



*Cover art by Loui Jover*

## ReleasSING THE CATCH-22

By Shawna Ray

### Moving FORWARD:

People say, “Fake it until you make it”, but I say, “Be it until you see it!” There’s my first famous quote! The thing is, I am a writer and singer-songwriter and I do work and have a degree in Communications. I am somebody, even if the world doesn’t know me yet. You always read these success stories after the fact, but that makes us nobodies feel like we could never get there and be known as somebody. You don’t hear the true thoughts and inner worries that go down. And once the name is known, there is a team of people writing and doing the publishing for you, so everything that is shared is carefully selected and pitched. I think people are ready for and craving something and someone real. What’s the word they use – a person of interest. I have lots of interests and I am a person, even if I only have a small but growing number of followers. A platform is something that is built to hold a person on the stage and that foundation is built. What I need now are the steps and opportunities to get me there. I have been busy raising kids and working full time, so I did not go after my dreams when I was younger and the truth is, I held my self back A LOT. I keep re-reading and rewriting these stories, because I can’t stand me in some moments, the way I was thinking ten years ago when I started writing this, with all of the disclaimers and over thinking.

This is basically a collection of journals and stories behind the songs that came out of the experiences. It has been a PROCESS. And this is the ground floor. It can only go up from here. But every time I thought I was going to actually get somewhere and do something big, there was a catch. Like the Catch-22.

### What is a Catch-22?

Webster defines it as Catch-22 (kăch’ twĕn-tĕ-tōō’) n.

1. A situation in which a desired outcome or solution is impossible to attain because of a set of inherently contradictory rules or conditions.

2. A contradictory or self-defeating course of action.
3. A tricky or disadvantageous condition; a catch.

Joseph Heller coined the term in his 1961 novel Catch-22, nominated as one of America's best-loved novels by PBS's *The Great American Read*. The book was adapted into a film in 1970, and is now a show on Hulu, titled Catch-22 (that came out in 2019). The term Catch-22 describes the absurd bureaucratic constraints on soldiers in World War II. The term is introduced by the character Doc Daneeka, an army psychiatrist who invokes the "Catch 22" rule.

On Amazon, the book descriptions read, "If Yossarian makes any attempt to excuse himself from the perilous missions he's assigned, he'll be in violation of Catch-22, a hilariously sinister bureaucratic rule: a man is considered insane if he willingly continues to fly dangerous combat missions, but if he makes a formal request to be removed from duty, he is proven sane, and therefore ineligible to be relieved." So, any pilot requesting mental evaluation for insanity — hoping to be found not sane enough to fly, and thereby escape dangerous missions — demonstrates his own sanity in making the request, and thus cannot be declared insane.

This conflicting concept brings up related catch phrases like, "damned if you do and damned if you don't", "vicious circle", and "the chicken and egg situation." But here's the previous catch that I have been releasing: past or predestined conditions do not have to determine our fate and happiness.

Those magic ruby slippers have been on your feet all of this time, Dorothy! They might need some refurbishing, redirection, and motivation, but we have the power to decide where we want to go — moving forward — in the now. Woo-hoo! You can do it. I can do it! Like Oprah giving away cars, "You're a person of interest! And you're a person of interest!" I have to give myself credit for a few things. I did finally get this book done!

Deciding who and what I wanted to be when I grew up has been a process, as you will read in the stories that were written during the struggle. Yes, the struggle is real. I decided I wanted to rewrite the end of my life story starting with the here-and-now and cast a vision for where I wanted to go in the next chapter. It has been an emotional journey. So, please, know that anytime I write in terms directed to *you*, I am also (and mainly) talking to myself. For some reason most people have been conditioned to think that the young person just coming up has a better chance of success than the middle-aged dreamer. Why is that? My kids are now grown and in college. I have even more drive to succeed and I have the freedom, work ethic and drive to make it happen. I am not going to stop in the middle to want a family. I have raised my kids and this dream never went away. I have been writing songs and stories the whole time. I just didn't have the time then to do much with them. So now, they need to be released!

This book series and the songs throughout are about remembering who you were when you didn't feel trapped, controlled, or chaotic. It's about catching and releasing fears, and reprogramming your mind with a renewed vision of your future.

It has taken me more than ten years to release this book that I have been writing, along with the songs I have been writing for twenty years. I was my own worst critic, and self-sabotaged at every point where I tried to break out of the Catch-22 loop. And I haven't got it all figured out yet, either. It's a day-by-day learning lesson, even now. Which is why I still haven't gotten any new music out in over ten years. What am I waiting for? The critic in my head to move out? Kick out the critic! "Hey you — get out of my head!

There was always a Catch-22, even in how to release this book. If I am too spiritual, then some of the people I love the most will not read it. If I am too raw and real, then the spiritual people won't associate with it. If it doesn't include "Christian-eeze" language or includes "foul" language, then the Christian publishers won't want it. If it contains too much spirituality, then the mainstream publishers will think it should be labeled and aligned with a "spiritual" publisher. If I tell the failed love stories, but there's not enough love content, then it can't be considered a romance. And I suck at love, so I still have

yet to actually have a real, lasting love story. But I am learning to love myself. If I am a best selling author and songwriter, then they will want to publish and release me. But I need the publishing and releasers to help me get through the gatekeepers, to become a best selling author and songwriter.

Ultimately, this a true love and success story, with names changed to protect identities. I finally reached the point where I decided that the only way to share is to keep it real and be myself. The good, the bad, and the ugly – it's all in there – like Prego. And I am determined to find those who have a taste for Prego. The end of the second book will include how I was able to finally get this released, along with a whole lotta failed dating attempts in "Releasing the Soul Ties." So you, the readers of this book and the agents and publishers that help me get there, will actually be characters in this story. It all hinges on being released, but the release will hinge on getting published, and getting published and releasing new music then touring to share the music and books, along with coordinating Release Retreats will be how the second book concludes. There's still a bit of a catch there. It hasn't all happened YET. But that's why most people can relate.

If you're in the process of reinventing your life, like I am — ready to step into your next... If you are healing and learning to respect and give yourself the love you've always wanted... If you are a music or visual artist who flows when inspired, and love to share...If you just enjoy reading quirky inspirational stories about real people...Join the journey! I hope to meet you at a Release Retreat. I want to hear your story! Connect with me on social media and let's get going! We are the Releasers! Releasing the Catch-22!

I'll be sharing snippets of song lyrics as quotes that came out of the stories throughout the chapters. Online you can click to listen to the songs and read the lyrics. The full book of lyrics will be in a ReleaSING Shawna Ray Lyrics book, or at least that is the plan at this time. But for this one, my sexy jazz song, I want to share full lyrics.

**“Releasing the Catch-22” lyrics:**

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There's that thing that kept me from the feeling of happy  
There's that hook holding me — cycle self-destructing  
Take the doubt — throw it out — look beyond the ceiling  
When you don't know what to do — do the next right thing

**You're releasing the catch twenty-two**

**A time when you lost sight of you**

**Every day we awake, and we chose**

**To be new, twenty-two**

Looking back on your teens — things that can't be unseen  
But then time is moving — like the spring, evolving  
There's divine in your soul, eb and flow of growing pains  
When the loss leaves a hole — fill in up with grace

**Releasing the catch twenty-two (Repeat chorus)**

Dreams are things we don't outgrow

Make your mark at any age

Toxic people - just let go

Moving forward - turn the page

## RELEASING THE CATCH-22

### CHAPTER SUMMARY – RELATED SONG TITLES:

1. **Reinventing** – “Butterfly,” “GPS for Love,” “Birthdays,”
2. **ReleaSING** – “Catch-22,” “Mustang,” “Could’ve Been,” “Live Forgive”
3. **Reminding** – “Boy Toy,” “Survive,” “Write It Down”
4. **Reflecting** – “Humble Pie,” “Baby Love,” “Coming of Age”
5. **Repurposing** – “Rainbows from Rain,” “My Doggy Does,” “Heartsong”
6. **Respecting** – “Diverse City” (book-song), “Picture of Love (Mom),” “Love-Love”
7. **Resisting** – “Mood,” “Dry Dreams,” “Breakthrough”
8. **Reclaiming** – “Recovery,” “Lost Lullaby,” “SHE”
9. **Relationshiping** – “Oxygen,” “Talkin’ Guitar,” “Hot Mess”
10. **Refining** – “Loop,” “Twisted,” “Peeling,” “Storm Chaser”
11. **Reconciling** – “I Am Collective” (poem), “American,” “Awakening”

## 1. **Reinventing** – “Butterfly”, “GPS for Love”, “Birthdays” and “Coming of Age”

*Reinvent – to make changes or improvements – to present something in a new or different way. To redo completely - to bring into use again – make as if for the first time*

Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reinvent>. Accessed 2 Feb. 2020.

In the basement storage room of my Mom’s house in rural Pataskala, Ohio (near Columbus), wooden shelves painted white are stacked with her perfect white boxes. The musty smell of past sump-pump failures and floods float in the air. I am slumped on the cold cement floor, in a daze, sifting through the chapters of my past. As I look up, I see a small raised window allowing a thin stream of light to peak in. My mom, Chris, is the queen of organization. Each thick white cardboard box with the easy-to-open lid is labeled and numbered, according to her system that assigns a “place for everything, and everything in its place.” Detailed descriptions of the contents in each box are written on index cards that are stored in her little green index card box. She learned this system at a ladies’ retreat from the original Queen of Organization, Donna Otto. Thank you Mom for fact checking me here.

Mom gave me one of these white boxes years ago to store memories from elementary and high school, and I proceeded to doodle all over it. My ratchet-looking box marked “Memorabilia” has black marker on the top, and the sides are covered with random thoughts. This memory box is worn and tattered after moving from place to place. The lid is dented in a bit, showing water stains from the time my basement flooded.

I’m 30 years old, and here I am, back living with my Mom — again. It’s a sad state of affairs. Divorced with two kids, we would be homeless if it wasn’t for my Mom. I hate that I never held men accountable to take responsibility. I just didn’t have the energy to fight a losing battle.

But to give my Mom this control is “killin’ me smalls.” (Yes, that is a Sandlot reference). I’m eating lots of humble pie (there’s a song). If I was on the street with two kids, my freedom would be even more limited. So, it is what it is — a box full of mess. One day at a time — moving forward. I have hit rock bottom, so I guess the only way to go is up from here.

**“Birthdays”** lyrics:

“Turning of an age, I see the candles on a cake—and wonder,  
Where am I supposed to be by now?  
Do I blow a wish or is it more about the breath  
That I take in to capture moments of alive?”

Moving into chapter two...  
Fifteen then you’re fifty!  
Birthdays always celebrate.  
Life is good—when we’re living—presently.”

I never felt like I fit into Chris’ perfect white box world. The upstairs of Mom’s house is a beautifully decorated ranch with high vaulted ceilings and rooms filled with real hardwood floors and white carpet. Jesus plaques and religious pictures on the walls remind me of how I tried and failed to be clean and good — a constant disappointment. At some point, I gave up and accepted messy me — away from all the religiosity.

I’m on pretty cool terms with creation and the Spirit that flows through all life, space, and time. But the “churchies” are still praying for me to repent of my sins and come back to their services.

I’m okay with the woman who grew me in her body. That is no easy feat, and I owe her my life in many ways. She has been a good Mom, and I love the strong woman who

raised me to also be fierce, driven, and assertive. She is constantly telling me to “close my cycles” like if you take off your shirt, either hang it up or put it in the basket. Close the cycle! She learned this early in her marriage from a speaker, Bob Gardner when she went to an insurance conference with my Dad.

