn't until December of 2011 while walking through Nordstrom that something hit me to get started. A TOMS shoe display caught my attention. Yes the shoes are wonderful (I have a pair on now – Carpe Diem style no less) but what really caught my attention was the book that was on display titled, Start Something That Matters by Blake Mycoskie (founder of TOMS shoes). Another ah, ha! I flipped through a few pages and came across the first of three inspirational messages. It was obviously my day to hear and receive these messages!

"If you are like me and most people I know, you yearn for something more than business success. You're searching for meaning. You want to have the time and freedom to do the things you love and contribute to making the world a better place."

I said to myself, "yes I do".

I flipped a few more pages to a Chapter titled, "Face your Fears" and read the following quote:

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones that you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover." ~ Mark Twain

I felt goose bumps after reading this, and said to my children who were patiently waiting to spend their Christmas gift cards; I have to get this book. Remember the title. We left the book and made our way to Justice and then Zumiez. After Zumiez we started heading to the car and I said, "What was the name of that book?" After shopping with a 9 year old and 12 year old, the title had slipped my memory. None of us could exactly remember so we walked through Nordstrom again and I took a picture of the book with my phone. I was sure to remember this time. I quickly read the inside cover (the kids were really ready to go) and found my third inspirational message and the push I needed to move forward.

"What matters most to you? Should you focus on earning a living, pursuing your passions, or devoting yourself to the causes that inspire you? The surprising truth is that you don't have to choose – and that you'll find more success if you don't. You don't have to be rich to give back and you don't have to retire to spend every day doing what you love. You can find profit, passion, and meaning all at once – right now."

Amen! And that is where my journey begins! I let go of that fear of the unknown, removing a huge roadblock and instead took a leap of faith and moved forward. I haven't figured it all out yet but I am confident that I am on the right track and open to all the possibilities, explorations, discoveries and opportunities 2012 delivers upon me.

"This little light of mine – I'm gonna let it shine!"

My Story – Part Two (2011-2013)

Fear is one of the most common things that keep us from achieving our dreams. When we let go of fear and put our faith in God and His mighty plans, our lives become just a little more meaningful.

(Remember from part one; there was that passion inside me from when I was a little girl...I just didn't know what to listen to or what it was telling me and that was true for 30 more years...until I let go and let God be my guide.)

When I finally began listening to the call around 2008, I still didn't listen with an open heart and let fears (the enemy) overcome me! I still didn't know what I was going to do, but I knew my heart was growing softer for orphaned children. I fought with what I was being told, "No, I am not supposed to go to Africa, China, or Mexico. This is for other people to do. What could I do anyway?" Fears and doubts abounded. But I also realized that I found myself saying with deep passion, I would love to travel to Africa when someone would return from a trip or I would read an article in a magazine or newspaper. Little by little, Africa moved its way into my heart, with a deeper purpose and meaning. One by one, things would happen or show up in my life that had Africa written all over it!

- 2010 - A colleague traveling for work doing research in South Africa and me feeling a longing to go with her on her next trip.
- 2011 - A meeting with a midwife and her husband who live in Kenya.
- December 2011 - An opportunity presented to me to travel with a church group to Kenya.
- 2012 - A field trip with my children to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation filled me with inspiration and desire.
- 2008-2012 - Countless articles about orphans and Africa appeared out of nowhere for me to read.
- A meeting (April, 2012) with a friend of a friend (Tay) to discuss her upcoming trip to Africa.

With this last meeting in April of 2012, I finally gave in to some of the fears and put myself on the waitlist for the trip Tay was going on. I let go and let GOD and am forever grateful! Once I let go things fell so easily into place. Two weeks later, on April 25th, 2012, I was signed up to go to Africa. Miraculously after being placed on the trip's waitlist, I received notice that a woman going on the trip had found out she was pregnant, and made the decision not to go. The spot was mine. I of course said yes but then let fear overcome me again.

Fear of the unknown.....Hesitant to step out of my comfort zone..... Financial fears

What about my kids? What will my husband say? What will my family think?

Fears that I had to overcome:

1. I feared international travel. The long plane ride, the security, the "unknown". I knew where I could go to be safe in the US. I was worried about my safety in an unstable country.
2. I feared not having enough money. How would I earn this extra money to go in only 3 months?
3. I feared what people would say...and they said it! "Why Africa? There are so many children in the United States you can help. I don't understand why you have to travel half-way across the world?" and.... the looks I received when I said, God has asked me to go!
4. I feared that I wasn't going to be able to make a difference. I am not rich, famous or have a lot of money, what could I possibly do?
5. After becoming a parent, I also became fearful and worried about the world that surrounded me. Everything had its potential to harm and the television did not help this. I became a hostage to information and media and I lost my faith and trust in God's word. I now know that I really didn't lose it, it just became buried by worry, fear, and life in general.
6. My husband, not being a Christian and believer in Christ, made it difficult for me and my children to embrace the Word of God in our home and I often felt, trapped. How would I be able to communicate God's calling. How would my husband understand this trip? Would he say I shouldn't go; and what would my response be?
7. I feared, leaving my children. Would they be safe, would I return safely?
8. I feared for my health, as I am diabetic. What would happen if I get sick? Where would I go?

God works in amazing ways though – and over time, I learned to listen, to not worry so much and to fear less. It helped to talk through issues with the group I was travelling with. We created a Facebook page and supported each other through their own individual fears. I was surprised (and comforted at the same time) that others had similar fears. We worked through each as they came up. The enemy tried to stop me from going one month prior to the trip as political unrest heightened in Kenya. We prayed and worked through this and God provide His safety net. In Kenya, two days prior to leaving for Uganda, we heard of the Ebola outbreak in Uganda through text messages and email from family members. Some were demanding us to return to the US. We gathered, we prayed, we collected more information and went to Uganda. God once again provided His safety net. The trip was life-changing.

As I am now planning for my next trip to Africa (March of 2013), I am less burdened with fear. My children tell me "you have done this before and you can do it again." What strength and courage these little ones have. My best advice for those feeling a longing

and desire to go on a mission trip is to, listen to the message (the call)! You are hearing it for a reason and have likely been hearing it for some time! Once you embrace the message, the fears slowly find ways of working themselves out and they aren't as big as they once seemed. Your fears are in your head! Let God illuminate your path and guide you.

*Find comfort in knowing HE will guide your way.
A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps. Proverbs 16:9*