

Catherine Sonnier

About 3850 words

1107 Festival Dr.

Houston, Tx. 77062

832-875-7832

catherinesonnier74@gmail.com

Eliana's Soul

Catherine Sonnier

In the early Spring, the sun shone above the lake, casting light onto the clear, peaceful, water. Distress was brewing further below. Submerged, at the bottom, sat a black SUV, on a pad of grass, swaying with the rhythm of the current. The vehicle had entered the lake within the last thirty minutes. In the front seat, I struggled to regain consciousness. My head had hit the steering wheel. In my weak state, I frantically wrestled with my seatbelt, as the car quickly filled with water. My lungs became compromised as I gurgled a cry.

“Ju...dy?”

I gazed into the rear-view mirror and caught a distorted glimpse of my children.

Judy, the oldest, 6, sat beside the left door, with her head against the backseat. Her long, brown hair floated around her face like jelly fish tentacles. Baby Sammy was slumped over, in his car seat, between his two sisters, while his bottle floated beside him. Ruby, 3, sat against the right door, in her booster chair, still clutching her teddy bear, as if in a peaceful slumber.

No, I can't let this happen.

I attempted the seatbelt again, but my arms and hands wouldn't comply. My limbs were limp.

Like a fish out of water, I tried to gasp for air, something the body does when struggling to survive. It was no use. My lungs were full.

Fish, turtles, and other lake creatures surrounded the SUV and four helpless souls.

Thu thump, thu thump, thu thump, the last beats of my heart resonated in the murky silence.

The absence of sound paired with the stillness of the water, surrounded the SUV.

Leaving my body behind, my confused spirit emerged and made several attempts to open every door of the SUV, with my translucent hands. I was unable to grasp the handles. Unaware of my limitations and new state of being, I glided through the window where Ruby sat and attempted to unbuckle her. Shimmering hands were once again, unsuccessful.

Suddenly, I felt a gravitational force, pulling me away from the car and my beloved children. I tried to break away from the clutches of a paralyzing tightness that gripped my weak soul, but it was no use.

I was lifted, through the SUV, away from the car, against my will, as if something was pushing me towards the surface of the water. I tried to break free from the force that carried my weak soul as I attempted to kick my limp legs and arms, but it was no use.

The pressing water wouldn't let my iridescent lips form the words I tried to speak, "Let me go. Leave me alone."

My resistance triggered a tighter grip that pushed me faster, faster, finally, my soul broke through, rising quickly above the water, through the air, just below the clouds. My translucent eyes gazed upon the Earth for the last time, as my bird's eye view became smaller and smaller. Noncompliant behavior subsided as I rose to incredible heights through the Earth's freezing atmosphere.

Earthly memories and connections dissipated as my soul was transported through stratus, then cumulus clouds. A tranquil silence began to penetrate my newfound form. As I broke through the last layer of cirrus clouds, a contented peace befell upon me.

I found myself walking, floating, through a misty fog, alone. A faint glow in the distance caught my attention. I followed the light until I stood before two lucid, undefined forms. Although transparent, an indistinct facial expression was noticeable.

Their baritone voices spoke in synchronicity, "Eliana, we are your greeters. You are in the land of Absolution. You have been brought here to receive a test for atonement. You will have an opportunity to make amends for prior, mortal sins. If you are successful, you may pass on, into an Eternity of your choice. If you fail, then your soul will cease to exist. It all depends on your test of atonement."

“Test of atonement? What could I have done to deserve this? I don't remember anything about my Earthly life at all. Please tell me?”

“We do not possess that knowledge, only the Almighty, the Chosen One, and the Ultimate Powers do. We are only the Messengers.”

“Who are the Ultimate Powers and the Almighty One?”

“They are the Higher Powers of the Universe. I have never seen them, only know of their existence. I have witnessed the deaths of many souls who have perished. I'm only a messenger, who once stood in your shoes, asking the same questions. The only advice I can give you, is that you follow your instincts and listen to your heart. Some of your earthly memories will return in time.”

“Your test of atonement will consist of being sent back to Earth to save a life. You have 14 days to complete the task. It's up to you to influence negative actions.”

“How will I be able to do that?” I asked.

You will be able to hear their inner thoughts. You can whisper suggestions, only audible to their ears. Equipped with this power, you must do your best to persuade and deter this earthly being from negative consequences. Your test of atonement is one of the hardest challenges a soul can undertake, since free will seems to guide negative outcomes on Earth. The trial you will embark was deemed necessary because of the severity of your sins.

I responded, “Please reassure the Powers that be, I will not fail. I'm ready to conquer the challenge.”