*“I don’t have it all together either, but I like to learn and grow,” Mom says and wanted me to add here. The family and friend review process is the hardest part about telling the truth. I didn’t have to get their approval, but I am a glutton for punishment apparently and also addicted to approval.*

To be honest, I have so many open-ended messes and shirts on the floor at this moment. Accepting that I am not a white box in this perfectly organized storage room has been freeing. I’m okay with being me — more of a music box that needs to be opened to get the full effect, and to hear the melody within.

Mom never had to work outside of the home, so I can see why decorating and managing the home was her priority and focus, along with her ministries. I don’t have time to be this organized, and I never wanted to tell anyone how they could be “saved” like she does.

We really cannot know for sure which way is the “right” way. We are all so different and come to and through various paths. What feels best to me is just to let everyone discover life their own way, and share the journey, peacefully.

**GPS for Love,” lyric**

“Might’ve made a wrong turn, took the long way around.  
Think I’ve finally learned searching lost and found.  
Tried to redirect us, but we crashed and burned.  
Waiting on the tow truck sitting on the ground.

Wish I had a GPS for love.  
Enter destination where I'll end up.  
Go the right direction to find myself  
Knowing love will always lead me home..."

I have had to work full-time, sometimes two jobs, while carrying and raising my two kids after their Dad left when they were ages three and one. I'm so over the chaos in my mind and life in terms of past relationships. I just need peace. But I also just want to accept that this is me, and to find a way that I can be successful, as myself.

Reaching into my box, I pull out a picture of younger me, sitting on the floor of the living room at our previous house in Gahanna, Ohio, near the Columbus airport. Look at this picture. My Dad is laying on the couch next to me. I must've had a song to share with him that day. I was 17 years old, using a tape recorder and keyboard as my loop peddle — with lyrics in hand. What if I had gone to Nashville or California at that age and gotten my music out then? Maybe I wouldn't be a nobody. Maybe I would be a has been. I guess we'll never know, until we know.

Man, I miss my Dad. He had been diagnosed with Stage Four Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma cancer when he was 40 years old. I hate cancer. Can we all agree that cancer sucks? Watching souls we love lose this battle is



excruciating. There's no way out but through, I guess, when you get to a certain stage. But it just sucks!

I have theories about why they still have not found a cure for cancer. There's a lot of money in medicine and treatments for cancer and other ailments. Doctors are quick to prescribe drugs that are poisonous. And there's a whole lot of testing going on during treatment, without consent. Toxic environments that make matters worse sometimes. I digress. You really don't want me to start getting on my soap box. We'll stick with the memorabilia box for now.

None of us expected to even think of losing my Dad so young. We were all in shock when the doctor told us he had six months to a year to live. My determined Dad, Bob, took it as a challenge and thought God was going to use him to find a cure for cancer. He tried all sorts of alternative, holistic treatments, as well as conventional medicine.

Did you know that sharks do not get cancer? Dad took shark cartilage and spent time in an oxygenated pool. He went to a holistic hospital in Mexico and tried all sorts of alternatives.

I changed my broadcasting and music major plans to stay closer to home for college. My parents suggested that I find a more practical career, even though I had always wanted to be a singer and actress. I had dreams of being a broadcast journalist — having my own show. I wanted to tell stories, human interest stories, like *PM Magazine* that aired at that time. I wanted to do *Oprah*-style shows and interviews and travel the world.

But everything changed when my Dad got cancer. I did graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in Communications in four years, as my Dad was nearing the end of his life. I guess there's that. It has helped me get work to support my kids.

Six years and four months was much better than six months to a year, (as his first doctor predicted), but it was a long hard battle — lost. We tried to be thankful that he was no longer in pain.

I made some very impulsive, emotional decisions during that season that I am living with to this day. Grief is heart wrenching. It reaches into your heart and mind and drags you along the road for as long as you stay attached to the pain. The feeling of missing those we love never really goes away. We just have to choose to live and let go, with each new day.

There are also many happy memories in this imperfect white box. Pictures of fun times with friends. I start pulling out letters from my younger self. She has a way with words, so friends and family members have always said. Reading love letters this young girl wrote to her first boyfriend, and songs she started writing at age 13, I think of what I would say to my own daughter, and feel the need to give myself a pep talk.

*“Girl, what happened to you?”*

*“Life!”*

Lyrics written on napkins and half sheets of paper. Pictures of the squad in high school. I remember daydreaming of how I would pursue acting, and become a singer-songwriter and share-and-tell real stories. Also show-and-tell — going on real adventures and sharing the journey. I have never been afraid of talking to people, of sharing who I am and what I think. Maybe I overshare. But I am tired of worrying about what other people think.

*Look at you! How cute are you in that bikini?*

“Boy Toy” was a song that younger me wrote when her first boyfriend broke up with her to go out with another girl who would let him run the bases.

That was before I rushed to get married before Dad died at age 46, eight months after I finished college. I was 22 years old.. Five years later, still grieving the loss of my Dad, my husband and I were struggling in our marriage, then he left me and our two kids. And you wonder why I have not been able to release these songs or achieve any of these major goals? I've been busy. It is what it is.

Pulling a butterfly stamp out of the box, I can't believe this ink pad with a rainbow of colors still works. I start stamping the paper with various colored butterflies.

*Damn. She really did have a way with words — for thirteen.*

Why do we have to be judged by our age? Why do I even care if people think I'm too old to be pursuing my passion and writing songs at age 30, 40, or 50 and beyond? Because I'm grown and competent in my career, and at this age it's tough to feel like a beginner again.

I was confident as the Director of Special Events — raising funds for a major nonprofit organization and as a Public Relations Director at a major university. I have done well in these jobs, working for “good causes”, or so they want you to believe. I've also seen the dark side of nonprofit organizations and large universities, and the way that they use the money raised is not always what you would think. But there are also many good things that these organizations do to help others and make the world a better place.

I feel good about raising my kids and working hard to support my family. So, why do I even care if I this book and the songs are shared? I should be coasting right now! Not starting over and facing rejection and criticism of my real-life story. For some reason, I feel compelled. I continue to write the rest of the story, which seems more exciting than this one, starting with past shit that has been painful to pull up and work through. Even I don't want to read about this sad stuff or face all my mess-ups.

Why do we do the things we do? My Mom feels just as strongly about the work that she does to encourage people through her weekly Bible studies and prayer group. I have no desire to be a part of that scene, but I guess most people are just trying to do the thing that we feel we are put on this earth to do. I get that we are all different, and that's okay, but some seem to have a harder time allowing others to go a different route. Most people are just doing the best with what we've got, and trying to help others along the way. It's all good.

I should focus on being thankful that my Mom let us move in with her. I am trying. Really, I am. I just hate that I really don't have another option right now. I pay my Mom rent, so technically the basement is my home right now. But she can't help herself. She is always all up in my business. She's a Mom. To most people, she is sweet, caring, and a classy sassy lady. In my case, she has been hella hard to live with, especially since Dad died. I'm being honest here. It has been hard.

Grateful. I need to be grateful we have a nice place to live, and that she helps with the kids. I completely appreciate her help Mom and I love you very much. It takes a village, as they say. I understand Mom is grieving, and there is no timeline for grief. I have no desire to watch the home videos of Dad and his funeral one more time. But she does.

Do you have people in your life who just like to cry? Are you that person? I cry when I feel like I need and want to cry, but I will do my best to avoid it if I can. Cue dramatic music (Boy George), "I know all there is to know about the crying game..." To each his/her own.

I prefer to laugh it out. Laughing and making music beats crying any day in my book. My response has always been to try to make a joke of thing, or write a song or a book – exhibit A - to sort through the emotions.

When Dad was in the final stages of cancer, lying on a hospital bed in our living room, he was telling us about the princess he saw. He was saying things like, "That girl on the

TV thinks she is the princess — but I am the princess.” I asked my brother if we could all just get high and hang out with Dad. I wanted to put on a princess costume. Why not? The cancer had spread to his brain. He had a urinary tract infection and his kidneys were shutting down, which apparently makes you loopy.

When Dad wanted water, he told us we needed to go to the well, which evidentially was in the family room. He wouldn't take a drink until we went in there to get permission from “the man at the well”. I wanted to know if the man at the well could turn water into wine. Mom never allows alcohol in her home — because, and I quote “she was yelled at and beaten by an abusive alcoholic father growing up.” She worries that addiction runs in our family and doesn't want to pass it on.

But Chris, I need a glass of wine tonight. Jesus turned water into wine. I am trying to understand her wound and respect her wishes. She gave us a better childhood than she had, and for that I am forever grateful. If she did have the tendency to become an alcoholic, I am thankful that she restrained and did not continue to pass on that curse.

But she isn't one who just chooses not to drink alcohol. She will make sure you know she suspects you might be an alcoholic if you are ever drinking alcohol around her. I had some friends come visit me and they brought a bottle of wine. She freaked out and poured the bottle down the drain. I was so embarrassed. A grown adult mother of two, I felt like a teen again. She hates alcohol and I get it – the wound runs deep. But it has nothing to do with her being such a good Christian that she abstains from alcohol. Seems to me that some people use religion to deal with their own fears, while judging anyone else who struggles with different challenges. We all have the issues, like a big ole magazine rack. Just please stop pointing that finger. There's a great Paramore song with those lyrics that say, “Next time you point a finger, I'll point you to the mirror...”

Mom also has this thing against Santa, which I suspected had a lot to do with her disappointment growing up poor, feeling like she must've been bad, and that's why Santa never came. She hates that theory and says it's because she thinks telling kids

Santa is real is a lie and she “never wanted to lie to us.” She also felt we should thank the people who actually purchased the gifts for us and I get that. Gifts from Santa were wrapped in special paper at my house and it was always that gift everyone knew you really wanted. That’s the Spirit of Christmas. Mom wants me to add her that she “Didn’t want my kids to be disappointed if they didn’t get the gifts they asked Santa to bring them.” Ahhhhh...Disappointment. Whoop! There it is. I love my Mom, but I had to tell her to write her own book if she wants to tell her story differently. Her lack of love for Santa at Christmas was a thing at our house and my cousins who had me (informed by my Mom) to tell them there was no Santa when we were kids can vouch for me here. No Easter bunny either. We got chocolate crosses. And no Halloween. We had “Clown around Night” at church. I just wanted the candy and presents and to have fun with my friends! Why does it have to be all or nothing? I Jesus invited Santa to his birthday party, so why have you made yourself the door man, trying to keep him out? The date isn’t on December 25 anyway, if you really get technical here. But it was over the top disdain — she got pissed and would not even take a picture with the guy in the red suit at the Christmas party. We all have our personal wounds that when triggered can get us fired up. But this is a true story to give you a feel for my fam growing up.

I don’t want to be shamed for enjoying and appreciating Santa and a nice relaxing glass of wine — without feeling like a sinner that needs to be saved, just as my Mom doesn’t want to be shamed for not going along with the Santa LIE, as she sees it. LIES! It’s all LIES! What a world. What a world. I ate an Easter bunny and I’m melting. (Wizard of Oz, if you’re not following). Just, lighten up. Okay? The man at the well told me it’s okay to enjoy my wine and have Santa décor up for Christmas. Heaven help us.

Do you think heaven is up? I think it’s all around us, through us and beyond us. And hell is the place we keep ourselves when we live in guilt, shame, fear, and anger. Cue the church lady. “Are you talking about Satan? Wouldn’t be prudent at this juncture!” I am trying to release all of this, for me anyway. Maybe I just like to stir (and smoke) the pot.

