

KELLY THOMPSON

BETWEEN
MONSTERS

& Mercy

AN INSPIRING TRUE STORY OF A SOUL LOST & FOUND

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1.

The Whisperer

In the spring of 1980, our young Mormon family moved to beautiful Minnetonka, Minnesota. Timber Ridge was a cozy middle-class neighborhood nestled on top of a hill in the suburbs of Minneapolis. Green lawns stretched from yard to yard with no dividing fences. Giant oak and maple trees created a lush canopy and stood sturdy and majestic, holding their ground as they had done for a hundred years. Our comfortable three-story home was white with dark brown shutters and sat dead center in the little neighborhood. Surrounded by friendly families with children of all ages, it was the picture perfect place to raise a family. From the moment the six of us drove up in our wood-paneled Jeep Wagoneer pulling a U-Haul trailer, we felt like we were home.

My parents were a charming-looking couple. Mom was tall and beautiful with green eyes that complimented her white porcelain complexion. She had long, thick red hair that she pulled back with barrettes on either side of her head. Always put together, she dressed with an understated sense of class. Dad was good-looking despite some premature balding. He was built sturdy with a little extra around the middle. He had a round face with kind eyes that sparkled when he smiled. Dad had two distinct fashion styles. His career as a consultant in retail marketing and his church callings kept him in suits with crisp white shirts and ties for Sundays and most of the week. But when Saturday rolled around, it was nothing but old T-shirts, worn-out jeans, a cowboy hat, and a pair of hideous black leather loafers that Mom tolerated.

The day we moved in, while unpacking, there was a sturdy knock at the door. My Mom answered it, and a spunky little girl with wavy auburn hair from the house up the lane stood there grinning. “Hi! I’m Molly! You got anyone my age to play with?” Smiling back, and with a wink, my mom said, “I think we might. You look like you’re just about Kelly’s age.” Molly and I were introduced and became instant buddies.

My nickname was “Bright Eyes.” I was five years old with big hazel eyes and shoulder-length blonde hair that was usually pulled up into crooked pigtails on either side of my head. Regardless of the weather, I preferred to run around barefoot and often bore scraped knees and elbows from bike riding and climbing trees. Long before the days of distracting technology, we created our own entertainment. In the summertime, I would be found outside palling around with Molly and other friends on our bikes, making forts, and exploring the nearby woods. We went on scavenger hunts, made homemade slip and slides from Hefty bags, and ran through sprinklers until mud squished between our toes. Sometimes my older sisters, Kari and Heather, would coordinate night games like flashlight Capture the Flag with the neighborhood kids. There was something special and exciting on those warm evenings when we were allowed to be out past dark and our normal bedtimes. Slathered head to toe in bug spray, we ran around the neighborhood, playing for hours until the mosquitos (or our parents) forced us inside for bed.

Hot and humid summer days would often bring powerful evening thunderstorms. Many stormy nights, I would sneak into my sister Kari’s room and climb into her bed with her. In the pitch black, we would open the window over her bed to let in the wind. Blankets wrapped around us, we’d watch and listen eagerly as the eerie darkness crept closer and closer, bringing torrential rainfall and often-noisy hail. Whenever a flash of lightning would strike, stretching across and illuminating the sky, we’d slowly count aloud together with excited anticipation . . . “One-one-thousand . . . two-one thousand . . . three-one thousand!” Until finally, we heard an explosive CRASH! of deafening thunder that would roll and shake

the house. Squealing and giggling, we'd jump under the covers for safety.

The long bitter Minnesota winters drove us mostly indoors for entertainment. One winter, Mom and Dad moved the furniture out of our dining room to give us more room to play. The large empty room made a perfect gymnastics studio and was long enough for cartwheels and back walkovers. Hour upon hour, my sisters and I choreographed and practiced dances for parental performances. We used our Grease and Annie records that we played on our orange and brown Fisher-Price record player. Our baby brother, Brian, would often be found sitting on the floor, watching his three older sisters play while he sucked his thumb and held tight to his blue blankie.

One morning after a severe winter storm, we woke up to our entire world covered in a thick sheet of ice. Everything the freezing rain touched had turned into shimmering crystal. It was a dazzling wonderland. Trees, bushes, and fences were completely glazed from top to bottom, frozen in time. The weight of the ice had caused some branches to fall, and there were power outages across our area. After getting the confirmation that school was canceled, my sisters and I bundled up and put on our ice skates. With the asphalt covered by a thick sheet of ice, the streets had turned into a virtual skating rink. Thrilled that we didn't have to go to school, we happily joined the other neighborhood kids outside and spent the day skating.

When the Minnesota winter weather was extreme and road conditions were icy, some evenings, Mom would bundle us up in our winter gear and we would happily pile into the Jeep with Dad. Back in those days, before cell phones, sliding off a slick road and getting stranded in below-freezing weather could quickly become a desperate situation. Dad always kept a large tow chain in the back of the Jeep for any roadside emergencies he might come across in his travels.

"Keep your eyes peeled kids!" Dad would say enthusiastically while we scanned the ditches looking for unlucky drivers who had lost control and slid off the road. "Look Dad! There's one!" someone would shout. Pulling carefully to the side of the road, Dad would step out into the blowing snow.

“How you doing tonight? Need some help? I have a chain,” he’d say. After grabbing the heavy chain out of the back, we’d all watch with excitement as Dad would get down in the snow and hook it to both vehicles. He’d hop back into the warm car, look at our excited faces, and say, “You ready?”

“Yes!” we’d scream.

Dad would slowly push his foot on the gas and we’d begin to roll forward until suddenly the Jeep jolted and jerked as the chain pulled taut between the two vehicles. We could feel the Jeep slide from side to side using all the engine’s power to try and free the other car.

