

GIRLS IN ACTION (GIA)

“GIRLS EMPOWERED”

“LETTERS TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF”



Dear Teen Jenn,

First let me tell you- YOU'RE GOING TO BE OK!!

I'm going to give you the tools you'll need to deal with better and survive.

1. Build a better support system of friends. - Stay with the friends that share your same values and believes. Strengthen the friendships with those that want the same future.
2. Learn to listen to your inter-self. If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't! Don't be afraid to think for yourself.
3. Take school more seriously. Knowledge is power and it doesn't end with high school.
4. Don't be afraid to take chances. Believe in yourself.
5. If you want to do something and the opportunity doesn't come to you...create your own opportunities.
6. Take your time, don't rush to get old. Once your youth is gone there is no way of getting it back. Savor it!! Enjoy it!!
7. Where you live does not determine where you will go. Research all of your career choices and find a mentor. Other than your relationship with GOD, a mentorship will help you focus your goals and future.
8. Love yourself first!! Your body is a temple. Don't let anyone force you to do anything you don't want to do.
9. Nothing is possible without GOD!! Join and a bible based church and never stray. Your relationship with GOD is the most important one you'll ever have in life.

Enjoy your teen years and build great relationships. Laugh hard. Create great memories. Learn about yourself and love every bit of you!!

Lots of love,

Your 30 year old self :)

Dear Younger Self,

I hope all is well with you. Please do not think that I am being too intrusive, but, I would like to share some life lessons with you that may assist you as you grow into womanhood. Always remember that God made you as a unique being and it is okay to be different. Celebrate your uniqueness. The world would be a very dull place if everyone was just alike. Also remember to celebrate and respect the differences in others. It is fine to have a different view than your friends. Look at a difference in opinion as a lesson. That other person's opinion may not change yours but it will open your mind to another way of looking at the issue.

Have different groups of friends that share your interests – neighborhood friends, school friends, church friends, friends from your grandmother's neighborhood, etc. Do not judge someone because they may not have as much as you. Always remember to treat people as you want to be treated. It is cool to hang out with the nerds, especially if they share your love of science, mathematics, literature or history. It is also cool to hang out with those who share your love of sports, fashion or music. Do not forsake your friendship with the smart kids for the cool kids. The smart kids will eventually be college kids who will eventually be the “big ballers – shot callers”— the doctors, lawyers, professors, accountants and politicians. Which social group, nerd or cool, do you think President Barack and First Lady Michelle Obama were in while in school?

Every friend will not be a life long one. Some friends come to help you reach a goal then they are gone for a while. Be leery of those who constantly want to compete with you. The only person that you should compete with is yourself. True friends encourage each other. Beware of a person who is constantly bringing you news about someone else. Just like they are bringing you news, they are discussing your business with someone else. This is not the person you want to tell your secrets to. Also, do not give anyone permission to make you feel inferior. If you feel inferior to someone then you gave your permission to allow this to happen. God made each and everyone of us in his own image.

On a more personal level, do not waste your time dating someone who is not going anywhere in life. A dude hanging on the corner becomes less attractive as you get older. You want to date a guy that has goals and is actively trying to achieve them. Date the nerd; he will be your family

man (a good husband and father) in later years. He will love respect and treat you like a queen. Do not let anyone pressure you into having sex. With sex comes emotions you are not mature enough to handle right now. Sex is a grown up action that results in grown up consequences. Keep your panties on. Remember your virginity is a gem. It is very precious, do not give it away to just anybody. Do not give in just because he says he will break up with you. If he does, he will be back. He will respect you more for holding out. Plus, he is not going to want you to give your gem to someone else.

It is important that you love yourself better than anyone else. That self love will relieve you of peer pressure and of being a people pleaser. Do not worry about people talking about you, especially if you are doing something positive. Keep working towards your goal. You will always encounter “haters.” Remember if they are talking behind your back then they are in the best position – BEHIND YOU!!! Believe in yourself and your dreams. Do not allow anyone to deter you from your dreams. Remember, it is YOUR DREAM and everyone may not share your belief. Stick to your guns and work towards YOUR DREAM.

**Very Truly Yours,
Older Self**

Dear Younger Self,

I would love to let you know from an older you, that you are loved. That middle school and High school are just a few years of your life so don't lose sight of who you are and what you want. If you be true to your self, your friends will be just as unique and true as you. Even though you wait to have sex, just remember that every time you are with someone new it takes a part of you away. Life is short, be willing to try new things and have grand adventures!

