

**GLORIA'S ROAD:
A SCHIZOPHRENIC
WOMAN'S
PERILOUS PATH TO
CHRIST**

A memoir

By Gloria Lovejoy



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Although this book chronicles true events and actual persons, the names of the persons have been changed to preserve their privacy.

*To my mother Esther, who never gave up on my writing,
and the late Reverend Mr. Albert Testa.*

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CHAPTER ONE

A “NORMAL” CHILDHOOD

Click click click click click.

My perception of the sound of Pastor Yeager’s shoes on the pavement was far from realistic. To me, it sounded like the Crucifixion, the pounding of nails through the hands of the Lord.

This was the beginning of a nightmare. Everyone in the mental health inpatient unit seemed to be able to read my thoughts.

I described everything as being “muddled.” My symptoms were also manifested in visual misperceptions. One of the other patients, for example, showed me a picture of her cat, which appeared to have fluorescent green eyes that popped out at me . . .

* * *

I was born in a small town in Pennsylvania on September 13, 1959, the first daughter in a family that would eventually grow to have three children. I have an older brother I’ll call Johnny; a sister I’ll call Peggy came along four years later. Because my brother and I were closer in age than my sister and I, he and I were closer, period. I remember how awesomely protective Johnny was of me.

I felt an incessant need for attention, which often backfired on me. When I was about three, during my potty-training days, I used to lie down and kick and scream until my mom came and pulled my pants up. Finally, one day, she grabbed hold of me and spanked me. Needless to say, I never did it again.

Johnny and I were awakened one night about a year later. “Mom’s

gonna have a baby!” he exclaimed. One would have thought that I had not even known she was pregnant, because I was genuinely surprised. Looking back, perhaps I had wanted to block it out of my mind because I wanted to be the baby forever.

The idea of a new sister was stressful. The first thing I said after they brought her home from the hospital was “*Eww! She’s ugly! Take her back!*” I did not understand the whole concept of pregnancy—I thought my parents just went to the hospital, picked out a baby, and then brought it home. After all, it happened that way in all the cartoons.

I was no longer the baby, and I hated every minute of it. I was extremely jealous of my sister; it was obvious from the way I behaved. It seemed like all the attention that was once given to me was now given to her.

Yet, the first few years with a baby in the house were genuinely neat. Not until later did I begin to torment the poor child. In many families, the older ones pick on the younger ones. Only I went overboard.

I had some pet names for Peggy (short for “Margaret”) such as “Migdy,” “Pigret,” “Digby,” and the worst one of all, “Hogtrash.” I coined this name when I was cleaning her room, called her “a little hog,” and said, “Just look at this trash under your bed!”

One would have thought that I *hated* my sister. I used to take the index finger of my right hand and twirl it around in a little circle. She’d scream. Other times, I was just plain mean to her. Mom used to say that I had given Peggy a complex. Most of the time, I just called her names.

I realized just how much I did love my sister one summer day in 1976, when my parents, my brother, my sister, and I were up at our cabin in the Allegheny Mountains. Peggy came down with intestinal flu and required hospitalization. Dehydrated, and with intravenous needles in her hand, she lay there in bed so pallid. I felt as though her suffering were my fault. I felt guilty for the way I had treated her practically all of her young life. But soon after she recovered, I started tormenting her again.

Mom used to say, “Some people have a mentor—Peggy has a *tormentor*.”

I resented my sister intensely, although she had never really done anything to warrant my resentment. My treatment of her to this day cannot be excused, but beneath it all, I do love her. I feel that her hard-as-nails attitude and genuine lack of compassion for me rests with me alone. A person subjected to the same pain over and over again can eventually become hardened to pain. In fact, she probably has many resentments of her own.

I did something horrible to Peggy once when she was a teenager. She had just come back from the beauty parlor with a new permanent, and she looked very cute. I was standing in the kitchen ironing some clothes. I picked a fight with her and finally threw the hot iron at her, but Mom intervened. That changed Peggy's attitude toward me immensely. She never forgave me; she says that some things cannot be forgiven.

The intense animosity between us will probably never be resolved. My sister has harbored a grudge that she will probably go to her grave bearing. As far as she is concerned, she's stuck with me as a sister and doesn't want me as a friend.

CHAPTER TWO

MY PARENTS

In the spring of 1967, my father, a sheet metal layout worker, was stricken with a ruptured appendix.

He developed peritonitis, ileitis, and phlebitis as well. ¹ My brother and I were staying at our grandparents' house, and Poppy called us into a room together and said, "Your daddy might die."

At the age of seven, I was too young to understand death. Death was something that happened to somebody when he or she got really old. My daddy was only in his early twenties.

Dad was in the hospital for twenty-one days. Although he did not die physically, in my mind, I thought he had died. All I knew was that Daddy was away for what seemed like a very long time. I was frightened.

When he got home from the hospital, he was very thin. It truly was a miracle that our daddy was alive. The doctor had even said that it was in the Lord's hands.

Two years after my father's surgery, my mother got very depressed. She had a weight problem. My parents' marriage was on the rocks. Mom had an obsession with an old boyfriend, the birth of my sister, and an incident that occurred when she was a child. All these things contributed to her depression.

1 Peritonitis: inflammation of the membrane that lines the cavity of the abdomen; ileitis – inflammation of a section of the small intestine; and phlebitis – inflammation of the veins.

Mom and Dad fought constantly during this time—they even discussed divorce.

It seemed as though I was always in the middle, trying to get them to patch things up and to start loving each other again.

Mom eventually lost her weight through strict dieting and exercise. But after she reached her goal, Dad was jealous of her. He actually seemed to *want* her to be fat. I think that Dad was afraid that Mom would look good to other men. He was insecure. He was more comfortable with a wife who was on the heavy side. That way, no man would be a threat to him.

In 1972, right after Hurricane Agnes, my father had a mental breakdown. I couldn't figure out why there had to be so much family bickering when a family member had an emotional crisis, but it happened again.

My parents separated this time. Dad went to live with my grandparents. It was very hurtful for all three of us. I can't speak for Johnny and Peggy; only for myself. I felt that if Daddy could quit loving Mom, he could also quit loving *me*.

Dad was down at Grammy's for about a month. He came back home after Mom took Johnny, Peggy, and me to Trenton, New Jersey, to see one of Mom's cousins over Labor Day weekend that year.

The fighting never seemed to come to an end. I remember saying, "Here we go again!" each time my parents started fighting.

I was stressed out—even at the age of twelve. I was confused by my parents' marital problems. Why did they have to fight so much?

I grew up thinking that no one liked me. I wasn't interested in football games, roller skating, or anything the other kids did. Instead, I studied all the time. I didn't particularly like the idea of associating with some of the people who hung out in those places anyway.