

### **‘Raising Brittany’ from page 37**

grass to see if he could catch it growing – I sincerely hoped not – but he'd say the same thing everytime we met and I'd come to anticipate it.

Depending upon who was home that day, I would either join the rest of the family for a speed bonding session/fashion walk or immediately hop back into Tat-a-Lac Boogie and head for Rush Street.

But no matter what, Burrel would always appear, surrounded by the same illuminated magnetic field as the day we first met, wearing a thousand-watt smile, richly hued silk shirt, heavy-starched designer jeans and just the right amount of jewelry – a four carat pink topaz pinky ring, neckchain and medallion, and a 1/4 carat diamond stud in his left ear lobe.

If his skin wasn't so dark, he might be mistaken for an Italian. His style was very Italian.

We would always park close by Chicago Avenue and our favorite Rush street eatery, Hugo's Frog Bar, where we enjoyed dining alfresco because everyday was a beautiful day. Our stroll was gingerly, showing everyone what a gorgeous couple we made.

During our first two years together, through his eighteenth and nineteenth birthdays and my twenty-first and twenty-second, the only thing about our relationship to change was that we began to spend days and nights together.

Then suddenly and out of nowhere, I realized that by this time in my mom's life, I was already a year old – her youngest of three – and by this age cancer had forced her to undergo a hysterectomy.

Just then, I heard my biological clock strike noon; I wanted to have a baby girl by midnight. It wasn't fair or smart of me to bamboozle Burrel into fatherhood before his 21st birthday, but it wasn't about him.

This was about what I needed; this was my choice, my baby. Of course, as a 20-year-old man, he was more than happy to participate; I was his first love and he was mine. And it wasn't so much that I was trying to get pregnant – it was a normal occurrence for Burrel and me to sneak off somewhere, anywhere, for a quickie.

It was more the fact that I just didn't get pregnant that, for me, was cause for alarm. Every few weeks, I'd say to Burrel, "I think I'm pregnant," only to find out it was just my overactive imagination sending out false positives.

This scenario was replayed in a monthly loop during an excruciating nine-month period. Then it

happened – after all that time all it took was a night of champagne and dancing to celebrate my twenty-third birthday for me to wake up pregnant.

I knew it within days. I had never had a stomach cramp in my life, but the very next time I became heated with passion, my stomach knotted with a pain so intense it forced me into a fetal position. Burrel said, "You're pregnant."

In the spring of 1988 – March 29 to be exact – I gave birth to a beautiful little girl, who I named Brittany Joanne (Joanne in honor of my mom). Brittany completely changed my life, my way of thinking.

What I mean to say is that she actually caused me to begin to think. I felt solely responsible for the comfort, happiness and overall well-being of another. And for the first time – at least in my mind – it was imperative that I give everything a very good thinking through, putting Britt first, of course.

I started out by tacking a sheet up at my ceiling to cover the black paint that I had just two years earlier-thought was so cool and artistic.

I'd read somewhere that , regarding early childhood development, bright primary colors were a must. Unfortunately, by the time I had connected the dots, it was way too late; Brittany was due in only a couple months.

I was terrified that paint fumes might linger and cause some debilitating birth defect. So I covered the ceiling and bought all the bright red, yellow, blue, and green toys I could find and was very proud I had diverted any threat of arrested development.

After three months, everything was going smoothly. I had very bravely and graciously – if I do say so myself – settled into young motherhood.

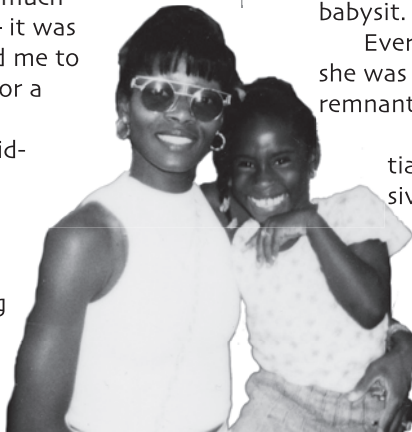
Britt was beautiful, happy, and healthy and I felt confident to juggle work and single parenthood. My twin cousins, who had just graduated high school, and their mom, who's also my great aunt, would babysit.