Dear Younger Me,

When you look in the mirror you see a blur of bright colors. I wish that you could see those colors as a beautiful rainbow, rather than some painting gone wrong. The first thing every one sees is that bright red hair and the millions of freckles all

over your skin. They are unique and beautiful and a part of you. Be proud. You are such a sweet human being. So kind, considerate and loving towards all beings: animal and human. When someone tells you, you are stupid or fat. Just look at them and say "I'm sorry you feel that way". Chances are, that when they call you names, it's because they feel about themselves. You are not broken, not worthless. You are whole and beautiful and perfect in your uniqueness. Every morning when you wake up I want you to look in the mirror and say "good morning gorgeous!" Celebrate the body and soul you've been given everywhere you go. Spread your love and cheerfulness to others around you. No one can make you feel as good as you can. Remember this: Loving yourself is the beginning of a life long love affair. Never ending love and support,

Me, You and I.

Hello Younger Me and the Greater You (the person reading this letter),

I am happy to have the opportunity to reflect on my younger days and possibly provide the greater you with some insights I learned from my life.

My saying today is: I learned hard lessons to hopefully help someone else to learn easy lessons. I have plenty that I personally wish that I had the opportunity to capture my youth and live this wonderful life of mine.

Please know, I do not regret my life and all the physical and verbal abuse I lived, I would not change it for the world because I believe God brought me through those things so that I can appreciate the area of my life of where I was before and where I am now. We can't change the hands we were dealt but we can dang on surely try to win the game. As card playing takes strategy and patience, you must apply that same concept to life.

1) I would have studied more of my books and less of guys. Better yet, I would have dated guys in my age group instead of men 5+. One thing for sure, we do not know what life has in store for you. So, you want to save the best for last and that is your body. At the age of 15/16, you do not have much to offer a grown man and if he is not willing to wait, he is not worth taking your precious jewels. I wished I would have reported those guys to the law enforcements. At my age, I felt robbed. It is much in you that you don't even know waiting to blossom. It is our life experiences that buds us into a beautiful flower that we are born to be. Do NOT let someone not worthy of that steal your precious experience. Like Beyonce said, "put a ring on it".

2) I would have had less boyfriends and more friends as boys and girls. I would have shared friendlier experiences, appreciate our differences and likeness, been less judgmental, less sensitive and more openhearted. You learn when you are older that differences are better teachers than similarities. Yes, it is good to have friends around you that think like you and maybe act like you, but the differences is what prepares you for the real world.

3) I would have purchased my home and car when I found my significant other. At your single stage, you should rent rooms and live carefree by travelling and learning who you are. Those things should be a mutual thing between your lifelong partner/husband. You have benefits of credit score, income, location and better planning. It becomes a hassle when you meet a guy who you want to marry and you have to iron out other things like selling your home, finding someone to rent it, the market crashing, jobs moving to another city...if you were rooming, you can easily make switches and swops, very inexpensively.

4) I would have played more sports in school and devoted more time to extracurricular activities. When you participate in school activities, you are more socially accepted by your peers and expose to national wide competitions. You get to travel and see new things outside of your neighborhoods and probably for free.

5) I would have focus more on myself and not others. It is great to share but when you are living off your parents, you need to get permission from your parents to spend your money on another. However, if you chose to do so anyway, be smart about it. Do not always let your friends take you for granted. Yes, it is great to feel like you are the riches of your friends, but you are not especially if you are from the same hood, same struggle. Focus on educating yourselves, get the same afterschool jobs but share opportunities before you share your money because they will never appreciate your efforts nor will they value it the same. Keep money out of friendship unless you are not expecting anything in return, then it is not a favor or a gift, but a loss.

6) I would have gone to Sunday school more often. Find faith in God and he will guarantee you a prosperous life, not necessarily money but wisdom to exhaust the resources you have available to you to acquire the goals you have set for yourself. Yes, we need money but if you do not have wisdom, money will not do you any good. You need values and church will instill that in you. Yes, you can be mislead in church, but God is omnipresent, give him your struggles and confusions and he will deliver you from it all. Do NOT let anyone deter you from the strength and your faith in believing in God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

7) I would have talked more with my grandmother before she died. Elder folks have a lot of wisdom. Yes, I know they can be mean and needy but it is great exercise to learn respect and hospitality when befriending them. Volunteer at an elderly home and play games with the old folks, you will find so much wisdom there.

8) I would have forgiven those people that offended me sooner than later. Learning to forgive is a healing practice that frees you of hurt, anger, confusion and pity on yourself. You can not control another actions, reasons and disrespect. Do not spend so much time being cautious of your heart that you forget to love again and trust. Do NOT let one or two bad seeds steal that joy from you. Tell 'em the devil is a lie.

9) I would learned more information about subjects I didn't enjoy such as politics and geography. All that information comes in handy when you are faced with making real life

decisions. It is important to learn what the decision makers are thinking and where they are coming from (locally, domestically and internationally).