“Go Dad!” we’d yell.

Finally, the Jeep would begin to creep forward dragging the weight of the stranded car behind it. When it was freed, Dad would shake hands with the relieved driver, politely declining any offer of money for the help. “You have a good night now and take care.”

“Should we look for another one?”

“Yes!” we’d shout.

During those evenings helping stranded drivers, I was proud and amazed by my dad and his cheerful service. He was my superhero.



As young adults, my parents became converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and they were married in the Salt Lake Temple in the spring of 1970. My family was like most typical Latter-day Saint families, and religion played a major role in our lives. On Sundays, we’d have church and then come home to spend time together. Mom always cooked a big dinner, and we’d have a family prayer before our meal. We didn’t go shopping, out to eat, or go play with our friends on the Sabbath day. It was special day set aside for the Lord, and that was a priority in our home. There were other church supported activities, such as Monday night family home evening, youth programs, church callings, Relief Society

night, ward service projects, and more.

Being honest and having integrity were important qualities often talked about in our family discussions. There was a high standard set for doing the right thing. We were raised with many beautiful examples of giving and service. My parents had an open-door policy for struggling teens that needed refuge, missionaries who needed housing, and relatives in need of a room to stay in. We learned that hard work was an admirable trait to possess, and chores were to be done well and on time.

We were taught the reality of Jesus Christ and about the plan of salvation. Knowing those truths came with the responsibility to do our best to live the example that the Lord set and to share the gospel with others. I believed what I was being taught and sensed the truth of it. I remember looking forward to turning eight years old and finally being baptized like my sisters. Our family of seven was complete in the spring of 1982 when our baby sister Hayley arrived.

When I was six and my sister Heather was nine, we lay on her bed and talked about how much we loved the spiritual things we believed. While I can't remember the exact details of the conversation, or even how the discussion began, I do remember that she and I were aware of how bright the room became. I was suddenly filled with a feeling of exceeding joy and love. It felt like the emotion was going to burst out of my little chest. We talked about what we were experiencing, and how much love we had for each other, and for God. Even though we were just little girls, the Spirit was testifying to the truth.

I was a happy child with a future as bright as my nickname. I was carefree and had everything in life to look forward to. Looking at my life and my loving family, no one could have guessed that it was all about to end. We could not have been prepared for the long nightmare that was coming.



When I was seven years old, The Whisperer appeared out of thin air. One day, I noticed my mind was being attacked by a vicious, shaming voice. It wasn't an audible voice, but a constant barrage of negative thoughts. The sadistic presence penetrated and infected my young mind, killing my happy childhood like a deadly virus. Pointing out real and imagined flaws, he seemed to know everything about me. He was always with me, scrutinizing my every thought and action. His cruelty was brutal and nothing was off limits. The Whisperer's message was loud and clear.

"There is something wrong with you . . . You are not lovable."

The effect the intruder had on me was immediate and powerful. Within weeks of being forced to listen to the negativity, I was filled with fear and anxiety. I became self-loathing and developed a strange primal urge to peel myself out of my own skin. I sensed something very bad was happening to me, but I didn't have the insight or words to express it. I was trapped alone with the enemy. The negative thoughts began to wear me down and my mental health began to suffer.

Even at seven years old, the stress of listening to The Whisperer began to affect the relationships in my life. I was almost always on edge and unusually sensitive. I would often overreact to whatever was said to me. Much of the time, people had to walk on eggshells around me or I'd get my feelings hurt and have a complete meltdown. Regular nightmares began waking me up in the night. I can remember laying in my bed in the dark, and the quiet house seemed to make The Whisperer unbearably loud. When the fear and sadness would overwhelm me, I would take my blanket into the hallway where there was a light and try to go back to sleep.

Because the anxiety was often worse around other people, getting me to go to school became a challenge for my parents. I began doing everything I could in a desperate attempt to avoid going. Full-blown panic attacks in the mornings before school became a regular occurrence. At my young age, these panic attacks mimicked temper tantrums, which confused and terrified

my parents.

“They don’t like you. You don’t matter to anyone. You don’t matter. You don’t matter. You don’t matter.”

On and on the voice went torturing me relentlessly. Once, while being teased by my sister, I took my fingernails and dug them into my throat. I can remember the shocked look on her face as I screamed at the top of my lungs while dragging my nails through my skin, leaving long bloody marks. That little episode bought me a ride to see my first therapist. After having me draw a picture of my family and asking me a few standard questions, she assured my parents that I was dealing with some normal sibling rivalry. It wasn’t long before it became obvious to my parents that the therapist was mistaken.

My parents were dumbfounded. At times I would seem like my old self again, playing and laughing with friends. Other times I was withdrawn and full of fear and panic. Hoping it was a phase, and praying that I would grow out of it, they did the best they could to correct my behavior, show me love, and move on with life as normal. Unfortunately, things were only going to get worse. The Whisperer was there to stay.



In an attempt to escape The Whisperer, at around nine years old, I began abusing my very first drug of choice. Food. Every day was the same routine. I’d get home from school, sit down in front of the television, binge eat large quantities of food, and tune myself out. I would often eat until my stomach ached. It wasn’t abnormal for me to cook myself an entire family size box of macaroni and cheese and eat the entire thing in one sitting. I’d wash it down with a tall glass or two of milk and follow it up with something sweet. A couple of hours later, I would eat again, filling up on the dinner that my mom had prepared. At night before bed, I would binge

eat again. I loved being full and I craved the feeling of sedation I would get after a binge. Stuffing myself was the only thing that calmed my nerves. My weight began to creep up, and by age ten, I was uncomfortably chunky. I had chubby cheeks that made me look even more overweight. The more I gained, the worse I felt about myself. The worse I felt about myself, the more I was convinced that The Whisperer was right.

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