I definitely believe there is another realm we don't see, and a power much bigger and beyond me that connects us all. When my Dad took his last breath in the hospital, he had been in a coma for almost three weeks. His mom, Grandma G. was there with Mom and me. Grandma G. told us she thought he might die at the same time of the day that he was born. The three of us surrounded him and watched his non-responsive face turn into a huge smile, as if he saw someone coming to greet him or something wonderful on the other side – whatever it was.

He took his last breath at 10:40 p.m. the exact same time that he was born, and then he was gone. The nurses told us this was also around the time the ocean tides change and that babies often come and people often go around the time of the tides. How cool is that? Everything is connected.

We wanted to keep the smile on Dad's face for the funeral, and that was a bad idea. He looked like the Cheshire Cat from Alice In Wonderland. From a distance, it was okay, and people commented that Bob was always smiling. But as you got close, his creepy grin looked like he was growling at you. Yikes! Dad probably thought this was hilarious. No wonder people usually look so serious in coffins. For the record...It's important that the lips are straight across, even if they actually die with a smile on their face.

It was a miserable time. I was thankful that my husband at the time, later the father of my two children was there for me in that season. His name is Jolt in this book because I didn't want to ruin someone else's name. Jolt really could be a sweetheart, and I loved him very much, from what I knew of love at that time. He was very supportive in those moments, and I will never forget it. He loved my Dad, too, and we were all grieving in our own way.

I remember Jolt standing behind me in the receiving line before the funeral with the coffin behind us as people paraded through to look at us sadly and give their condolences.

Jolt was whispering in my ear the whole time, “I love you. I love you. I love you.”

There are some cards and letters in this box from when we dated and went to prom together in high school. I broke up with Jolt in high school because he was so intense. He scared me. He made me a mix tape where he talked in between the songs. It really is sweet, but also sounds very thirsty, as the kids call it these days. Young dumb, needy love.

Oh shit, my ass is numb from this concrete floor. I hate that. Feels like I have been numb for years. Don't get me wrong...I love my kids and will never regret them. Grateful. I just wonder sometimes how different my life would have been if Dad had not gotten cancer when I was 16 and died when I was 22. I still wonder what could have been if I had not rushed to get married at that time. These are useless ponderings. It is what it is. The box of Shawna's past, like a Dickens haunting.

If the young songwriter in this box was my daughter, what would I say to this free-spirited dreamer? Cancer sucks!? Men suck? Life sucks? It's too late? No. I would say, “Get up girl! You need to DO something with these songs! (Also, there's no need to punish yourself by sitting on the concrete floor. We have couches for that and this box is not heavy!) Bless your heart.”

My song, “Butterfly,” inspired my first tattoo of a blue butterfly on my right shoulder blade when I was in the process of divorce. I had moved with the kids to Indiana in an effort to reconcile my marriage with Jolt after he left us. He was convinced that I just needed to get away from my Mom.

I was singing with a band called Haven at the time, and I got us the gig to be the opening act for a concert I was coordinating. I also sang my original song “Butterfly,” during the intermission.

It was the first time someone came up to me and told me my song had an impact. A single Mom, she said, “Your song really touched me and gave me the strength to keep going. I really needed to hear that today.” She shared her story, and I realized these songs are not just about me sharing my story. They are your songs now, and I hope they become part of your story. Music is attached to so many of my memories. It’s amazing how a song can take you back to the time when it imprinted.

Songs have a way of taking us back to those times in our life. I wish someone had shown me which way to go, so I wouldn’t have made such a mess of things. But, (this is a big butt), I wouldn’t have my kids if I had not married Jolt., and I am so thankful to have brought these two amazing souls into this world.

I seriously need directions. I wish I had a GPS for life and love. Like just plug in your desired destination and have a guide. Mom says that is what the Holy Spirit is for, (not just Spirit – it has to be capital Holy Spirit – this was a long editing process with my Mom). She says God is always guiding us, if we listen close enough. My internal GPS has said, “Steer clear of this loser! Make a *you*-turn!” But I continued right on down that path and crashed and burned anyway. Why do we do that?

The song lyrics in this book came out of these times in my life that I will eventually compile with the full song lyrics in a book, *Releasing Shawna Ray Lyrics*. See what I did there? On brand and on point! I have pulled and will share some short quotes from the songs here too, as you are reading the story that inspired the song.

Hopefully the recorded songs will also be available soon. Working on releasing *all* of it. Feels like I have been pregnant with these songs for so long. Get these babies out of me already! Can you hear my patterned heavy breathing? Get them ouuuuuuut! And yet, my ADD tendencies have kept this book in my computer for years. Each time I continued to make edits and add honest and real comments. I don’t want to act like this is easy. It has definitely been a process.

You might be able to just sit down and bust out a book, but this one takes me back to dig up a lot of past pain that I was unwilling to fully delve into for years. It is hard stuff, but burying and carrying past pain is so much harder. Singing it out and writing it in the form of a song is the easiest writing for me. Songs flow, but I have still been crippled by fear for years. And also, just dealing with the timing of life. I had two kids to raise by myself, and needed to work to pay the bills.

**“Butterfly,”** lyrics:

“Sometimes you’ve got to come to an end before you fully begin.

Sometimes you end up with tied hands—the change begins.

Take cover butterfly, you’ve got to trust what’s inside.

It’s all a part of learning...

To let your soul rest.

Learning to trust an unknown plan.

Learning to let go of some things so you can

Spread your wings, butterfly. Do your thing, butterfly.

Show your colors. Bask in the light.

It’s all a part of learning to fly—Butterfly...”

You know the deal with butterflies, right? The reinvention process requires a willingness to be completely wrapped up in the moment, and transformed through the process of friction. That struggle and rebirth is what forms the wings needed to fly. And if you opened the cocoon too soon, the wings would be useless. So, basically everything has a purpose, and comes about in the right time. But how do you know when the time is right?

I’ve heard that this notion of being born to fly irritates some people. It’s a metaphor, okay? I equate it to that floating feeling I get when I’m on stage. In my dreams, I am

looking out at a sea of people who are singing my songs along with me. I am barefoot, like at a Grateful Dead concert. Fly high, butterfly.

*Can I just keep it real... Even if you don't agree with me. Don't you want to stick around and see if and how I work this out? You can judge me and/ or pray for me. It's okay. And for the non-churchies, we don't want to be judgmental either. Keep reading. I love a lot of people, my family and friends who love their churches. I am not referring to all people who go to church when I say, "the churchies" here. Just like "the churchies" refer to "the secular world" when they are talking about the sinners. It is a select group up uptight people that think being churchy is their job. What I am saying is...Stop throwing stones! Just be real. Peace, love and happiness. Call me a pot smoking hippie if you want. It should be legal, if all the other horrible drugs are legal. It is a plant! God intended for us to chill out and open up. I am telling you my story and I am who I am.*

It scares me to share my songs and tell these stories honestly and authentically. That's the truth. But then I remember the woman who was so moved by my "Butterfly" song. When I think about it now, I get butterflies, that fluttery feeling in my stomach like when you watch someone get too close to a cliff.

I have to share. I really don't even need to be the one on stage. I'd be happy to just listen to someone else singing my song(s). I don't have much confidence in my voice anyway. Maybe too scratchy and bluesy for some people's tastes. Maybe too old for the music business. I just feel compelled to do something with these songs that keep waking me up at 3 a.m. The muse is relentless, especially when I have to get up for work the next day.

I keep talking about this to my friends and family. I think they are sick of all my self-sabotage. Is she really going to release this new music and the book she says she has been working on for the past ten years? They know it's a long shot at my age. But won't it be cool if this becomes an example to show that you can pursue your passion, and achieve your hopes and dreams at any age? I don't need to be a superstar. I just want

to have an outlet to share and do what I love for a living. This is for all the nobodies out there who also need to release.

I feel like the boy who cried wolf. That phrase and other stories give wolves a bad name. I went to a Wolf Conservation Center in Salem, NY and wrote a song called Good Wolf to help them raise funds for wildlife conservation. It's on the Catch 22 EP. I have to do this! I have been making myself tell people and talk about these ideas, trying to build up confidence to share my thoughts and songs. I feel like it's false advertising and a tease at this point if I don't follow through. I set big goals and it pushes me to get there. Right about now, you might be wondering if I am ever going to actually RELEASE this book. I might've had to start sharing this in the form of a blog on my site.

*No Shawna. Right about now people are worried about their own life struggles. Get over yourself.*

I have gotten some things released. I recorded some of my songs, but they have not been heard by many people YET. That word is a good one. I have started saying what I want to happen, with the disclaimer that it just hasn't happened YET. At least it's something, right? We all have to start somewhere. The point is, these ideas have not gone away. If I'm crazy to think that all of this means something, then so be it. Reinventing isn't for the weak or those overly worried about what people think.

The irony of -- say Wilbur and Oliver Wright inventing flight, Thomas Edison inventing the lightbulb, or a current artist or inventor creating something that was previously unknown. It takes time and courage. I was watching a show where they highlighted another man who they believe invented the airplane before Wilbur and Oliver. It could be possible that on opposite sides of the world, the idea inspired many people to try, and more than one person to succeed. Ideas usually come from somewhere outside of us. I guess it depends on the person who is most receptive and has the ability to follow through with the ideas. It all depends on the ones who keeps going.

New ideas or approaches can seem absurd before they are fully derived, developed, tested, and proven successful. To actually produce a flying machine in America, Oliver and Wilbur Wright had to crash to the ground over and over again. There was this race to create a flying machine, and other highly trained PhD-types from big-wig universities with major financial backing and staff support -- all vying for the opportunity to be rich and famous. Oliver and Wilbur believed that flight was possible, and they wanted to prove their theories. Maybe because they were tired of people thinking and telling them they were crazy!?

Creating something new that has not been seen or done before can get you so low. The only way to go up is to never give up. You can quote me on that one, if you make it cute and colorful. Somebody else probably already said it.

Once something is proven though, it is then an invention. Of course, the possibilities open up at least to include a finding and discovery where inventiveness is assumed to have required skill. This involves a lot of processing and experimentation, and there is still that skewed possibility that the invention is somehow “a mental fabrication, especially of falsehood,” which is one of the definitions of the root word “invention.”

And then, when it comes to re-invention, some people definitely think you are crazy. You have proven yourself in one area of your life, but then you realize there is something else you want or feel led to try. Maybe something fails or is taken from you, and you need to start over. Maybe you have been completely successful in your career, but there has always been this other thing in the back of your mind or deep in your soul that you wanted to do.

An accident or a death, divorce, financial crisis, health scare or addiction can reroute your flight. Now what? You get to be the pilot. You need to take the wheel and drive. You get to write the ending to your own story.

*Okay, then. Let's do this thing! What's taking us so long?*

*Give me break, okay? I have a lot on my plate.*

Because this book contains personal journals, you might be able to gather quickly that I am still learning and dealing with insecurities. And yes, I'm a bit angry, at men and at God in some of these stories. It just doesn't always make sense to me in this present moment. Some of these songs and journals were written when I was seriously going through the shit. That stage of anger in grief is extremely hard not to take out on other people. I have said sorry as much as I possibly can.

Sometimes the wise one will speak up and give some sound advice. I'm trying to listen to her more often. I can't decipher if it's my Mom's voice in my head or if that is really me or the Spirit in the form of a horse. I just can't be sister Christian. That is *not* me.