10) I would have been more of me and less of them. It is so much easier being yourself, ok, this one I was always comfortable being me. However, I would have stayed active and would not have become unhealthy. Focus on your health, no sugars and preservatives...I know it sounds like a commercial but those things are unhealthy for your skin. Well, some people can eat unhealthy and never be affected but when you know it is affecting you...try to have self-control and not make decisions that will ruin your image and self-esteem.

I have many more but I will end it here because my other advice will be for the 25 year old me...lol. I really hope I provided some helpful advice to my younger self that you will be directly affected by and/or encouraged. Stay on course, give respect to earn it. I love you all much.

Dear Thirteen-Year-Old Me,

Heyyy girl! Writing this letter is you, only from your early thirties! I know that's probably freaking you out, but honey, that's only the beginning, once you read what I have to say to you. I wanna start off by saying I know you think you are SO smart and know what you should do and how you should do it, but baby, you haven't a CLUE! I am not telling you that to make you feel unsure of yourself or to belittle your intelligence, because you are SO smart, but you need more time to build up your common sense and wisdom in the choices you make. Because the choices you make now will affect you many years later!

First off, I know you're a virgin now, and you're starting to experience more feelings about boys. Heck, I remember that because this is the year you lie about your age to talk to an 18-year-old guy on the phone. I know his voice sounds SO good and he makes you feel all special and wanted, but honey, that isn't real! You've got to look at yourself in the mirror—I mean REALLY do it, not that phony stuff you do because that guy in the self-esteem assembly at school told you to—and you will see such a beautiful, intelligent, talented, outgoing young lady that doesn't have to get validation from any guy, over the phone OR in person! I know no one in your family really tells you that, but over time, you will build up your OWN self-confidence, self-esteem, and overall belief in yourself. And you know what it took for you to get there? You getting sick and tired of being picked on and made to feel “un-pretty” by guys, some guys who weren't even all that! (smile) But it has to come from more than that. It should come from YOU loving YOU!

Another thing I wanna touch on is your belief in God. At 13, I know you're kinda out of sorts with your relationship with God. In fact, during this year, you are praying that you will get a boyfriend. That's because you are tying your happiness into being bunned up with somebody. You listen to your slow jams on the radio at night and moon over guys like White Mike from Backyard Band, that guy you're crushing on from church, and Devante and Dalvin from Jodeci. And even IF ANY of those guys could be in your life, please understand that that kind of happiness is temporary, especially since you can't be with any of them 24/7. YOU have to find happiness in GOD and in YOURSELF, since those ARE the two “people” who will be with you 24/7. Learn to pray and read your Word, like your pastor and deacon are teaching you in church, because that will help you become a stronger, healthier, happier person.

Your weight issues are something else to discuss. Your eating is kinda out of hand, and you should be more active. I know that sounds weird, since you believe you are active in marching band, but you need to eat less fatty foods and have a more active lifestyle to balance it all out, so that your weight can be maintained. If not, it will get so out of hand that it will cripple you later on in life—physically, emotionally, and mentally.

I know you also don't have the best opinion of mom and grandma. They fought your whole life, and even after grandma moved away, they argued by phone! But please know, they each love you in their own unique way. They aren't perfect, and you have to be more patient with them. They disagree about what seems like everything. Mom is more in the habit of satisfying herself since she was a young mom and had to grow up fast; whereas grandma is more about making sure her family is okay. But at the end of the day, they both love you and want the best for you. So just be more understanding of them and don't judge them so harshly. They will each be there for you so much over the years, especially when you yourself make mistakes!

How would you feel if I told you that in a little more than two years from now, you will get pregnant and have a baby? I told you earlier, hold on to your seat! Baby, you were looking for love and attention in all the wrong places, and thinking that you had control over your sex life. But in actuality, it was controlling you, and as a result, the boys and men you were having sex with had control over you, too. You will have a baby girl with a guy who is very troubled—an insecure, jealous, deceitful kind of person. He won't be there for you and your baby like he should be. You will also try and keep their relationship together against all odds because you believe that's the right thing for your child, but this isn't wise. A real father, a GOOD father would never turn his back on his child, no matter what the situation. So when he walks, let him walk away and don't look back. I won't go into many details about the situation, but just know that he isn't what's right for you, and more importantly, your daughter.

I know this is a lot to digest, but I had to touch on the most important factors I felt you should know at this age and stage in your life and, let's face it—knowledge is power. I don't know if anything I said will change your mind, heart, attitude, or choices, but I had to try. You could be so much more than what you realize, but if you lose focus, you will lose so much time trying to regroup from your mistakes. Some mistakes are avoidable, some aren't; but all are lessons you should learn from regardless. Please remember: Time is precious, time is valuable, time is money. I love you, and wish you the best in the years to come!

