

# Michelle's STORY

I grew up in Washington, DC. While under the custody of my mother, I spent the first few years of my life in foster care. At age six, my father, an alcoholic, took custody of and raised me as a single-parent.

Factors from my broken home and dad's alcoholism kept us homeless more than once. We slept on park benches, in bus stops, and in public restrooms where we often took advantage of the running water to wash up.

There were many times when I was hungry. And times when, with no money for bus fare, I had to rise at 5AM in order to have the time I needed to walk to school which began at 8. To be honest, even as a child, there were days when I truly thought we were not going to make it through to the next.

All combined, and as a result of those experiences—and more, I grew to become incapable of trusting even the kindest of individuals. I built a very high wall around myself, one I felt was strong enough to protect me. And, I was not about to let anyone into my life.

Prior to 2009, I'd already had one miscarriage and one abortion. When I discovered I was pregnant for a third time, I wanted to do things the right way that time. I wanted to choose life, and I did. My daughter, Milah, is now almost five years old and a blessing beyond what was imaginable just five short years ago.

When I made the decision to choose life, I knew it would not be an easy road. I knew I would have to sacrifice my unwillingness to trust others, because I was also smart enough to know I would never be able to make it alone.

When I discovered *Gabriel Network*, I quickly learned that it was an organization of people. Those very beings I'd learned to shelter myself from. And, I learned that the unique group of individuals at *Gabriel Network* were sent by God to be the very people who would help

me honor the commitment I made to choose life.

From the very first moment I interacted with the organization, I recognized something different—something I'd never before experienced in my life. Beyond doing what could very well have been just a job—tasks done for a paycheck and out of a sense of duty—there was a commitment on the part of seemingly everyone there—a strong sense of “family.” A family I thought I would never have.

It wasn't just black people helping black people. It wasn't just white people helping white people, these were “people” helping people. Watching and participating in their activities really helped me get over some of the insecurities I had been carrying with me for so many years. These “people” helped me to be able to trust for the first time. Their love penetrated my heart.

Five years later, I am now at a point in my life where the life-coaching, counseling, and sense of community from other people in the program—the other mom's—and the staff from *Gabriel Network*, have come together and given me a new way to approach my life. I can now trust, I can have faith. All to say, I owe it all to God, of course.

I have so much respect for the people at *Gabriel Network*. I'm now, and always will be, appreciative of their love and support. They gave me an irreplaceable feeling of being truly cared for and cared about.

*Gabriel Network* is about way more than helping homeless women... **it's so much more than that.**

*Michelle*