I'm trying to stay positive, and I do have a strong spiritual connection to the Source (I will capitalize it, just like Mom capitalizes Holy Spirit). I just don't think it matters what you call it, or how you gather the wisdom and build community. There are many ways to make the journey, and I prefer to stay hopeful. I think that whether or not you see the glass as half full or half empty, we all have the power to fill up the cup. Shawna quote!

My mom loves to tell a story she heard from somewhere about the optimistic kid who had a big smile on his face as he was ripping through a big pile of manure. His father asked, "What are you doing?" And the kid happily announces, "With all this manure, there HAS to be a pony in here somewhere!"

So, let's keep digging. What if the caterpillar stops short of the cocoon saying, "Hell to the no – I won't go!" From the future, we can see that on the other side of struggle is a beautiful new life filled with vibrant colors and newfound freedom. But it feels like you are losing everything that you have become semi-confident in, at that point.

Your whole existence has involved the crawling you have come to know, and trust to get you from point A to point B. You know your way around on your little tiny legs. You know how things work. You feel competent and comfortable in the life in which you are familiar. Sure, you sense a certain kindred spirit with the butterflies that glide above you. But you feel beneath them. You're not good enough to fly. You are merely a caterpillar. And yet, you are beginning to feel compelled to move toward this metamorphosed state. Or maybe you are forced to change. Why is this happening? Why are you disturbing my comfortable caterpillar life? It is beyond your control. Your life will never be the same again.

Another known fact — if a caterpillar is not healthy and at the precise stage and weight, ready to go through several layers of molting and metamorphosis, it will die. I have watched people who seem to die years before they leave this life -- because they refuse to change and grow.

I want to believe that there is some sort of perfect timing, and that someday all this stuff I've been writing down will be helpful to someone, starting with me. Even if I am writing this only for my kids to read someday, I have to get it out. I have to stop stopping myself. Just keep swimming, just keep swimming...

As I write this my house has turned into a ladybug sanctuary. Here's a tip that will be worth the price of admission. It fit there. But I am posting this part for free, so here's a free tip. I hate killing things, so I figured out a way to get the lady bugs out of my house. Take a card of some sort and a glass of water. Put the glass under the ladybug on your wall or curtains and scoop it into the water. They don't die in the water. They curl up in a ball on their backs and float. Then you can gather them all up and pour them outside. Blocking the ways they can get in is also important, but I'm just saying – this will get them out of your house. My Mom calls me Cinderella because once a bird was flying around in the garage, banding it's head on the window. I stuck out a broom and called it and the bird flew over to my broom. I then walked outside and it flew away. I have also

been known to place a bag of potato chip crumbs on the floor to scoop up mice that get in at my Mom's house because she lives in the country. It's a thing. I am a kid at heart.

It is crazy how fast time flies. They always tell you that, but it's true. So, I will be that annoying lady that tells you to treasure those moments, even when you are completely overwhelmed. I still feel 18 in many ways, so I cannot fathom how I have two adult kids. At the same time, I also want to do more to help young Shawna with these songs and ideas because she got stuck at 15. I want to pave the way for young Zach and Kaiya and all of their friends and any of you who are reading this. I want to show in my own little way that it is possible to pursue your passion and fulfill your purpose, at any age. Que music...

### **Coming of Age lyrics:**

How does the time go by so fast?  
I loved you before your first breath  
Looking at you, all grown up  
My heart feels all kinds of love

Coming of age  
Moving in moments  
Scared while you're brave  
So independent  
Well, you're getting there - You will get there  
With baby steps. On to the next, on to the next. On the next, on to the next

## 2. **ReleaSING** – “Catch 22,” “Could’ve Been,” “Mustang,” and “Live Forgive”

*Release – verb — to stop holding on to someone or something – to allow or enable to escape from confinement, set free, to allow a substance to enter the air, water or soil – to set free from restraint, confinement or servitude – to let go of something that confines, burdens or oppresses – to give up in favor of another – to give permission – make something available – to move from one’s normal position in order to assume another position.*

One of my favorite people on the planet helped me learn this lesson of release. My cousin, who I will call Gypsy, and I are three months apart in age and have always been like sisters. Our Moms are sisters, and we have always been close. When my family moved from Phoenix, Arizona to Columbus, Ohio in sixth grade – we both thought it just might be the end of the world. She came to live with our family for a year when we were both in seventh grade, at the time when her parents were getting divorced.

Stay with me as I skip to more present times and then go back. I need to credit those who helped me actually release the pain that was there from the past. Fast forward twenty years when Gypsy and her son came to live with me and my kids. She was taking classes to be certified as a holistic medicine practitioner and yoga instructor. We were living in a four-bedroom house on the west side of Gahanna (where I went to high school). There is something about being back in your hometown that can sometimes bring up a lot of stuff. I was finally back to a stable job with decent income and had accepted that people knew I was divorced. The strangest thing is running into people who you kinda sorta recognize, but you might not remember their names. Then they inform you that you are friends on Facebook. Oh yes, that means we are best friends!

We stapled squares of material over the unfinished basement ceiling frames to give Gypsy a bedroom in the basement and I moved everything out of my office to make a bedroom for her son. It was nice having another adult to help with stuff around the house and call if I needed her to run pick something up, kinda like having a partner.

I was her practice patient when she was learning to do hypnotherapy. She would have me lay on the couch and ask me questions about what I felt I needed in order to heal. In one of our first sessions, I said I wanted to overcome my fear of sharing my songs and stories. She has a very calming voice and I trust her, so I was ready and open. I set my intention to release from that point on. She walked me through some calming guided imagery as soft music was playing in the background.

With the smell of lavender incense in the air, she got me to the point where I was completely relaxed by visualizing water pouring through my body. Gypsy then guided me as she said I was walking up to a castle, and there was a very tall wall (representing my fear). She told me to grab the ladder and climb up, then look over the wall. In my dreamlike state, I saw a band singing on a stage on the other side of the wall. I was up there, barefoot boho hippie, which is my truest form. There were thousands of people all sprawled out on an open field in front of us – enjoying the music and festivities. She explained that the wall was too tall to jump over and suggested that I get down from the ladder. She then guided me to walk over to the giant door at the front of the castle. She told me to reach into my pocket, and there I found the keys to the door. I had held the keys the whole time! I unlocked the door and walked through.

Gypsy guided me to look around. On the other side of the wall, I was looking ahead, walking toward to the concert. But then I saw a huge canyon between me and the stage. It felt like a dream and I was lying there silent. I could hear Gypsy guiding me to keep moving toward whatever it was I saw on the other side of the wall. Remembering that I held the keys, I felt empowered to keep walking forward. I looked down and saw a bridge beneath my feet. I kept walking until I reached the stage.

When Gypsy woke me up, I explained what I had seen and she said that the canyon on the other side of the door was something she had not heard before, but that made sense that I was sensing there were more obstacles I would need to get through before I reached my dream destination. The destination is the journey (another song).

This might sound simple in writing, but something started to shift in my mind that day. My yoga practice, running, hiking, meditation, and other types of therapy have helped me to visualize my goals, change my thinking, overcome fear, heal, release, and move forward. I highly recommend hypnotherapy or guided meditation with a guide you trust.

In favor of sharing here, I am willing to release my position of privacy and fear of what you will think of me, and accept that vulnerability is a position of strength. But I am also aware (and it became even more clear when I started to share with friends and family members who are included in my stories) that some people are not comfortable at all with sharing personal stories and especially do not want someone else telling their story. Gypsy has her own story to tell, so I have taken a lot of her backstory out of this book. Let me just say that she is an amazing soul who has overcome a lot to heal and release herself and if you ever have the chance to take one of her classes or experience a hypnotherapy session with her guidance, it is a true gift.

Sometimes we do need to go back into our subconscious to heal past wounds, and reprogram past thinking that has us stuck. You have to want to release. I had to be the one to choose this and to walk through my fears, overcome the obstacles, and give myself permission to pursue my passion — now seeing it as my destiny. The focus has to be on what you want, rather than what scares you the most.

I wish it was that easy. There are days when I am sitting in front of a television or computer screen, watching other people lead the lives I wish I had the guts to pursue, wondering if this will ever amount to anything. I keep waking up at night with songs in my head as if I am just listening and writing things down as I sing along.

I didn't study music. I'm an amateur at best. I went to a Christian elementary school growing up in Phoenix, Arizona. We didn't even have basic music class. Just chapel on Thursdays and sometimes the church pianist would turn us into an awful sounding choir. I begged for piano lessons and my Mom asked the choir leader to teach me

piano, but I had to give up one of my recesses for those lessons. That didn't last long (because I wanted to play at recess). So, my music skills are at the level of a middle schooler. My Mom wants to make a point here that I chose not to learn piano.

There's another catch here: my own self-bullying inner critic. I have always loved to write out my feelings into songs. It is who I am and what I do. My Instagram is @shawnashares and that is freeing for me. But that does not mean that I don't also struggle and worry about what other people think. I am not sharing because I need attention or need to "brag" as some people see social media. For me, it is about a shared experience and connection that I enjoy and appreciate, with healthy boundaries and balance. It's a means of sharing my songs and stories. For some reason, I just feel compelled to write. It is who I am. I never want to wish that the muse will stop waking me up with song ideas. I love and live for those moments. But what do I do with them now? I'm like Freaky Friday, "I'm *old*, I'm like the crypt keeper!"

I need to get more comfortable on stage again. I never had this fear when I was younger, so I really wish I had pursued music at that age, when I was also thin and pretty – so they tell me, (I still complained about the parts I didn't like and thought I was fat then – I so wish I could be that fat again).

I am a feeler and that can trigger me to be a bit forgetful, so once nerves kick in and I am feeling an audience, I struggle at times with distraction and sometimes forget lyrics. I will state here that it doesn't always have to be that way. I am getting better about staying focused. I sometimes get horrible stage fright and it feels like I am being choked, especially when I try to play guitar and sing at the same time. What goes through my mind in those moments?

*"Holy shit! I suck."*

Maybe by disclosing all of this I can release fear's power over me. Goodbye stage fright. I don't need you anymore. Please inform older Shawna that she needs to go ahead and share now. Also, that despite the fear, she can do it! Move through it!

*Did that work?*

*Not quite yet, but if you are reading this, then I have gotten much farther along than I am today. Baby steps.*

I really am still 13-years-old when it comes to my experience with music. If the 13-year-old me was standing up there playing guitar and singing original songs – the panel of judges might say, “Wow, she's really got something special — for 13.” Can I just accept the fact that there will be people who think I suck and think I'm too old or not good enough, not thin enough, not pretty enough, including my inner critic? And I am producing music with my own money and efforts, while working and raising two kids as a single Mom. I don't have a team of people at a big record label working for me and paying big time producers to make me sound like a million bucks. It is what it is.

I also don't look like I did when I was young and cute. I am aging gracefully and learning to love me, as I am. But the music business has traditionally been a young artists scene. And guys and girls are treated much differently. I see this changing and I love it.

How come guys are not judged by what they look like as much — the way women are scrutinized by appearance? Why are we expected to be half naked, hair styled, makeup contoured, dancing in heels and a bathing suit to sell a song? I am not a woman who is anti-men, but I am a strong advocate and proponent of equal opportunities on all levels. So, you know...I will probably never wear a leotard on stage. You're welcome. I mean, maybe for a million bucks. I would need a trainer and honestly, that's just not me.