Yours in Love,

Thirty-Something You

Dear Younger Me,

If I can turn back the hands of time, I would definitely have been a better steward over my finances and money! I am now 50 years old and I feel very young, but let's face it... the clock does not stop for no one. If something was to happen to me right now, this very day.... I do not have the proper money set aside for burial and funeral expenses or to leave my only daughter some money.

That is one of the biggest things I truly wish I could change and reverse at this point. I know it is never too late to start (and I have) but I always think about the MANY times I had good

opportunities and good money and did not properly invest them in me for the future. Very critical! Especially because our men (spouses) typically die before we do.

The other thing I wish I would have done sooner was to pour more into my dreams and visions. I am just now starting to create "my world" For about 35 years I have not put my dreams first..... I placed them on hold while I took care of everyone else and helped them fulfill their dreams. Take care of yourself and I don't want to be happy.... I want to be joyful all my days and walk in my passion.

Love, Me and you!

Dear Teen Me,

I was very active as a young girl. I used my body as a way to get attention from boys because I felt like I needed to be loved. I actually hated myself as a child because I was always made fun of because of my looks. I never seemed to get the right attention being myself, so I started to become whatever would make people accept me. As a result, I ended up using sex to get the attention I thought I needed in order to be liked and to feel better about myself. I never really had a person around to motivate me and tell me that I was beautiful not just on the outside but also on the inside. I didn't have anyone pushing me to become the best that I could be. I was always told "that's stupid or you can't do that, or you don't have what it takes to do that". I was always in a very negative environment, be it at home or at school. I ended up being molested as a child, again looking for attention in the wrong place; I became a heavy drinker at the age of 13 and as result of teen promiscuity I ended up with several STD'S including one I can't get rid of and I had 8 abortions. I thought about killing myself numerous times because I couldn't live with the fact of all the things I had done, be it willingly or unwillingly; but I could never bring myself to do the act. I know now that the Lord stopped me because He had a plan for me in the future. I wish that I had someone around back then that could have guided me towards a non self destructive road through Jesus. I did go to church when I was a girl, but that was all I did. I went but I didn't learn or retain what was being said because it did not appeal to me as a child. Being saved was something that adults did, not kid's. I wish I knew better. My advice to you young ladies is to value yourselves. Don't allow your body to be used as an experiment for these young boys because at the end of the day, they do not care a thing about you and how you feel. Don't let circumstances in your home or your school situation bring you to a point where you are killing yourself slowly. Seek God in ALL things through Christ Jesus and he will guide you in all your paths.

Dear Younger Self,

I been writing this note in my head for about 3 years now and I know it's nothing and nobody but God leading me to finally put it down somewhere. Somebody can benefit from my testimony. A lot of people who know me and REALLY know me, may know where I'm going with this but I don't mind my friends knowing "my story" because I'm moving on and it's my story of survival!

I have been struggling with myself for the past several years because of an abusive relationship I stayed in for six years. I was involved with a man who wanted to control me, isolate me from my friends and family and bring my self-esteem down as low as it could get. Only to make himself feel better. For years, I went through life believing all the negative things he said about me, because this was a man that I loved and I thought loved me. For 6 years I questioned myself everyday, why did I stay? At one point, I was afraid to leave but then sad to say, I grew immune to the abuse. It was like the day wasn't right unless we

fought. Sad right? I started feeling like it was okay, but let me tell you that; going to work with foundation packed on your face (when you don't wear make-up) to cover up black eyes and purple bruises is NOT okay. When a man constantly accuses you of cheating and criticizes everything you wear or never have anything good to say is NOT okay. When a man comes home drunk and decides to use you as his punching bag and stomps you in the face and ribs with his timberlands on is NOT okay. You wait for him to fall asleep, because you've plotted on ways to kill him in his sleep without going to jail is NOT okay. I'll admit at one time I was conceited, not because of how I looked or what I had, but because of my positive spirit and kind heart. Meeting him just tore all that down. I felt worthless, all the things he called me I believed it. He said no other dude gonna want you, the kids stretched you out, who gonna want you? I believed that too! Can you imagine staying in an unhealthy relationship for 6 years, sleeping with a man you wanted to kill and constantly praying to God to remove this man outta my life BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY! Even death!! I remember my grandma used to say "Everything that glitters ain't gold". Ain't that the truth?

The honesty of it is that I stayed because of the money. I let a nigga define me, who couldn't even define himself because of some \$\$\$\$. More importantly I disrespected my kids (there were only 3 born at the time) by allowing them in that hostile environment and I beat myself up everyday for it and apologizing to my kids. He didn't respect me or my kids. They were my motivation to go; no matter how many times he threatened he would kill me. Well, God answered my prayers and took him outta our lives, he didn't die but he got a lonnnnnngggg jail sentence. My struggles have been with self-esteem, knowing my worth, and settling for less. I no longer seek men for money; I take care of me and my kids. If they have something to bring to the table FINE, but I don't ask nobody for S*H*T!! A lot of bulls*** comes with that. I DEFINE WHO I AM AND WHO GOD WANTS ME TO BE!!! I HAVE A PURPOSE HERE AND I AM DETERMINED TO FIGHT...THAT'S WHAT SURVIVORS DO!!! I am happy with myself, my kids are happy. I am conceited again (lol) Life feels good! God revealed to me that I was the only one holding me back from my blessings. Don't settle, know your worth.