As soon as the lucid forms spoke their last words, I began to sink beneath the foggy mist. I floated down, passing through each layer of clouds, until reaching the Earth's surface. I found myself in a classroom, sitting at an empty table.

The teenage students in the room, fifteen to seventeen years old, were busy writing. I looked at the board where the teacher had written a writing assignment.

What Can I do to Help Create a Positive Attitude at Home and at School?

I glided off the table, then began to roam from student to student. I was intrigued by the writing task and felt compelled to read the students' responses.

Most of the student's writings were positive as the assignment instructed, but when I got to Michael, I noticed a different tone. His title read, *Nothing*. I wanted to know more and why. I began to read.

Nothing

Positive means nothing to me. Nothing in my life is positive. No one at school or at home gives a shit about me, not even my teacher. She lets everyone bully me while she hides behind her computer and pretends not to hear or see anything.

Just yesterday, Cameron called me a "skinny faggot." Mrs. Humphrey tried to reprimand him while the class laughed. "Cameron, cut it out. Leave him alone. Haven't you bullied Michael enough this year?"

Using intimidation, Cameron got in Mrs. Humphrey's face. "What 'cha gonna do about it? What would happen if I told the principal about the white powder you keep locked up in your desk drawer? You think I'm the only one who knows?"

Mrs. Humphrey's eyes grew large as she sheepishly answered. "Never mind. There's no need to make a big fuss about this."

She sat at her desk and pretended to be busy at her computer, dismissing Cameron's actions and words.

"That's right Mrs. Humphrey, you keep on typing away, minding your own business," said Cameron. "I'm sure you don't want the police to get involved in this matter, considering we're juveniles and all."

How can she expect me to write about anything positive? Like I said, I'm stuck between a pile of shit, here and at home. Why would God, if there is one, put me in the middle of this hell hole?

School sucks. My life sucks. My mom's a junkie who uses my dad's disability check to buy drugs and alcohol. When the money runs out, she sells her womanly services. My dad is confined to a wheelchair and a hospital bed for the rest of his life. He's paralyzed from the waist down. We're lucky we have a place to live, my grandma's house, rest her soul.

A few years ago, my dad's car broke down and he had to ride his bike to work. He was a janitor at the elementary. On his way to work one morning, a car hit him. He's been paralyzed ever since. My mothers supposed to take care of him, his caregiver, but most of the time, she parks him in his wheelchair, in front of the TV, in the bedroom. Sometimes, she raises the

volume, so he won't hear the partying in the evenings. Many times, I've come home from school to find him sitting in a soggy, poopy diaper. I struggle to lift him out of his wheelchair and clean him up. After the ritual, I put his favorite TV show on and set him back in his chair with something to eat. At least my mother helps me get him into bed. I couldn't manage that alone. Besides, she's always ready to put him in his bed so she can party all night.

Before I go to school in the morning, I kiss my father on the forehead, making sure not to wake him up. Almost every morning is the same. My mother lays passed out on the floor or couch, sometimes with a couple of so-called friends, while bottles, cans, trash, etc. remain all over the living room floor.

Thank God for Ramen noodles. Sometimes, that's breakfast, lunch, and dinner, bought with some of the change I find under the furniture or in jackets left behind. God must have fun playing chess with his pawns. I always feel like a pawn.

When the bell rang, Michael wadded up his essay, in a fit of fury, and threw it in the trash can, as he walked out of class. No one would ever know what Michael was wrestling with. No one else would ever read his desperate words.

Suddenly, I remembered the Messenger's words. "Your test of atonement is the hardest challenge a soul can undertake."

He's right, I can't, fail. Not only would I fail myself, but I would fail this tortured teenager who's already living a hellish life. I would give my soul to save his soul.

Michael continued through the hallway, until he reached his locker, where a crowd was gathered. **Michael Sucks Big Ones**, was written on his locker, in large, black letters. He opened

the door, grabbed his backpack, then slammed it shut. Since the exit door was right beside him, he scurried out and hurried to catch the bus. I followed him.

When Michael boarded the bus, he tried to find a seat, close to the front. Passing the third row, Big Jim nudged him from behind. "Keep on movin', you little twerp. I'll tell you where to sit down."

Big Jim got a kick out of picking on little guys, especially Michael. Even though I knew Jim couldn't hear me, I spoke anyhow. "Leave him alone, you big, bully. Pick on someone your own size."

Before Michael reached the last seat on the bus, Big Jim pushed Michael into an empty one and sat beside him. I was sitting directly behind.

Big Jim asked, "Did you bring the bottle like I told you?"

Michael nodded, yes.