I was in a musical when I was 17, and on opening night I completely forgot my lines. I was playing the part of a model in *Working*, and there was a group of mean girls I let get

to me at that time. I was in choir and theater, but managed to take myself out of most things because I couldn't stand criticism and jealousy. I think I actually made a practice of lowering my level of energy — so people would like me. It's ridiculous. But I can look back on several stage performances where I shined and got a lot of praise. The bitchy backlash from that was horrible. Frienemies are not fans.

I wish I had not let them get to me. Learn from my mistakes so it doesn't take you as long to get to this point of sharing. I am amazed by young brave musicians sharing on social media platforms today. They put the work in. I lacked that discipline as a kid. I am working on improving my discipline of practicing and sharing music. Practice makes perfect. If you avoid it, like I have, you can get stuck. I have worried so much about what people would say and think that I created my own hook that has held me back.

Maybe this is just a silly hobby and private journal. But when an idea or song comes to me, I feel like I am swept up into the clouds. I wake up still partially in a dream state. I hear the music and start singing along. It is how I have always processed anything major in my life. Songwriting comes as easy as breathing. That doesn't mean that all of the songs are spectacular. I will give you that disclaimer right now. They are a work in progress, with a growing team of amateurs who are becoming my champions.

My parents were entrepreneurs with transportation companies and a multi-level marketing business. They understood and encouraged dreams. But no one in our family has ever been in the entertainment or music business. They appreciate music as a hobby, but expected us to build a business or career that actually made immediate money for the time worked. Most of the wives in my middle class extended family were stay-at-home-moms, and some kept their careers on the side, usually part-time.

My parents usually only listened to "Christian" music in the house. They were especially leery of rock music (in the late 70s — early eighties) because they were warned at church about back masking, where bands supposedly recorded subliminal messages within their music. I remember finding my older brother Rob (who is two years older than

me) hiding under his bed with headphones on, listening to ACDC. It became a ritual and secret rebellion for us to hide in his room listening to ACDC and introduce each other to cool “secular” music.

Basically, I had the exact opposite of a stage Mom. Non-Christian music found me. Although my Mom warned me of the dangers and pitfalls of “worldly music” because she didn’t want me to be led astray, she did like and supported my poems and songs, especially the spiritual ones or those that were personal to us.

Mom asked me to record and share my song, “Survive”, that I wrote the day Dad died, for his funeral on February 20, 1996. It was crazy. I was rushing around with the church pianist the day of the calling hours. I missed some of my friends who showed up to feel sorry for me. We didn’t have cell phones or social media then, so there was no quick way to inform everyone. They were also at the funeral, but understood once I explained that I had to record a song for the funeral.

My friend Christi was curious, “*You write songs?*”

My best friend in high school didn’t even know I wrote songs.

I just remember sitting in the church pew at the funeral as the song started to play, suddenly aware of the audience of people actually listening to one of my songs for the first time. Afterward, several people came up to compliment me on the song. I figured they were just being nice because they felt sorry for me.

*It’s not very good. I put it together so quickly, in a very sad state of mind. The lyrics are cheesy and music is simple.*

There was something that started to release in me that day. I shared a song I wrote and I did not implode. But it took me a while to get back on that horse again. Until I desperately needed an outlet and release. I shared the first acoustic version of my

song, “Butterfly” (recorded in 2003) during my divorce process. “Butterfly” is a sort of anthem for me. Sharing it was the first time that I released my inner critic. It was the first time that I actually liked listening to a recording of me singing. I love seeing and feeling people respond to the “Butterfly” song.

I was completely disillusioned with “Christian music” at that point. Growing up in church with very Christian parents, I am thankful I was open to receiving and hearing the divine from a young age. But if you haven’t gathered this so far, I honestly have a really hard time with churchy religious people who speak fluent “Christianeze”, and yet seem to miss the point. That part about unconditional love and the whole “judge not lest ye be judged” concept doesn’t always make the cut. How about the Golden Rule? And here I am — judging them. I will check myself and keep moving forward.

*“Treat others as you would want to be treated”* is a good guide for all of life. That stops wars right there if you allow it.

Don’t get me wrong. I know some amazing, wonderful, and good people who are members of the church. The church community was very good to my Mom and our family when my Dad was sick, and after he passed. They coordinated to bring us meals and flowers and were very supportive. No one brings you meals when your husband leaves. When my ex filed for divorce, the churchies prayed for healing in my marriage, and I held on to that hope that things would change.

He then proceeded to avoid divorce court for five years. There were a few momentary lapses of reason when we tried to work it out. But nothing had changed. Nothing has changed to this day. If reconciliation is possible for you, that is great. It has been lonely and heartbreaking at times to be a single Mom, and I seriously miss sex. But to stay in a toxic marriage is worse. I agree that kids do need a Mom and Dad to be present and loving. But sometimes coming from a broken home is better than living in one. I am okay knowing that my kids have grown up in a happy home full of love.

Although I say I'm okay with being on my own, I do hope I will find and experience real, lasting love with an equal and supportive partner someday. I have tried to date a few times since the divorce, but I'm usually attracted to the same type of assholes. My mom says that calling someone an asshole makes me look bad, so I should say sometimes my ex acted like an asshole, but he is not an asshole, he is the father, cough, sperm donor, of my kids. Whatever it is, I am trying to break the habit.

Step up to the mic...Hello. My name is Shawna and I am a recovering asshole-oholic. This is the part where you give me some support, "Hi Shawna." I want to say that I have learned to just say no to assholes, and to make healthy choices moving forward. But there are assholes disguised as nice guys everywhere -- and I keep wanting to believe what I hope they will be, instead of what they show me. The thing is, if you rush in too quickly, you go all in before you even know if the guy (or girl) is a wolf in sheep's clothing. I still want to believe that most people are good. They don't intend to jump in, then jump out as soon as you fall for them. Hurting people – hurt other people. I know it may sound cliché, but the love I am focused on now is learning to love me again.

I really don't hate men. I am attracted to and crave them, actually. No matter which way you tend to go, I think some of us just get programmed and maybe a little addicted to the catch and release. Yes, this is a fishing metaphor. Hear me out, even if you are not into fishing. I grew up fishing with my Dad because it was one of those things we could do together. I am not afraid to bait the hook or hold the fish. I was determined to fish with my Dad because I was jealous that my older brother, Rob, got to go on hunting and fishing trips with him every year, and that because I was a girl, he assumed I wouldn't want to go. So, I asked my Dad to teach me how to fish, and we went on some cool fishing trips in Michigan and Canada.

Anyway, there's this whole bait and lure process that men and women both learn in dating. And those who are not good at it, learn other ways of getting what they want (like becoming wealthy). These days, there are so many apps and dating websites that are solely based on outward appearances, that we leave very little room for good old

destiny to draw us to the keeper. I have known lots of guys who like to fish and catch, but they don't even stop to think of the damage they are causing when ripping the hook out of the fish's mouth and throwing it back into the pond. Ghosters are the worst!

When they get good at the game and think they know exactly how to look, dress, and act to throw the lure out and make the catch — watch out. We have endured and done so much damage to ourselves and others by turning this into a game. The kids are the ones who truly get damaged and eaten alive when sperm donors do not stick around to actually be parents. Just saying. That is the type of behavior that an asshole displays.

Weddings have become big money makers for certain companies. What comes after the wedding? Can you just picture the divorce fashion display and fashion show?

*Today, Shawna is wearing stained grey sweatpants and an oversized shirt to match her depressed state of heart and mind. This can be yours if you screw up and get stuck.*

I still believe all things happen for a reason in this life, and we do the best with what we are given. I have always loved my kids from the moment I met them. When my daughter, Kaiya, was little, she would tell me, "I picked you to be my Mommy." Sorry kids, you got a working single mom who is now a late blooming singer-songwriter/writer/storyteller and a sometimes Dad who is brilliant at construction, housing restorations, and dodging child support. At this writing, our son, Zach, is 18 and heading to college. Our daughter, Kaiya, is 16 and starting her junior year in high school. So, now what? I am forced to release them out into the big pond of life.

While on vacation visiting Denise in California, I read two books. *The Year of Yes*, by Shonda Rhimes and *Yes Please* by Amy Poehler. Highly recommend them both. *Big Magic* by Elizabeth Gilbert is another great book that helped me to get over myself and finish this book. Because I am an artist with ADD tendencies, it sometimes takes me a while to get through books. You don't have to get through this book in one gulp either. Take what you need and keep creating.

I cannot even tell you how many times I stopped writing because it seemed crazy to think that someone would actually want to listen to my songs and hear the stories behind them. Many a great writer and artist had to walk through the Nos to get to the Yes. Many creators scrapped their first draft(s) or work(s) of art to improve and remake a masterpiece. It is getting to the point where I can't stand *not* to be a writer and songwriter. This is who I am and what I want to do next. I still have to work a day job to take care of my kids. But I know now that there is a bridge that will get me where I need to go — eventually.

Have you ever felt that way? Holding on to an idea for an invention, business, or creative project? The muse comes to you and you start to allow it to work through you. But then you let fear stop you and it starts to eat you up inside. You might even get through the door, but then there is still a great divide. Once something is written, that is only the beginning of the process. There is more writing, rewriting, editing, producing, publishing, copywriting, manufacturing, distributing, marketing, and promoting to release. Whatever it is you want to do in your next chapter —,once you get through the wall of fear, there will also be canyons to cross, and a whole lot of work that needs to be done. The catch is, you will always wonder what could have been -- until you follow through and do what you need to do to release your ideas into the world. Visualize the achievement you are longing for, and find your way there.

I'm talking to myself here. And to you. I know, right? We need to get going. Is that okay if we go on this journey together? I am not there yet. I am writing this as I am still figuring things out. There are plenty of books about people who have made it.

So, what is the goal? Financial achievement is not the benchmark of success for everyone. Big homes and fancy things have never been my thing. But travel, I absolutely need to explore. And to be a gypsy, I need freedom from my day job. That is why I started consulting and freelance writing so I could work from home. And when

surgeries made it even harder for me to sit in an office chair, I was forced to find other ways to work.

Your legacy simply requires you to follow through on what you are meant to do. For me, the process *is* the story. The destination *is* the journey. My songs are the soundtrack and releasing them is how the first chapter of my life leads into my next. It's been so hard to explain this to people. But most artists will understand. I hope it will all make sense at some point. Right now, it still seems like a dream.

When you are in the middle of the journey, it can feel like someone is watching you. At least that is how I have felt as a writer. There is this observant eye that is taking in every feeling, emotion, and experience, and documenting things to try and make sense of it all.

I watched a film recently, *The Lady in the Van*, that illustrated this in such a perfect way. The main character played two sides of himself, and they had conversations with one another about the lady in the van. The writer who observed and noted things as they happened was talking to the other side of himself, who was living and experiencing life. *Stranger Than Fiction* is another movie I love, and I swear, sometimes when I am writing, I look up at the voice and say, "No I'm not gonna get stuck! I am going to release these songs and this book! Don't kill me off before I get this shit out!"

Right now, my life is even more confusing than at 22, if you can believe that. I once thought I would have it all figured out when I grew up. I am older, therefore I am aged and grown, but my "up" ladder did not go where I thought it would go.

I am at a plateau in my journey. I've done some good things: raised two brilliant and hilarious young adults, and did pretty well in my career.

For years there was this ever-present feeling that maybe I made a wrong turn somewhere along the way. When I talk to others who have everything that I thought I

wanted, I sense they wish they had made more time for a family and could enjoy the type of private life that is my norm. Or they wish they had more freedom and could be free to create. Social media creates these sorts of comparisons that can really mess us up.