It made me bitter and angry. I went into a relationship with a lot of baggage always wanting to argue, fuss or fight because it was what I was accustomed to. I have been married for 3 and a half years to a WONDERFUL man, who he is outside is not who he is at home. We both know each other inside and out, we know things about each other that family doesn't know. When they say opposites attract that's us (lol) but you cannot help who you fall in love with and I've helped him become a better person and he has helped me become a better woman. We have had our ups and downs and changes and turnarounds but the bad does not outweigh the good. I think our 9 month separation showed us who we really are and who we could really be together!! Things happened during that time, that we both cannot change or take back but we're moving forward and do not let the outside define who we are. We've learned some life lessons and we both have made mistakes that hurt each other but that's life and anybody in a relationship or marriage that tells you its PERFECT...LIED!!! If it's perfect something is wrong. See my life lesson was control, I wanted to be in control and if it wasn't my way it was the highway, or always solving problems by throwing him out, and that's not the answer. I've learned that he is not him so in order for me to move forward and receive my blessings I had to LET GO of the past and LET GOD create the path to my future.

Oh my! This road is so bright, no more nightmares, crying over false visions that Satan has created in my mind, no more worrying. He's good, I'm good and we're good together!!! So even when it seems things are not going to get better, pray and wait for God because he knows the ending to the story before it starts. Have Faith even when it doesn't look good, because God has a way of making a way outta no way!!! I LOVE YOU ALL! GOD BLESS...{MUAH}

Dear Teen Me,

Thanks for being selective and obedient to a few important things when there were so many outside and negative influences that could have led you to a destructive path. I'm happy that you choose to go to college but it would have been more memorable if you would have attended college after graduating from Dunbar Senior High School. I understand that grandma and mom encouraged graduating from high school more than going to college, but you should have been more aware of your surroundings and realized that graduating college was just as important as high school. And since your parents or most adults were not aware of how much things had changed since their younger days, you should have used the education and common sense you had to dream, and reach beyond the obvious. You could have started by making more productive visits to the counselor's office instead of visiting just to have an excuse to hook class. Now you see, although it felt right, it was immature and unproductive to your future. It was a flaw and I will make sure the things that I took for granted are all available and utilized by my daughter.

Here is another thing - you didn't dream too much. As a matter of fact, you didn't have too many goals; and if you did, well you didn't pursue them. The only thing that mattered to you was having fun. Well now you see, you could have had fun after graduating from college, especially since most of your friends were doing the same things. And why were you so interested in the "cool" guys or the guys that always had some drama surrounding them. Again, you should have thought about your future and choose a gentleman who encouraged you to dream when you two weren't dreaming together. Imagine how it would be if you married your high school sweetheart (what a wonderful story to share with your kids). Well that was the past and unfortunately you lived those times and they are irreversible. What matters now is that you learn from your past and encourage Tiffani and other young ladies to start reaching for their dreams as soon as they finish reading this letter, if they haven't already started.

With love,

Dear Teen Me,

You are only 13 honey. Do no make adult decisions while you are a child. Yes, you are still a child. I want you to know that you have always been loved even though you grew up without a father. You do not have to be a people and family pleaser. You were loved and adored by your entire family, friends and teachers. You are beautiful, funny, and smart. You do not have to hide behind a mask...just be yourself.

My only regret is that you began to have sex at the young age of 13 years old because you did not want to feel left out. All of your friends were “doing it” so should you. You wanted to share a story like them so you would begin to lie like you are not a virgin because you thought it was uncool. You will lie until it become a reality. I wish I could turn back the hands of time and hand you this letter the day before you make the decision to lose your virginity. Have you ever heard the saying that “Curiosity killed the cat.” Sex is a beautiful experience that should be shared only with husbands and wives. I wish you had listened to your older cousin who was 14 years old and told you that sex hurts and it is not cool. She tried to warn you, but you wouldn’t listen because your other friends told you how good it felt. I wish you would have blocked them out. I wish you had the mindset to tell them to stop having sex too. Bad Peer Pressure is not good for you. Surround yourself around girls who are on the right track of doing good things.

I wish you would have learned to be more open and more affectionate because you would know that sex is not a “dirty” word and it was created by God for husbands and wives to share together and have children. I think having sex so early in life made you feel guilty about being sexually active. This causes you to dislike sex.