"Open your backpack and show me," demanded Big Jim.

Michael unzipped his backpack so Big Jim could see. I listened to Michael's thoughts. *I hope I brought the right bottle this time, vodka last time, bourbon, this time. Don't want any more knuckle thumps on my head.*

Jim grabbed the bottle, took a quick swig of whiskey, secured the cap, then placed it in his backpack. Winking at Michael, he said, "Nice work, Little Mikie. Consider yourself lucky today. Tell your momma, thanks a lot."

As the bus came to a stop, Big Jim quickly stood up then pushed his way forward, towards the exit. Acting impulsively, forgetting my state of being, I followed behind Jim, tried to push him off the last step as he got off the bus. I fell through him and landed on the sidewalk. I bounced back up and entered the bus again. Seated beside Michael, I thought to myself, "*I wish I could give Big Jim a big taste of his own medicine.*"

The bus continued, to the next stop. I whispered in Michael's ear, "*Don't fear. Things will get better. I'll help you fight your way out of this. Be patient.*"

Michael grabbed his ear and sat low in his seat, beside the window. He couldn't wait for the bus to stop. Was he hearing voices? *I don't want to turn out to be like my mother.*

As soon as the bus stopped and everyone departed, Michael stepped off, last. I followed behind, as Michael started walking home. Within minutes, it began to sprinkle. Michael lifted the hood on his jacket and placed it over his head, as he hurried his pace.

Things will get better? Really? How? When? I don't believe in hopes and dreams.

After several blocks, he reached his house. We climbed the steps to the porch landing. Michael opened the door and entered the screened porch where his mother, Darla, and her drinking buddies gathered, playing poker, on a patio table.

Darla put her cards down and asked, "Hey, Mikie, where ya been all day?"

Standing beside the screen porch, Michael answered, "School today, mom."

Darla giggled, as she lit a cigarette, "Mikie, you know I forget what day it is sometimes, get me a cold beer before you go to your room, dear?"

“Bring one for me and Skip while you're at it,” Charlie added.

I went to the kitchen with Michael. He looked for something to eat, found two slices of cheese, two slices of bread, and made a cheese sandwich.

After gulping down a bit of nutrition, he took the last two cans to Darla. “Here mom, there's only two left.” Walking away, he said, “I'm gonna go check on dad.”

“Oh, he's fine. I checked on him a few hours ago.”

Michael knew better.

With my iridescent hands, I tried to knock the cans out of Darla's hands, but was unable. What kind of mother could be so self-centered and not care about her son's wellbeing or her husband's incapacity?

Popping the tab, then taking a drink, Darla replied, “Okay, Mikie, you do that.”

Shaking his head, Michael went back inside to check on his dad. I stayed close behind. Entering his father's room, Mark, was lying in bed, propped on two pillows. He was watching reruns of *The Price is Right*.

Michael asked, “Hey, dad, did mom change your diaper today?”

Mark replied as he struggled to sit up against his pillows, “No, not yet.”

As Michael opened the dresser drawer to grab an adult diaper, he noticed the empty can of chicken soup and Vienna sausages, sitting on top.

“At least momma brought you something to eat. I wish she'd warm it up for you. I don't know why she doesn't care more about you. Sometimes, I feel like quitting school to take care of you. Don't know what I'm waiting for,” remarked Michael as he began changing Mark.

Mark replied, “Please son, I implore you not to quit school. You only have three years left, then you can get out of this mess. I need you son, but I also need you to finish school, do something I never had the chance to do. I have faith in you.”

Michael hugged his dad and said, “I love you, dad.”

Michael's essay was the absolute truth. I was a witness.

Later that night, after the house was finally quiet, Michael woke up thirsty, walked through the living room, towards the kitchen. I stayed close behind. Darla was passed out on the sofa. On the coffee table sat a bottle of Xanax and a half full bottle of whiskey. Michael never made it to the kitchen, instead he picked up the bottle of Xanax and the whiskey as he proceeded back to his room.

Michael contemplated. *This is it, my chance to end it all.*

I heard Michael's desperate thoughts as I stood in the corner of his room beside the nightstand.

\ *At least it won't be painful. I'll just fall asleep...forever.*

I wanted Michael to hear my voice, but it was no use. My words just floated through the air. “No Michael. Please don't.”

I stood beside Michael, in disbelief, as he grabbed the pill bottle, opened it, then proceeded to empty the pills into his mouth. He picked up the whiskey from the end table and began washing down the pills. He didn't count them as he swallowed, but it was a mouthful. He began coughing and gagging as some got stuck in his throat. A few spattered out of his mouth and fell under the bed. The rest went down as soon as he chugged more whiskey.