I am happy and grateful for the life I have while looking out at the road ahead. I have remained present and appreciative of my life, kids, and family. We cannot go back or change the path that has brought us to this point. With the wisdom and experience of an adult, I am releasing my younger self and moving forward from this present moment. Are you with me? Can we all just agree that no one has a better life than we do? And if you wish your life was different — do something about it.

“Catch-22” theme song lyrics: “There’s that thing that keeps me from the feeling of happy. There’s that hook holding me, cycle self-destructing. Take that doubt, throw it out, breaking through the ceiling. When you don’t know what to do — do the next right thing... You’re releasing the catch twenty-two, from the fear that has been haunting you. Back and forth we get torn and confused. There’s a new twenty-two.”

Can I just insert a post-edit here that I went to see the new *Frozen 2* movie and this “Do the next right thing” quote was stolen from my unreleased book and song. Or maybe it is a general good quote that Denice shared with me years ago, and I held too tight -- so the Universe needed to get that out there in a bigger way, since I was taking too long.

Age 22 is when I rushed to get married to Jolt just before my dad passed away. Jolt is the code name for the ex-husband/father of my children previously mentioned, if you have forgotten or are just popping in here. That whole season of life shook me, and it has taken a long time to get it out of my system.

*Okay we get it. Move on.*

*But I need to tell the story about how I met Jolt without pissing him off or calling him an asshole.*

Jolt was that mysterious bad boy who I met in my senior year at high school, when he was a junior. The type that seems so attractive and cool in the movies. He looks a lot like Sean Penn, thin and 5'10" (just tall enough), with brown hair and hazel eyes, (but his eyes rarely sparkle. They are intense). He was always thinking, and walked with a very direct "tough guy" attitude. He went by the nickname "Aussie" so I thought he was from Australia, which intrigued me, because that is at the top of my bucket list.

I was full of energy, never met a stranger, with blueish hazel eyes and black hair. A pear-shaped figure, average height (5'6") and athletic build, with a tiny tummy I so want to get back. Not bragging, so you know. I thought I was fat and ugly then. But people tell me I was pretty, and I am trying to do a good job of helping you picture these characters.

*Enough with the disclaimers.*

Lucky to never need braces or glasses, although that is not the case now. I was thin back then and had a thick butt (I only say this because I received the "Best Butt" in my class award in those high school "Most Likely To" awards things). I guess by some definitions, I was pretty. I never wanted to be categorized or have guys like me just because of what I looked like. I was more than that. I got good grades in school, and have always been very intuitive and creative. I feel everything, and am still learning how to guard myself and not take on other's people's energy.

Jolt's father was a sergeant major in the military, and he had moved around a lot, which gave him a sort of detached confidence (or so it seemed). He acted like he didn't care to fit in, but also knew how to make friends quick and adapt to change easily.

A friend from church informed me that there was this new guy at school that had transferred into all of my classes just to meet me.

“Do you know Jolt is totally in love with you?!”

“What? Who?” I had no idea.

“I work with him at Wendy’s, and the other day we were all hanging out. The question was asked, ‘If there was one girl you could get with – who would it be?’ Most of us were naming celebrities. But Jolt said ‘Shawna Goebel...by a fireplace...and I don’t even have touch her...I just want to look into her eyes. She has the coolest eyes.’”

“Whaaaat?” I didn’t even know what to say to that. Especially once I learned his name and figured out who he was, realizing that he was in *all* but one of my classes that semester.

About the time I finally figured out who Jolt was, he walked up out of the blue one Friday and asked me if I wanted to go out with him that night. I had never even talked to him. I don’t even remember exactly what he said, but I was thinking he should have at least tried to talk to me first, and then maybe ask for my number?

“Oh...Sorry. I’m going out of town this weekend.” This was true, because I was supposed to go snow skiing with my family. Turned out to be too warm, so there was not enough snow. We ended up postponing our trip.

Since I was home, I went to a party with friends that Saturday night. Jolt walked up and got super close to my face because the music was loud. It kind-of freaked me out. He had a beer in his hand and was extra bold that night, “Thought you were going to be out of town this weekend?”

“Yeah, well, I was, but...”

“I get it. You’re just too stuck up to go out with anyone who is not as popular as you!?!”

What the what??? Shocked, I just stood there confused, laughing a little with my friends who saw this whole thing go down. He walked away and left the party before I could even explain.

I was with a group of friends, so they were all teasing me the rest of the night. “Yeah Shawna, you stuck up bitch! You think you’re so popular!”

I have talked to people now who did not hang out with us in high school, and they tell me I was “popular” -- whatever that means. I thought I was friends with everyone -- all of the different groups of kids in school. I honestly never thought I was better than anyone, and tried to be nice to everyone. I hated the idea that someone thought I was stuck up. This really bothered me. I tried to be kind and friendly and made a point to stick up for people who did not seem to have many friends. I was just having fun and getting through school like everybody else.

Mumbling to myself, “I’m not stuck up.”

That Monday I decided I would explain things to Jolt during our television broadcasting class. It was my favorite class. At the time I thought I wanted to go into broadcasting. I loved shows with human-interest stories, like *PM Magazine* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. During TV class, we had a lot of freedom to walk the halls and go out on location to shoot videos and coordinate interviews. We would buy candy at lunch and sit around eating it.

Jolt was acting like a sour patch kid, enticing and sweet, but bitter when I walked up to him. I tried to explain that I was supposed to go skiing, but there was no snow. “Forget about it. You’re too cool for me.” He threw these words as he walked away, thinking he knew me.

“Whatever.” (Asshole. I mean, that is the sort of thing that someone who was acting like an asshole would say and do). “You don’t know me!” *How did I not see that big red warning sign?*

So, I let it go and eventually Jolt started dating another girl at school. He would avoid me anytime I was in class, and since he was in all my classes, this was so annoying and obvious. I didn’t really know him very well or the girl he was dating. I was just glad the pressure was off. Eventually, we were paired to do some stories together, and we slowly became friends. One night he called to plan filming for a story, and we stayed up until 3:00 a.m., talking about the universe and the meaning of life. He was witty, intelligent, and deep, which matched my craving for constant conversation. We both won TV awards at the end of the year for best story and best anchor. It was a thing.

On Valentine’s Day, my friend was dating Jolt’s friend and the four of us watched a movie together at her house. She told me he had broken up with his girlfriend. It was the awkward flirting/ not flirting thing. He sat next to me and that made me happy, because he seemed to make a sport out of acting like he didn’t care most of the time. I realized in that moment that I wanted him to sit by me. Maybe I was starting to like him. A little. I asked about his girlfriend.

“We broke up, but she still got into my bedroom and decorated it for Valentine’s Day.”

“Aww, that’s sweet —and sad. Does she think you’re still together?”

He laughed while pulling out a bag of chocolate hearts. “No—she just wishes we were still together. Want some?”

His friend loved to tease, “You know you want some Shawna.”

“I might want some chocolate, but it won’t taste good from a broken heart.” We all laughed and ate the candy from Jolt’s ex-girlfriend while watching *Lethal Weapon* with Mel Gibson and Danny Glover.

Movies mess us up. They make it seem like wanting the bad boy is a good thing. Like that guy will actually change magically once he has your love. Little did I know how much Jolt would hurt and discard me, with the same nonchalant shrug, while giving away the gifts I gave him.

We kissed for the first time that night, and hung out a lot for the next three months. I liked him, but he was so intense and said “I love you” so quickly that he still freaked me out at times. I told him I liked him a lot, but wanted to take it slow. We agreed we could still date other people. When I didn’t do or say what he wanted, he got really angry and mean at times. But then he would come back and apologize.

I had a lot going on my senior year. My Dad had cancer, and things were really tense at home. I had planned to go to Bowling Green University in Ohio because it was known for having a good broadcasting program at that time. My friend, Merry, went there and we had planned to be roommates.

My Dad wanted me to stay closer to home and maybe go to The Ohio State University. I went to visit OSU, but it was so large and overwhelming to me at the time. I was sad and scared of losing my Dad, but also feeling like my plans were getting clouded by cancer. At times, it seemed like my Mom was losing her mind completely.

I was looking forward to getting away from it all on spring break in Fort Myers, Florida with my friends. My parents wouldn’t let me go unless they chaperoned. So, my Mom and Dad drove me and five friends in our big red van. Another friend and her parents caravanned. Mom and Dad stayed in a separate hotel room, but my Dad spied on us from the bushes.

One night our guy friends, (I will call them Dude and Witt), came over and we let them in, even though it was against the parent's rules. We heard a knock on the door, so the guys hurried to hide in the shower. My Dad had gotten an extra key, busted in and searched the room. Pulling back the shower curtain, he found two guys with bottles of Jim Beam and Vodka in both hands. "Helloooo Mr. Goebel," chirped Witt. My Dad smirked while trying to act stern, "You guys need to leave." We all fell out laughing when the guys quipped, "Yep, we were just leaving," as they marched out the door like drum majors holding their bottles of alcohol as batons.

Dude's parents had a condo in Fort Myers and they went there often, so he showed us around. I was always comfortable with Dude because he was so easy going and we hung out with the same group of friends. He had a pool at his house, so it was fun hanging out over there in the summer. Dude had light brown hair that swooped to the side and hung down over his eyes. He was the tan surfer dude type and we were just friends, but on spring break we started flirting. Jolt and I had agreed that we were not going steady or officially girlfriend and boyfriend. In fact, he got so clingy and intense that subconsciously I think I was looking for a way out. I just wanted to have a good time with my friends.

My squad of friends at the time started with Christi, a tall and beautiful blonde with blue eyes. She would drop the best one-liners under her breath, and could always make me laugh. Christi became my first friend when I moved from Phoenix to Columbus at the end of our sixth-grade year.

I could hear people whispering, "Who's the new girl?"

Christi came right up to me in the bathroom that first day. "How the heck did you get so tan?" I didn't even realize I was tan, but compared to snowed-in Ohioans, I guess I was.

Christi was friends with a lot of different groups of people, and she introduced me to everyone. If it wasn't for Christi, I probably never would have been in the cool crowd or

gotten through all of my math classes. She was smart and funny, and we never fought. Her Dad had died young and she was raised by a single Mom, so maybe that's why she was the first person I told when I found out my Dad had cancer.

My friend, I will call her Merry, was a basketball player. Her Dad was our social studies teacher and high school girls' basketball coach. She talked me into playing basketball in seventh grade, but I wasn't tall enough to play forward, so pretty much sat the bench and filled in as point guard whenever Merry needed a break. I was fine with just being on the team and cheering everyone else on. We had a basketball court at our house in Phoenix, and I always loved shooting hoops out there. But I still had a lot to learn about the game. Whenever I dropped a pass or missed a shot, I felt really bad for letting the team down. I decided not to try out for the team in high school, but supported Michelle, our star point guard.

Merry has brown hair, a happy smile, and looks just as pretty in sporty natural mode as she does when she is all dressed up. She has the coolest scratchy voice and is always hilarious, never afraid to be goofy. We liked to make funny videos when I would spend the night at her house. I hope those never get leaked, but they still make me laugh. Michelle and I were also in theater together. We made up a few obnoxious comedy sketches that we performed for the *Varsity Varieties* show during our junior and senior years. I recently found those videos, and cracked up laughing at the *Saturday Night Live* sort of moxie we had in those moments.