Everyday when I stopped by to pick up Britt, she was happy and well fed, as evidenced by the remnants of the day's meals on her onesie.

My great aunt Carrie, who had partially raised me, always told me an impressive milestone that Britt had reached because of the care by her and my twin cousins.

Aunt Carrie had taught Britt to do the twist, while she did waled out her rendition of the famous Chuck Berry tune. Together, they'd put on quite a

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show. Britt was only six months old and she couldn't even walk, but she'd hold onto the crib rails and twist.

However, one issue that I just couldn't ignore was that everyone in that household smoked cigarettes. Just before Britt turned one, I found her a new babysitter named Mrs. Hadley, a retired nurse who cared for two additional children.

Although she wasn't family, Mrs. Hadley came highly recommended. I was pleased until one day, when I picked up Britt, she wouldn't walk anymore, and Mrs. Hadley didn't know the reason.

A short time later, I quit work and didn't return to work until Britt turned three, old enough for pre-school. I refused to work any job that prevented me from escorting her to and from the school bus daily.

I even put my friendship with my best friend Patty on the back burner because her daughter Tiffany and Britt just get along well together.

Unfortunately, I soon discovered that my best friend was the first of many things I'd have to give up for the sake of Brittany.

Next to go was night clubs. Pre-Brittany, I had been known to don the finest of silks and leathers, go rollerskating three times per week, party on Rush Street or Michigan Avenue on the weekends, and still make it to work on time Monday through Friday.

Now, I'd traded my silks for cottons that were more practical under a threat of baby drool. I also decided that any place where Brittany wasn't allowed was just not worth my being there. I couldn't stand to be without her.

I thought about her constantly whenever we were apart. I felt as though I was missing a big opportunity to teach her something. It was crazy. I had a hard time enjoying myself without my Britt.

Britt and I did everything together. Just me and my little girl, hand and hand, Britt skipping alongside.

People would say, "You're really gonna miss her when she goes away to school." I always agreed and expected that time to be bittersweet.

But much to my surprise, Britt sort of "went away" two years early when she began to drive, she was never at home.

Britt already had gone missing in action during her freshman year in high school when she played basketball and ran track. Driving privileges enabled her to really turn up the volume on her social life.

She'd make her plans, while I'd did her hair and chose her outfit. Then off she'd go. I loved it.

It reminded me of the times when I helped my brother Tony get ready for his dates. Just as with

Tony, I'd wait up for Britt to return home to hear the evening's details. I thought, "This is a piece of cake! I'm handling this like a real pro." When Brittany finally went away to college, I realized that it was time for me to start a new chapter in my life, but I felt dumb-founded and lost. This would be much harder than writing an essay about what I want to do, harder than giving up silk blouses and martinis.

But I couldn't even remember who I was or what I liked or didn't like or..... "Well, I like fashion.....But, should I really pick up where I dropped out of International Academy of Design? I'm 45 now; do I still want it enough?" I wondered.

Terrified of putting myself first, of rediscovering me, and of the hard work it entailed, I decided simply to start working; to take up a new vocation just for the sake of earning money. Because, quite frankly, I knew what I didn't want to do, but I had no idea of what I really did want to do.

Now that three years have flown by, and I've added insurance producer to the list of things I don't want to do. I'm still faced with the same question about the rest of my life."

So I reasoned that fashion has always been and always will be my first love, but today's economy is not conducive to starting a new fashion line nor to opening a new retail fashion business so that went on the back burner again.

I always knew that I had a talent for writing so now is the time. I'd started writing a book about ten years ago. I never finished writing because my computer crashed. The thought of finishing my book really excites me because I have a lot of things I want to say and great advice to share. So, I enrolled in writing classes at College of DuPage.