I prayed. "Dear God, please don't let him die. He is your precious child. Help him, Lord."

Michael made so much noise coughing, he woke his dad in the next room. "Michael, are you okay?"

Michael walked into his dad's room. "I'm okay dad, just choked on some water, went down the wrong hole. Goodnight dad. Love you."

Michael got into bed and spoke softly, as he laid his head to rest.

"I beg you to forgive me, Lord, but I can't live this life anymore. Please take my soul with you to heaven."

Michael closed his eyes and fell into a deep sleep. I stayed with him all night, knelt in prayer, beside his bed. I watched his body twitch several times throughout the night.

In the morning, the sun shone through the bedroom window on Michael's face, but he didn't stir. 7:00 a.m. passed, 9:00 am passed, on to 11, still nothing.

I could hear movement in the house. Michael's mother was in her husband's room. "Come on Mark, let's get your diaper changed," Darla said. "I gotta go clean up the mess from last night."

As Darla left Mark's room, she noticed Michael's door was still closed. He always left it open when he went to school in the morning. She peeked in his room to find he was still in bed, asleep. "Michael, sleepy head, whatcha doing still asleep?"

As Michael's mother got closer to the bed, she stepped on something with her bare feet. "Ouch, what's that doing in here?" As she reached down to pick up the brown pill bottle, she found the extra pills that had gone under the bed. She also found the empty whiskey bottle on the floor.

She pushed on Michael's arm and tried to wake him up. He was drooling and breathing heavy. "Mikie, Mikie, wake up."

She pushed on him several more times. "Michael, Michael, please wake up for God's sake."

Darla dialed 9-1-1 immediately. Michael's breathing was in distress by the time the EMS arrived. The ambulance took him to the hospital where his stomach was pumped.

Michael remained in a coma, in ICU for over a week. I stayed by his side 24/7 and never stopped praying for his recovery.

The hospital brought back many bad memories. I remember my husband, Jack's last few days. He had decided to end his cancer treatments and resorted to spending his last days with

family and friends in the hospital. It was very hard on me. The kids were so young. Judy was 5, Ruby was 2, and I was pregnant with our third child. The children didn't understand what was happening to their father during the latter part of his illness. I told them he was going to the hospital to try to get better.

\ Even though I knew the cancer wasn't treatable, I refused to accept this reality. Now, keeping watch over Michael, I felt the same tone of the room, trying to prolong a life, so many doctors and nurses coming in and out of the room, life-activating machines, and medicinal smells that filled the air, all too familiar.

Darla was also at his bedside, mostly crying, sometimes praying.

As much as I wanted Michael to live, part of me could understand why he wanted to take his life. It was hard to watch him, now on a ventilator, fighting for his life. I couldn't fail this poor lad.

“Dear Lord, if your will be done, please let this cup pass far away from Michael. I will spend the rest of my time here on Earth beside him. He won't have to be alone in his miserable life.”

On the morning of the thirteenth day, the doctor came into the hospital room to talk to Darla. “I'm sorry to inform you, but we will have to remove the ventilator tonight. Please gather friends and family to say your goodbyes. We've tried our best and have run out of options.”

More familiar words to contend with, I thought to myself. Whatever happened to miracles?

Darla broke down. "No, please, my son, my sweet, dear son."

The nurses gathered round to console her. Sadness filled the air.

Family and friends came to the hospital and tried to comfort Darla, but it was no use. No matter how many family or friends filled the room when Jack died, I never felt comfort.

On the morning of the fourteenth day, Michael's spirit left his body. He called out, "I am free now." He looked at me and said, "Who are you?"

I answered, "I am Eliana, sent here to take you on your new journey."

Where are you taking me?

To your heaven.

With a glowing smile, he took my hand and said, "I'm ready."

I replied, "Yes, you are."

I couldn't tell Michael my real purpose. I didn't want to let him down. I knew I still would have to contend with the Messengers of The Almighty.

Holding hands, we felt a gravitational force pulling us upwards, through the hospital roof, through all the layers of clouds, then finally to the heavens. Michael floated away to his eternity while I faced one of the Messengers.

"I am here on behalf of The Almighty One who has decided to relinquish you from your atonement. Although your mission failed, another was gained."

I didn't know what to say except, "I'm so graciously thankful to be released from my atonement, but I don't know why."

The Messenger continued, "The Almighty One has bestowed his grace upon you because of your efforts and compassion. You are free to join your family in your heaven now."

As the Messenger disappeared into the distance, I heard three familiar voices approaching me. Four souls took my hands, one tall, three small. We floated away into our distant, eternal, heaven.