Gahanna Lincoln High School was pretty big, with 450 in my graduating class. It joins three middle schools (back then there were two), and currently has more than 3,500 kids in one high school. I know a lot of people who have horror stories, but I honestly have great memories from high school, for the most part. I would have to track them all down to get permission to list all of my friend's names, but there was a group of, like, ten of us who were really close, and an even larger group of girls and guys who all hung out at parties and games. The girls had really big hair back then -- held in place by

crazy amounts of hair spray. We joked that since our mascot was the Lion, we all looked like we had a lion's mane of hair.

It's funny how friendships go in and out. Some of my closest friends now are those I lost touch with after high school, but we reconnected through Facebook. It's nice to keep in touch through social media, but these forums can sometimes be very "show, share, and compare," so I have backed off some, especially around election time. UGH.

*For the record...I don't want to hear rants about your political or religious judgements. I don't need to see pictures of what you ate for dinner, unless you are sharing the recipe and teaching me something I can use. I so wish I could go on vacation with you, but I'm poor. I do love seeing pictures of your family. There is just a lot of TMI (too much information) being shared on social media. Whoa...Did she get a boob job and some botched plastic surgery on her face? It's like driving by a car wreck.*

*Gossip can be just as addictive as substances, and Facebook seems to be the gossiper's playground. More like face-plant for us poor divorced single people. I have talked to friends who never had or have lost kids, who say it is also like torture to see everyone's family pictures. We want to be happy for you. Really, we do. Everyone looks so happy and loved at face value. I know we all put out what we want to show. I think that is why there are more real-time social platforms. I am a total goof with the filtered faces on Snapchat and Instagram that bring out my inner goofy characters, and I don't have to know or care if people like it or not. Some people will probably be happy to read that I've been frustrated and depressed through these hard times. See, I am not stuck up. I've been down. I'm here for you, to make you feel better about yourself and give you some juicy gossip to share with the fellow haters. You're welcome. Cue Jill Scott song, "Hate on me haters..."*

So back to Spring Break with gorgeous orange and pink sunsets and the powerful energy of the ocean. There's just something about the ocean that is so relaxing and romantic. Dude (I call him that because he used that word often) and I ended up walking

on the beach alone, holding hands, and then we kissed. I think I probably kissed him first. Dude was never pushy or serious, but he was definitely sexy, sweet, and funny. We had a blast that week.

One night we got back to the hotel and there was a message from Jolt on the phone. Again, this was before cell phones and social media, so I hadn't really talked to him since we left. Jolt and his friend had to work that week, but they called to let me know that they decided on a whim to drive to Fort Myers to see us for one night.

"Holy shit! Jolt is on his way!"

*I'm sorry if cussing offends you. Did I mention that I decided this is my story and I want to keep it real? You can pray for me. Okay? Please do. I have no filter.*

Christi knew that I had been hanging out with Dude that night. "Shawna - what are you going to do?"

"I have no idea." I hadn't really thought about all that. I liked Jolt. I just didn't want to be so serious, so soon. Jolt was driven and passionate and would do anything to get what he wanted. He started talking about marriage after only two months of dating. I wanted him to chill out.

There was a part of me, like most girls, thinking this was all very romantic like the movies. Guy driving all night just to be with you on the beach for one day. Or maybe it was more like a guy driving to defend his territory because he sensed I had kissed another guy?

There was also a part of me pushing back when Jolt came on too strong. I was young and had big plans for my future that did not involve marriage and kids right away. I babysat a lot and loved kids. I guess I thought – someday. But that seemed far off at the

time. And have I mentioned that my dad was dying? Dude helped me to chill out. Jolt just stressed me out sometimes.

I was actually very happy to see Jolt in Florida. We were having so much fun on spring break, and there was alcohol involved. Jolt and I made out on the beach that night and I convinced myself this must be true love if he would drive all that way just to be with me for one day. Jolt asked me to go to prom with him, and I said yes. We were official at that point, I guess.

I explained things to Dude the last day of our spring break after Jolt left. "I'm sorry. I do like you, and you are so much fun. But Jolt and I had already started something before we came to Florida, and now he asked me to prom and asked me to be his girlfriend and not date anyone else."

Dude was really easy-going, "It's cool. No worries dude."

Jolt got really territorial after that especially when he found out that I had kissed Dude on spring break. We got in a big fight and almost broke up over it. Honestly...he scared me at times. He called me a f\*\*\*ing bitch when we were fighting, and I felt really bad for cheating on him -- even though technically we said we could date other people at that time. I guess I should not have been flirting with two guys at the same time, and Jolt had done so much for me. He was that guy who always wanted to help, even going with me to take my Dad to his doctor appointments when my Mom got really sick with a bronchial infection. Mom was also in and out of the hospital during that time. It was a mess.

Jolt came back after our fight and forgave me, since we were not technically "going out" the night I kissed Dude. Graduation was getting closer and prom night was crazy. I had fun taking pictures, getting all dressed up and going out to dinner with Jolt and my friends. They were starting to warn me about how controlling he was getting though.

I did sneak off to a corner of the dance floor for one dance with Dude at prom. Is that horrible? I remember feeling a brief moment of jealousy because Dude and his date were having so much fun. That night I lied to my parents about staying the night at a friend's house. Jolt's friend had a group of people partying at his house. I was drinking and got sick. I don't remember many details but I ended up having sex with Jolt on prom night. (Momma Shawna note of advice to the youngsters – I get that you will have sex and was never in denial about this like my Mom. But wait until you are with someone you love, who respects you. And use condoms! You don't want to get the heebie jeebies!). Things got really intense after that. We got really close and I loved that his parents would let us go into his bedroom and shut the door. It was like playing house to be able to watch movies and have sex in his bed.

*I can't believe I am confessing all my sins here. Are you praying for me? Thanks. Why did God make my body want and like sex so much if it's a no? Then if we get married, we are supposed to automatically be rid of all the guilt and shame in sex? Feels like we're doomed no matter what we do. How 'bout that catch 22!*

Since I'm telling all here, Jolt was not my first. Everyone thought I was sister Christian in high school, so this will be fun for some to read. No, I was a closet sex lover. But not by choice initially. I had dated a guy when I was 15 and he was almost 20 years old. I will call that guy Con. I met him at a dance club. He was there alone. He asked me to dance, then asked for my number and quickly made me cut ties with all of my guy friends, and even gave me a hard time when I wanted to see my girlfriends.

Con had dark black hair and was very good looking, a wrestler who had attended New Albany High School near Gahanna. I later found out that he had dated two other girls from our school, and both of them were now known as "nymphos" as far as the school gossip went. I just liked dating an older guy who was from a different school, so no one would know my business.

Con talked my brother Rob into asking my parents to invest \$30,000 for them to open up a night club. Rob was working as a DJ at the time, and was also a rapper. My parent's stipulation with the loan was that they could not serve alcohol. Christi and I would stand out on the corner with signs trying to get people to come into the club, and we posted flyers all around. But you cannot make any money from a teen-only club. It was an epic fail.

One weekend after we had been dating about six months, my parents were out of town and Con's parents were also out of town. They served virgin strawberry daiquiris at the club that were so yummy, so after we closed. Con brought the drinks home and added alcohol. This was my first-time drinking alcohol, and in a fruity drink I had no idea I was getting drunk.

He took me back to the bedroom and we were making out. Con was extremely aggressive that night. and I had never seen him like that. I told him to stop when he wanted to have sex, and he told me it was too late to say no. I pushed him off of me and he held me down on the bed. I was screaming no, so there is no question I did not want to have sex. I crawled under the bed to get away from him. I was crying as he pulled me out and threw me back onto the bed. I turned over, thinking that would protect my virginity and he used the back door instead. Clenched, I was totally unprepared for that pain! Sorry to go there with this one, but you might notice there are several mentions of fifteen in my songs like "Live Forgive," that you can now better understand.

I was screaming and crying. It all happened so quick. I was in shock. Con flipped me forward eventually and finished in the front as my whole body lay limp. This back to front nightmare caused horrible recurring yeast infections by the way. I was afraid to tell anyone, and didn't really know what it was at the time. When Con finished, I ran to lock myself in the bathroom and slept on the tile floor that night. The next morning, Con was all apologetic. Begging me to open up the bathroom door, "I'm sorry – okay. I was drunk and couldn't stop."

I really don't remember how I got home. I think I called Christi to pick me up. We broke up for two months, but for some reason, I went back with him. I think I thought I had to marry Con since we had "the sex" before we were married. I ended up staying with him almost a year after that and eventually would do whatever he wanted to keep him from getting mad at me. I can't believe my parents let me date a guy that much older than me in high school. Not that they could have stopped me, honestly. It was all very bizarre and very rough, forceful sex in random places for a year. I never had an orgasm with Con. I just felt like I had lost everything that any other guy would want, and I couldn't tell anyone. I was ashamed and felt worthless.

Once he had me, Con got crazy, controlling and even more abusive. It took me a long time to get away from Con, and he still stalked me -- even in college. He would not stop calling, kept showing up at our house, and would sit across the street watching our house at night-- threatening any guy that tried to date me. I finally told my brother.

Rob is 6'2" tall with big broad shoulders and blond hair, hazel eyes. He played basketball and football. He is hilarious, and we have always been very close. One night, Rob ran into Con at a bar downtown, and I guess Con started talking shit. They got into a fight and Rob beat him up. Con had to go to the hospital to get 19 stitches in his eye. I was actually mad at Rob for beating him up at the time, but looking back I am glad I told him the truth and that he stuck up for me. Con went away for a while, finally, and that's when I started dating Jolt.

Jolt was always very loving and sensitive when it came to making love, unlike my first horrible experience. I loved Jolt, and all of my friends thought he was my first. But I was still very torn, and resisted anytime I felt like he was expecting sex or getting controlling. When I told him I needed space because I had a lot going on with my Dad and was getting ready for college, he got so mean and hateful. He cussed me out and really scared me. I am sure I was confusing because there were so many mixed emotions that were not fully healed. I bawled when he finally left. He heard me crying and came back to say he was sorry. I didn't want him to hate me. I thought I would probably end up with

Jolt, but just wasn't ready at that time to be so serious. He asked if I was sure I wanted to break up and I said yes. It was a dramatic scene, like the ones in the movies when sad music plays as the guy walks away. We had only dated for four months, but he acted like it was everything.

Jolt's parents got transferred to a base in Oklahoma before the school year ended. He had talked about staying with friends, but after we broke up, he moved to Oklahoma. Before Jolt left, he gave me a tape of songs and he talked in between each song, saying really sweet things. What girl does not want someone they love to make them a music playlist? I felt so bad. Maybe I was a stuck-up bitch.

I ended up dating Dude later that summer, and Jolt hated me for that. It was nothing serious. Just a fun senior summer fling with all of my friends at Dude's pool. He was always the life of the party. I wanted to forget about my problems and just chill out.

Things eventually fizzled out with Dude before we went back to school. He hooked up with another girl at a party and that was that.

I met another guy later in the summer, I will call Comedy, because he was and still is very funny. His mom was friends with my mom from church, and she sort of fixed us up. He was a kind, confident type, with gorgeous blue eyes and light brown hair. Comedy was in the Marines, getting ready to be stationed in Panama, so there was no pressure to get serious. I loved spending time with him whenever he came home, but we never really found the space to maintain a relationship. He was the one my friends thought I would marry though because I fell in love with him hard and fast, and had honestly never felt that way with anyone else. We had very similar personalities and I loved his Mom and brother.

After I got divorced, Comedy was still single, and we reconnected for a short time. We said if we had not found anyone by the time we were 40, we would get married. Comedy got married the year I turned 40, then divorced a year later. He was a full-time

comedian for a while, but then completely disappeared. I sometimes wonder about him, but he continues to be elusive. He borrowed money from me one time and I never heard from him again. Ha! Now I am that girl who writes songs about her exes, and now I am telling all the business in a book.