Although, you had unprotected sex with one person, your boyfriend, who was also 13 years old, he was sleeping around with multiple girls and gave you a sexually transmitted disease (STD), crabs, now called sexually transmitted infection (STI). He would lie to you and tell you that you are his only girlfriend. Don’t believe him. Look at the facts, you have a disease....Lucky for you its curable. Thank God it wasn’t AIDS or HIV or Herpes. Those are disease that you can never get rid of. You are too young to worry about relationships and if your boyfriend is cheating on you with other girls. You will feel sad and alone because you are too embarrassed to share this horror story with your friends so you will carry the weight on your shoulder alone. You will feel as if you cannot tell anyone not even your bestfriends who never judged you.

This letter will be the first time that you will share this story with anyone. Everyone thinks you are perfect. No one is perfect so stop trying to live your life as if you are perfect to cover the fact that you had sex. However, I know now that this happened for this very reason, so I can share my story and help another young girl not to have sex before she is married. Enjoy Your Youth. Be A Kid. Be a Teen. Live Life to the fullest. Go Dancing. Please Please Please Focus on your education and having good and clean fun with your friends and family. I only say this because two years later, you will get pregnant by that same boyfriend and abort your unborn child because you do not want to become a Teen Mom like the rest of your friends. You see how

hard it is for them to go to school and raise a child especially because most of them were unable to complete their education. This guilt will live with you forever. You will support Pro-Life, but live a lie as Pro-Choice by aborting your second pregnancy because you worried what others would think of you if you had another baby when you just had a baby a few months ago. This all happens because you keep having sex and you are not married. Yes, you will have another abortion when you are in your twenties. This abortion will kill your spirit. You will have a hole in your heart and stop loving your boyfriend and you'll break up for good. I am taking a lot risks here being open with you because my story needs to help another young girl not to make those same mistakes and know that she does not have to feel like she has to be in the "in crowd" to have sex. Don't do it. You can only lose your virginity once. Make it special. Just like the Founder of GIA says, "You are worth the wait." Please listen to the adults in your life as they try to warn you about your boy choices. Younger Me, I focused on sex because you will be successful in academics and the work-force, but inside you are living a lie. Don't do it younger me, Don't have sex until you are married. It would cause you lots of problems and heartaches.

Take off the Mask! You do not have to be perfect. It is okay to make mistakes. Stop punishing yourself. Do not let the fact that you have sex make you think that you are a sinful person. Let it Go and Move On and Make a vow to try not to keep making the same mistakes over and over again. God loves you just the way you are. Oh yeah, don't judge other people for the same thing you were doing. You learn that an 11 year old girl is having sex and you look down at her because you feel that she is "too young" where I got news for you, my younger me, YOU are too young as well to have sex. Say "NO" to sex.

Be True to Yourself,

Love You

Dear Little Lady, Tween and and Teen Me

You are a child and enjoy your time as a child. Don't try to carry issues that should be passed over to a trust worthy adult. See at age 8, I carried a very heavy burden that I hid and tried to carry on my own back. My burden was that I had been molested from ages five through seven and the person told me that if I told anyone that he would have to kill my parents and if I wanted them to live then I must keep the secret. Wow, a heavy issue at such a young age; but I am here to tell "Lil Terri" the devil is a lie. The enemy wants us to keep things in the dark and bottled up so that we have such a tough time in life because you have destiny and purpose. By carrying this secret, I battled suicide, being an overachiever, being a people pleaser, trying to take care of my parents instead of letting them take care of me, and trying to control my anger so much that I took a passive role for fear that I would hurt someone due to the backlash of what happened to

me. I can remember being in the bathroom, my mom and stepdad being asleep, seeing the razor blade that my mom used to shape her eyebrows thinking about splitting my wrists; because the burden was just too heavy to carry. I would tell my teachers at school I was sick, they would send me to the nurse and nothing was physically wrong with me but mentally I was dying on the inside. Finally, the school contacted my mom and she asked me what was wrong; I had a chance to tell her then; but the fear of her being harmed kept me from telling my secret. Now by carrying my secret; I then crippled myself because I traded in my childhood to become an adult. The only problem is that I was not equipped with the proper tools to handle adult problems. I never had a chance to enjoy my life as a child; so at times I even now I wonder would life would be like if I had turned the secret over sooner to an adult. My saving grace was that I turned my life over to God at the age of 10; he kept me even when I did not know how to keep myself. He wiped my tears in the midnight hour. He carried my burden when the load got too heavy. He loved me so much that he allowed me to get healed; the spring of my freshman year I had to deal with what had happened to me and underwent individual therapy while attending college. I was finally able to tell my mom what happened to me during one of my therapy sessions. It hurt her so much that I carried such a burden for 13 years and never gave her a chance to be my protector. Never take the journey that you are going through alone; there is always someone out there that loves you and cares for you enough to take the journey with you. You have destiny and purpose; because God says so- so don't let the circumstances of life keep you down. As Pastor Joel Osteen says "A setback is a set-up for God to bless you and change your circumstances".