Now, Brittany's and my roles have reversed. I'm running a marathon and writing papers while Brittany tells me how smart I am and how proud she is of me. She's my biggest cheerleader.

Being a mom was a lot of hard work that brought many sacrifices, but I wouldn't change a thing.

Brittany is well on her way to graduating with a bachelor's of biomedical science degree after only three and one-half years. Then it's on to med school in the fall.

She could not support me now if I had not supported her throughout the years.



Pam and Brittany at Six Flags.



## ‘metal’ from page 25

mates. I didn’t like the traditional Mexican music played in my home.

So what were my choices? I sampled a radio station here and there, my ears experiencing ecstasy in the form of heart pounding drum beats, deep dark bass, the screeching wail of a guitar, and blood-curdling growls from a vocalist.

Energy, emotion and dark inspiration combined into something more than ordinary hard rock and pop-punk. This was metal – a mighty omnipotent sound powering through my body.

I got up from my chair and ran around my room while screaming, “That’s it! My quest is over! I have finally found what I have been looking for.”

For that moment when I was listening to that organized cacophony I didn’t care who barged into my room or what anyone thought of me. I knew that I had found myself in metal.

Heavy metal soothed and showed me that it was ok to be distressed and angry. Because after all I was human, I had the right to feel. I would never be alone again, and this music decreed it so. I was born to be a metalhead. A metalhead is a fan of heavy metal who not only listens to heavy metal but appreciates the beauty of heavy metal. A person who lives, eats, and breathes heavy metal.

The outspokenness that once branded me as an outcast now was praised for its truthfulness and landed me new wonderful friends. But being a woman who like metal had its disadvantages.

I had to prove that I knew my metal, that I knew what I was talking about. I always had to work my way to the top. I had to show people that I knew and loved metal bands because of my personality.

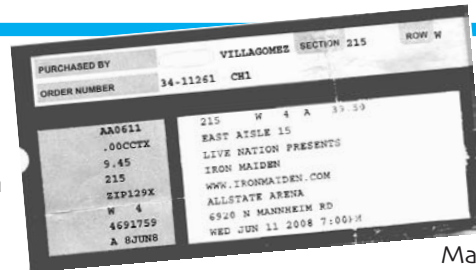
The pinnacle of my metalhead existence came on June 11, 2008, when I witnessed an Iron Maiden concert.

I walked into a dark, large arena full of people, young and old, proudly displaying black shirt with the words in yellow, red, and blue labeled across their chests IRON MAIDEN.

I thought, “This is it. The moment I have been waiting for, the moment any metalhead has been waiting for, to see one of the pioneers of heavy metal, Iron Maiden.

I climbed higher and higher to find my seat in the Allstate Arena. I could feel my excitement and anxiety grow simultaneously as I was about to see and hear the legend live.

My enthusiasm got the better of me as I almost fell down four flights of stairs. I was caught by a random stranger, whom I thanked before letting my clumsi-



left: Kathy’s first Iron Maiden ticket.

ness take charge.

I waited in vain for Iron Maiden to set up

since the daughter of the bassist is the opening act. She attempted to energize the crowd with silly her pop music but her cause was worthless.

Everywhere around me, fans were conversing about which album is their favorite, or which song Iron Maiden would play during the concert.

I heard a father telling his two small children to be patient while awaiting Iron Maiden. Patience! Easy for him to say! He probably saw the group when he was 16. His sons and I on other hand were not even born when Maiden started touring.

After what seemed like a decade, vivid and dazzling lights that looked like the aurora borealis appeared with loud puffs of smoking rising from the stage.

From every corner of the arena, every nook and cranny proclaimed the entrance of Iron Maiden. The arena turned from concert into a footy game. The crowd chanted as loud as they could, IRON MAIDEN, IRON MAIDEN, IRON IRON MAIDEN! UP THE IRONS!