*Warning: Use caution dating songwriters. I did change the names. I even gave Comedy a bit for his jokes, and gave him permission to tell it. I can hear Elle King singing in the background, "Exes and Oh, oh, oh, ohs, they haunt me..."*

Something about this age and stage has me going back through all of the guys I dated, wondering where I went wrong. One guy I dated in high school and again in college is now a sexy Hollywood actor. But he would kill me if I told you his name or gave any information. I was with some random guys in college – none that ever lasted very long. I didn't hear from Jolt for a while, until one night he got really drunk (wherever he was at the time) and left a crazy message on my voicemail that everyone on the floor of my college dorm heard and quoted the rest of the year.

Jolt was screaming, "You shit on my head! You ruined my life! I loved you so much and I now I hate you for ripping my heart out!!!"

"What the hell is wrong with him?" my friends asked.

"I have no idea. He needs anger management. I never shit on his head. I just didn't want to get married." That became another inside joke in college. Did you shit on his head? Don't you go and shit on his head! Shawna, you ripped my heart out and shit on my head! Enough.

At one point, I was trying to figure out a way to detach from all the guys I had been with. I needed closure. I was still very much tied to Jolt and in some way to every guy I had ever loved or tried to love. Sex seems to tie two souls together somehow on a spiritual level, at least that is how it feels for me. Most girls get so attached and emotional once

they have sex with someone. Not all sex is intimate, but I think it still creates a sort of imprinted bond in our memories and subconscious -- even when we have developed thick skin and try to act like it doesn't mean anything.

I have a hard time letting go, even when the train is running off the tracks, dragging me behind it. One night at the age of 30, waiting for my divorce to finalize, I tearfully wrote down the names of every guy I had been with up to that point. I could count them on two hands but was ashamed that I was such a "sinner" according to The Bible. I wanted to release the ties. I will go into more of that in another book, *Releasing the Soul Ties*.

For the record, Con sent me a friend request on Facebook a while back and apologized. I told him I had already forgiven him for me, but had no desire to be any sort of friends with him. He persisted and then I changed my profile pick to my hand up and said, "No means no!" before I blocked him. He has not bothered me since, but this makes me very nervous to put all this out there now and be on tour. I hope he has gotten help and made a change, and that there is nothing to worry about.

I just felt it was important to share this story to help others who have been through date rape and other hideous experiences like this. Also, for awareness of what to avoid. It sucks and leaves a scar, but to hold onto anger only hurts us more. For me, it has helped me heal to finally share these secrets with people I love. And now, it's all out there. This chapter has kept me stuck for many years and doubting if I should even share anything.

Could've Been, my angry song. My Mom hates the F word, and when my kids were young - I did not cuss around them at all. But we keep it real these days. This was a culmination of frustration with Fboys in general. And guess what? I was just as wrong in many ways. I effed it up too. I have owned my part in all of this. But this was my "tell him off" song and it felt effing good to get it out! Now the churchies have reported me and my "explicit" lyrics. The censored effed up version is on the album.

### **Could've Been lyrics"**

You messed up what could've been a good thing  
Open and then suddenly you're running  
Now I see a player who is losing  
All you care about is what you take in  
Should've been grown by now  
Little boy burning out  
Better go get some help  
Get some help!

**"Could've been love, could've been us, but you effed it up.**

**Could've stayed hot, could've had trust, but you effed it. You effed it up.**

I know a lot of guys have been intimidated by the "#MeToo" movement, saying that it makes them nervous to make a move. For me, the #MeToo movement is empowering because it broke the silence and fear of standing up for yourself and sharing when someone was inappropriate. It is about knowing that you have every right to be treated with respect and have equal opportunity to advance and show strength. It also helps us all protect ourselves, with new awareness and openness about how to handle these situations. No means no. Plain and simple. And we will NOT be silent anymore. No one should use their position to force sexual favors. Guys and girls are still free to make a move, respectfully. Flirt and be sexy, but ask permission. Sex should be consensual. In 2020, there are all kinds of women and men and lots of neutral genders in between that should all be treated with respect and consideration, with equal opportunity.

I have dated some guys who say I am intimidating because I am a strong woman. I do not want to have to play weak just to make a man feel strong. My favorite music is a more bluesy style that is gruff sometimes and my new song, "Mustang," is like that. Obviously, after reading these stories, you can see I wasn't always this strong. I am still healing from these wounds, so I have a hard time trusting men. I need to remember that there are still nice guys out there who treat all people with respect. I was raised with

confidence, and I am a girl who also loves to fish and ride horses and quads and be outdoors. It's all good. There is no one way to be, except to be yourself. We cannot go back and change the past. We move forward from today.

**“Mustang”** lyrics:

The pretty prance gave you a show around the circle, view got old.  
I've got big dreams beyond the yard and I'm flipping my wild card.

This strong horse was born to run.  
Mustang roar, revving the engine.  
Share the ride, but I will drive.  
I am a Mustang  
You'll catch me outside...”

**Journal entry:**

*“This is the New 22! Today is the day I decided I am the only one who has the power to rewrite my story. In this book, I am committed to resisting the urge to give disclaimers and down myself so you won't think that I think I am all that or so you know up front that I don't have it all figured out. I never claimed to know how to help others -- even though my hope is that there will be at least a few young spirits and old souls like myself who are inspired to keep on trying and go after their dreams with me. I have realized in my 40 plus years that 1) I have to be real about my age because I hate to be fake, and 2) When I was 22, my Dad was dying, I graduated college and rushed into marriage. I was too busy wishing my life was more figured out. I made all sorts of crazy impulsive decisions that basically spiraled into the now. I didn't realize how good I had it then, and if anything, I just want to stop to recognize the good today! Not that it's all good, but that I am determined to find the good in this day. I don't want to live any other way. Believe me, I have tried. Carrying regret is a heavy load. Fearing failure pretty much brings it about. Waiting for things to be perfect before you do what you can do, will pretty much make sure you do very little.”*

If you are anywhere near 22 or near 72, this book is about loving and doing you. As you are, without the hoopla of hoops. These songs have been cooped up since 13 and 22, so they will creep into every chapter. I will share the finished recordings when I have them and also the rawest of raw concept ideas online if I need to get them out. I tried writing the stories as fiction because I could then get over myself. It's hard. Two of my "friends" who read the first version unfriended me for a time. I don't know why. Maybe they think I am crazy because I talk to myself in a book. I am not crazy. I am fully aware that you might think I'm crazy. Some people resist when you grow and change to be something different than how they knew back then because they want permission to stay the same. Let them go.

Life over 40 is sometimes even more confusing than at 22, if you can believe that. But the beauty is, I don't give a shit anymore. We have the ability to look back and begin to make sense of it all the older we get. I hope to laugh at myself more, and down myself less. I hope you can learn from the mistakes I have made and figure it out sooner. And I hope to keep on learning until the day I die, and beyond.

I am writing this to and for myself, with the awareness that I will have to share it. That's the only way it makes sense. And I am also writing it as Mamma Shawna, to those girls and guys who are growing up after me. For those who enjoy gathering insight as much as I do. I am not a guru. I am one of you, at every age. That's the point. We have to start with where we are today and do what we are here on this earth to do.

The culmination of thirty years of writings songs when I was afraid to sing. This is the NEW 22, my friend! The year *you* decide who *you* want to be. You might need to REwind to the age when life shattered your mirror, the curtains ripped, or your foundation was shaken up. REmind yourself of a few things in the presence of today. If those dreams are still alive, it's time to REvive. If those wounds need healing, then it's time for you to REnew. If you are in the process of REinventing or want to take that first step. If you are learning to REspect and give yourself the love you have always wanted.

If you are REady to move into your next chapter...Then I hope you will come with me on this journey of ReleaSING. It's gonna be fun. It will be real and raw and imperfect. And yes, there will be a soundtrack to play along, because this is who I am.

*You might find these "Let's do this!" speeches annoying. Sorry, just get through this part. I was really trying to psych myself up for this. I tell more stories as we go along.*

Sorry to kill the fierce empowerment speech mood, but at this very moment, I had to choose between writing these thoughts out or spraying Knockout to rid my house of fleas. Seriously *need* to stop all that itching in this house. I have done everything and spent way too much money at the vet so far. WTF actually stands for What the Fleas? (in this case). I was reading about these nasty things. The adult flea creates a crust around itself until it senses a vibration that a host is near. Disgusting! Like the predatory men I have dated. UGH.

Okay. I need to get my ADD ass back downstairs and cover all of the utensils and food-related items, sweep all floors, wash all bedding, give the dogs another dose of Frontline plus. Now they're saying to buy pest demitodes(?) to put in my backyard to eat the fleas and keep them from breeding and spreading out there in my yard. But then what will happen to the pests I unleashed back there? What do they do? I have always used the treatment during flea season. But this year I skipped it because I lost my job, and NOW I know that the prevention is so much easier and less costly than the mess created afterwards. So that also sums up my story. Prevention is good medicine. But you find yourself in a mess, you've gotta do what you've gotta do.

As I mentioned before, getting the approval of friends and family members to share these stories was probably the hardest part, but we got through it enough to respect everyone's wishes, or at least give them a heads up that this was coming. Obviously names have been changed in some cases and I had to find that delicate balance between TMI (too much information, for those who may not know) while speaking my

truth. Forgive me, please if I have offended you by being me. My intention is to keep the peace, but keep it real.

*Stop apologizing Shawna! Get over yourself! Okay...Okay...Sorry. UGH! I did it again.*

So we end chapter two. Still seeking a major publisher to make this a for real book, with distribution and marketing support to get it out and tour. Fully aware that I will need to do the blunt of the marketing. I'm here for this! Still planning to coordinate at least one Release Retreat in 2020. I redesigned my website. The amazing artist Loui Jover signed a release to allow me to purchase the use of his art for my EP and book cover. That made my day and life. I am obsessed with this Australian artist Loui Jover's work and want to buy many of his originals someday. So happy with the cover! So we're here now. I am releaSING "Catch 22", the title of my EP that will release on 2-22-2020 with the songs that go along with these first two chapters. Yes boys and girls, I am releasing the catch 22!

*Okay, we get it! Moving on...*

I know, I have beat that horse to the ground. But we all have these doubts and no one wants to admit it, let alone share those thoughts in the process. I need to get this out! There are a total of 22 chapters in the two books – ready to release. If you know anyone who might be able to help with this, please contact me through any of the channels or the contact page on my website. It's all up in the air right now, but I have let it go! You've gotta start somewhere. I am going to share these first two chapters on my blog and other e-story sites and see where it goes from here. Yikes! I can do this!

So what are you gonna do today to release your catch 22? I want to hear your stories. Please share in the comments and email me.

Is there someone you need to forgive? Even if they don't ask for forgiveness, you release the hook it has on you by choosing to forgive. You basically unhook yourself from that ball and chain. Ready...Release! Listen to Live Forgive and write it out.

**“Live Forgive” lyrics:**

“I’ve talked myself in and out. Wasted my heart on anger.  
You were gone before you left. I was drawn to all your drama.  
Got caught up in a twisted web, and now it’s time to make amends

Because... **There’s no sense in bitterness**  
**There’s no room in unforgiveness.**  
**I keep on hashing over it while energy is spent**  
**Hurting me more, affecting you less.**  
**“I will choose to live forgive.”**

Make it a great day,  
Shawna Ray