"Little Terri" came out blessed; I hold two undergrad degrees and one masters degree. I am an accountant with the federal government. I have a beautiful 8 year old daughter. I have a family, close friends and church family that loves me unconditionally. Despite my setback; God has used me as a vessel to pour into others and help others who have been or have gone through similar circumstances. So I say to "Little Terri", you have destiny and purpose; so continue to press your way through your circumstances because "you have destiny and purpose".

Sincerely

Terri Richburg

Hello Beautiful and far more Spectacular Me

You are an amazing beautiful being. You were created to be spectacular. You are smart, fearfully and wonderfully made. You are special. You look so nice in that outfit. And I love you!

You are funny looking, you are getting fat, are you stupid, what's wrong with your hair, I hope you are getting new clothes.

It's astounding how the second set of comments just seems louder and more prevalent. It is not ok to talk about someone it is not ok to pass judgment or to ridicule. It is not ok for someone, anyone to do this to you. Think to yourself how wonderful you are and that your beauty is your own. Someone else's opinion of you especially negative is not worth a second thought. Easier said than done HUH? I know because from the age of 8 until now (somewhere in my 30's). I still struggle with low self esteem. But here is the thing its SELF ESTEEM. It's yours no one else's. Other people can only aid you to destroy or lower your self

esteem. And that's only if you ALLOW it. It's taken me 20 some years to realize that I have low self esteem because I allowed the negative comments to resonate, echo, reverberate. You are responsible for your destiny. God gives you choices not always black and white or right and wrong but you do have choices to make. Also please remember that to inherit your destiny you must remember your history. This will make so much more since when you get older. But remember it for now and later. Look at yourself and say I am BEAUTIFULLY MADE both inside and out. I am glad to be me and then say people should be glad they know me. But then make it true. Treat others as you want to be treated.

Don't ever think that someone molesting you, touching you or raping you is your fault. If it happens and you don't want it to TELL SOMEONE, no one should touch you in anyway if you do not want them to. It's not your fault. It's wrong and unacceptable. I don't care who it is. DON'T TOUCH ME! DON'T TOUCH ME! Scream it! This is my body and you cannot touch me. Scream FIRE! I don't care what you scream. SCREAM. Not just for you but for the next girl that clown will think he can touch. If I had said something I could have stopped from happening to someone else. Be someone's secret hero. Be your own SHERO! Be an inspiration!

I know you have seen and been through so much at such a young age. It's not ok for you see what you see or endure what you have. However it will either make you stronger or weaken you. It's up to YOU. You can triumph over your adversity. I admire the fact that you don't drink, smoke or use drugs despite seeing the alcoholism and drug abuse around you every day. I have a high regard for your strength in the face of the abuse physical, mental and abuse witnessed because of the alcoholism and drug abuse. I think it honorable that you don't gamble when people around you would spend their last to by a lottery ticket.

When you are sad and it seems you can't bear the pain please talk to someone. Don't take the pills. Be grateful that someone was there so you didn't succeed. Thoughts of suicide can be very overwhelming and will continue if you don't get help. Killing yourself will not prove or solve anything.

I thought I was doing something because I did not have sex until I was 17. But then I was pregnant at 19. You are worth the wait. You don't have to prove anything. You don't need that dude if that is the only way. Same way he approached you, so will someone else. What you can do is prove that you are strong and don't need to use your body to get or keep anyone.

Go to church. Pray. Give your life to God because when all others forsake you he will be right there.

Don't make excuses. Reasons are different than excuses. "If there is a will there is a way" Make away to get to school and church on time. Make a way to get your homework done, a way to participate in after extracurricular activities and church groups.

School is imperative. Go to school pay attention because contrary to young people's belief you will need it. Find something you love. And set goals for yourself, mini goals and long terms goals. Don't be ok with average. Don't say well I got C's, I passed. Don't just pass SURPASS. Know the feeling of being on honor roll or having perfect attendance. Learn a new word a day or a week. Go through this letter and find all the words you either don't know or are not sure of and look them up. I want you to know what it is like to accomplish

something. Start looking into colleges and careers NOW. Because later does not always come or comes to fast.

Last but not least take pride in who you are and who you aspire to be. If you want to be respected than make yourself respectable. Watch your language and how you speak. Be respectful of adults and children when you speak to them or around them. Dress age appropriate. Don't give anyone reason to think negatively of you. Carry yourself in a manner where people don't cringe or frown when they see you.