My heart pounded as loud as chant, my hands so sweaty in anticipation. I stood up, and there on the stage was 18 foot tall Eddi – Iron Maiden’s mascot and I knew at that moment that the very last thing that needed to be said for the experience to truly begin was former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s World War II speech in 1940.

I counted in my head. And there it was, “We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France We shall fight over the seas and oceans.

We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air.

We shall defend our island whatever the cost may be

We shall fight on beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, We shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight on the hills. We shall never surrender.

And then the Iron Maiden lyrics for “Aces High.”... There goes the siren that warns off the air raid Then comes the sound of the guns sending flak Out for the scramble we’ve got to get airborne Got to get up for the coming attack....”

And so it began, the legends of Iron Maiden were here and I could not do anything but feel small and insignificant and full of awe.

And I was okay with that.



### ‘Cape Town’ from page 31

surprisingly pleasant reception we received on this visit compared to the hostility we experienced on the last, yet still silently battling relentless waves of fear and anxiety that made the hair rise on my skin.

We arrived at a small pre-school where a large group of little kids were waiting, seated in rows circling the area outside the classrooms. We performed our songs and were then treated to some skits, songs, and dances by the students as well.

After our performances, the principal stood to welcome us. Her voice was kind, but tired—marked with years of ruthless struggle. She spoke of the community’s growing concern for the well-being of their children and what paths they would travel, given their harsh surroundings.

She informed us of how most of the kids didn’t have the “luxury” of experiencing any sort of real entertainment, and that our short visit was by far the highlight of their month and possibly of the months to come.

I noticed my mother, facing the opposite direction and a tissue held up to her face. Ross and one of the chaperones stood comforting her, their voices a low murmur, sympathy in their eyes. That was all it took.

Tears welled up in my eyes as I let it all sink in. I caught a glimpse of my mother’s red eyes and tear-stained cheeks. Not only had she spent a significantly longer period of time living in South Africa, but she grew up when apartheid was still very much in tact and thus knew what it was like to march in mass riots and protest on the streets.

Her teenage years were scarred by frequent uprisings, often turned violent as white police officers opened fire on crowds of protesters, striking and killing even some of her closest peers. As a multi-racial South African, she—like blacks or Indians—was no stranger to discrimination.

But at the end of the day when the streets grew quiet after the day’s chaos, my mother—just like those other minority groups—went back to her own neighborhood and her own race, unperturbed by the same struggle being fought by her fellow South Africans.

This was the mindset of the South African people, and this was the mindset I had always known, never really caring to know otherwise.

I now felt guilt, remorse, anger, sadness, empathy, and compassion. I had spent my entire life silently passing judgment and concocting ridiculous fabrications guided merely by utter ignorance, simply because someone looked different.

But who was to blame? I thought of my 5-year-old

cousin, who threw around racial slurs like it was nothing out of the ordinary.

Or my childhood friends in Ottery who would make careless comments about some of the black residents around the corner.

Or my grandma who would threaten to let the passing homeless people “take us away” when we were misbehaving. It appeared that growing up, I was trapped in a seemingly normal world created by the people and surroundings I trusted most, only to realize now that I had been blind to the intense passion and suffering that occurred in the very place I called home.

I realized I was no different to these people that I had been indirectly separated from for so long. While I cried over childhood heartbreaks, they rejoiced over a plate of food on the table or barely having enough in their pocket to buy a pair of school shoes.

These were my fellow South Africans. My brothers and my sisters. I may not live there anymore, but South Africa, with its magnificent mountains and seas, exhilarating entertainment, awe-inspiring wildlife, and remarkable culture and people—with whom I can now, truly identify—will always be the one true place I call home.

The advertisement is a vertical rectangular graphic with a dark background. On the left side, there is a list of program details in white text. On the right side, the word 'Ingenuity' is written in a large, stylized font. Below it, the text 'Transfer programs that provide intellectual capital' is written. At the bottom right, the IIT logo and 'ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY' are displayed. At the bottom left, the website 'iit.edu/cpd' is listed.

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