I love you Girl and I am proud of who you are and will be

Dear Inquisitive Teen Me,

I use this expressive adjective in my greeting to you as a reminder for you to continue embracing the fascinating characteristic of curiosity that you possess. While to some people, this trait may seem to be a bit forward or even intrusive, but for you...this attribute will propel you to successfully accomplish several of the goals that you set for yourself. So please remember that your unique way of thinking holds great promise for you! It's okay to have a different perspective and it's perfectly fine to use a completely different route to arrive at the same conclusion as others.

Before I begin to share a few life lessons with you, I must let you know how proud I am of you for the amazing human being you are becoming! Even though you will be truly blessed in a many ways, it is not the material things that stand out or add value to our lives...it is the type of human being we decide to become and the behavior we display that speaks volumes and reflects our true self. This is what people will remember when they think of you, so always make a conscious choice to be compassionate and selfless. The level of integrity, character, and loyalty that you display is outstanding. Whether it's in the classroom, the boardroom, or in your community, you strive to always speak up for what is right. You view being vocal for a specific cause as a responsibility and not simply as an act to stand out in the crowd. Even though you are young and have a great deal to learn, your passion is inspiring to both young and old.

Of course, not everyone you encounter will understand the vast amount of passion you have for learning, friendship, and animals. Some will not even respect it. You will encounter classmates who try to ridicule you for getting good grades in school. You will also find that some of the people you begin to bond with are not really your friends. Believe it or not, you will also cross paths with those who view your love for animals as ridiculous. Knowing you the way I do, all of this will be hard for you to process and even more difficult to shake off. Maya Angelou, famous African-American poet/author noted, "When someone shows you who they are, believe them." Over time, you will find this very profound quote to be true and hold significant meaning. Taking the time to understand the meaning behind the words will help you to move past the hurt caused by others. Don't waste so much time focusing on why someone responds in such a negative manner, doesn't like you or doesn't want to be your friend...it's their loss and you will be stronger and better for understanding that your destiny is not connected to those people. You are a child of God who is destined to prosper exceedingly and abundantly!

You are such an honest and trusting young lady...and while these characteristics are admirable, sometimes you're a little too trusting. You expect the same in return and will find out that not all people will give the same in kind. It will take some time, but as you mature, you will learn to deal with situations and people differently. Right now, you view using your

gift of speaking up as the right thing to do when a wrong needs to be corrected, but sometimes you react a bit hastily. While it comes from a place of strong desire to help clarify and help others understand your perspective, often times it will not be well received. You may even be viewed as a perfectionist. I understand that you're not trying to be perfect...you just want everything to go accordingly to plan, fall in the proper order, and line up just right. Unfortunately, life will not always work out in that manner. Therefore, I want to share with you early on in your journey the gift of observation. Learn to sit back, observe, assess and then make an informed decision or provide a more substantiated response. Sometimes a response is not required at all...I know that's hard for you to imagine (big smile). You tend to worry that if you don't react immediately then your meaning will be lost, but that is not the case at all. Once you learn to act rather than react to every little thing that occurs, you will free yourself from a great deal of self-imposed pressure.

One of the main concerns I want to share with you is how you deal with trying to make everything just right (perfect). I know how important it is for you to get good grades, plan out your career and basically attempt to plan out your life (at least into your 20s and 30s). Don't get me wrong, you should continue to excel in school...trust me, it does pay off! Your organized way of planning for your career also sets the stage for great career opportunities. You don't know it yet, but the personal motto that you adopt in graduate school will resonate with you for the rest of your life. It has actually helped other people that you have shared it with as well! I'm sure by now you're saying, "So what is it?" Well...the concept you have adopted as your personal motto is "Don't get ready; Be ready!" Basically, this means that you should always prepare early in your journey. Don't wait for someone to tell you to get started pursuing a degree, getting that certification, or networking with organizations that share the same interest as you. Self-initiative is a trait that will take you very far in life! You already display this trait, so please continue doing so and encourage others to take action as well.

Most importantly sweet one, remember to always find a cause greater than yourself and give, give, give!!! Your ultimate purpose in life is to serve, so position yourself to give abundantly, love exceedingly, and make a difference with the blessing you've been given called life!

Love always...

Hello Ladies:

My name is Joshua Reed, and I was raised in Sursum Cordas aka (Da Borda) lol.. I know how it feel to sell drugs, smoke weed, go to clubs and even watch people get killed. My parents always taught me to live a better life, but I chose to indulge in the street life out of my own free will. I no longer smoke drugs, sell drugs, carry guns nor do I go to clubs. And I must admit; this new lifestyle that I live is more fun and good benefits than that street life I use to live. I encourage you young ladies to pay close attention to (Kitta-Boo) lol I mean pay close attention to Ms. Ikisha Little, and learn from her GOOD encouraging advice. And always respect your parent while seeking to live a righteous live.

**Sincerely Yours
Josh aka (JD)**