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More Than Just An Acquaintance

MY JOURNEY TO FIND
MY TRUE IDENTITY AND
GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MY LIFE

By Sonja Henry Harper

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God's purpose for my life

SONJA HENRY HARPER

For many years I sat on a church pew Sunday mornings and Sunday nights –Wednesday nights as well—hearing the Do’s and Don’ts of Religion. Often, I left feeling worse about myself, knowing I could never measure up. Today I am here to tell you that if you walk this walk, you will fail, just as I did so many years ago. If you try to live by religion instead of a relationship with God, you will fail miserably!

God was no more than just an acquaintance to me. I met him every time I entered those church doors and left him when I exited. Although I had always had a deep belief in God, nothing made sense to me. Perhaps I only believed in him because of my childhood background. Perhaps I felt I had to believe that there was a God and that he had a purpose for me. Perhaps it was my only hope.

Halfway Across the World

It was 1966. At 19 months old, in West Germany, I was removed from my biological family by the *Jugendamt*, Germany’s child protection service. I was adopted by a U.S. military couple who were stationed in Germany. They brought me to the United States when I was three. I grew up in the small Texas country town of Deweyville. It was the kind of town that if you blinked, you missed it.

We arrived in America on the RMS *Queen Elizabeth*. I still remember standing on the deck and seeing the Statue of Liberty as we entered New York Harbor. I looked up through the fog and saw this majestic lady holding a torch. That vision has been forever etched in my memory. I knew in my heart something special was happening.

Now, as a grown woman, I see it for what it is: God’s Providence—the hand of God steering my life. I am forever grateful that I was rescued and brought to this country. I was given the freedom to worship God freely.



At age four I became a U.S. citizen. We lived in San Antonio, Texas, until I was nine years old. We then moved to Deweyville, the little town I told you about. I grew up knowing I was different because of my adoption. I would look at my friends and their families and wonder why my life was so different from theirs. It was particularly hard when I became a teenager. My girlfriends would tell me how much they looked like their aunts, or about the family traits they carried.

I so longed to be like somebody else—to be connected. I would stare in the bathroom mirror for hours, it seemed. I would look at every detail of my face! I would ask God, “Who am I? Why did you make me?” And in a weird way, I would move very close to the mirror and say, “Sonja Hutto, just who are you?”

I wanted to know that I had a Purpose here on Earth. Meanwhile, all that my girlfriends wanted to know was who was going to ask them out on their next date!

I struggled through those years—but secretly, silently. I remained very outgoing and popular. I was the High School Cheerleader, Football Sweetheart, Prom Princess, Homecoming Duchess, All-A Student, Lettered in Varsity Basketball my Freshman Year, Captain of the Basketball Team

I was somewhat of an overachiever.

As a grown woman, I can tell you now that that was all about proving to my inner self that I had value. Deep down, without knowing it, I was suffering from a deep sense of loss—a hole I could not fill no matter how hard I tried. The nagging hole of wanting to know I had a purpose on this earth.

Beginning My Life

I soon graduated from high school and went to college. I received my degree, became a Registered Dental Hygienist, and began a career in dentistry. I married quite young and extremely insecure. I just wanted to be loved and accepted. I didn't know that brokenness finds brokenness. I was married for 17 years, in an tumultuous marriage. I was insecure and broken, and so was he.

But I did have three beautiful children. With each birth, with each new child, another huge wall fell down. Each time, I became able to love a little stronger and deeper. God had begun healing me through my children. Throughout the years of my marriage, I had been depressed now and then. But it was when I gave birth to my oldest daughter, Brooke, that my world came crashing down. I was 23. By the time she was 11 months old, I was in full-blown depression.

I had continually been seeking the help of doctors after her birth. I knew something was wrong. I was suffering from anxiety attacks and crying constantly. I remember holding her for the first time and feeling overwhelming love for the child in my arms. But all I could think of was, "How in the world could I love her so much?"

Then, "How could a mother love her child like this, and give her away at 19 months old?"

I began to realize for the first time in my life what had happened to me as a little girl.



Depression and Healing

My depression became worse. My best friend had just graduated from nursing school. She came to me to tell me she thought she could help. She was the first to tell me I had depression. I didn't even know what that was. (We have come a long way since the '80s.) But I was willing to do whatever I could to get better.

I checked myself into the neurological hospital for thirty days. They did a workup there and concluded that, due to the trauma of being removed from my biological family at a crucial age, I was experiencing PTSD—Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. My repressed memories were starting to surface.

Those thirty days in the hospital were the most healing days for me. One by one, distinct memories began to surface. God was helping me connect the missing pieces of my puzzle (my inner self) to all the buried emotions I'd had for 23 years. After sharing my memories with my adopted parents, true emotional healing began. After all those years, I was finally able to mourn the loss of my biological family.

When I give my testimony, I tell it like this:

“Close your eyes and pretend that when you wake up in the morning you have a new husband, new children, new family, and you must carry on as if nothing happened. You lose your identity, your sense of who you are, but you just have to pick up and carry on.”

That is what it's like for a child to be taken out of a home. Children bond with whoever and whatever they know. Even in abuse, they love their families, and it is heartbreaking. I am now that child grown, and I understand.

Don't You Want to Know?

I faked my life. I struggled through it, acting as if I had it all together emotionally. But all the while, I smiled on the outside while crying on the inside. Depression is real. I suffered on the inside, in secret. I tried so hard to do life, and have a perfect family, with a perfect home, and the perfect American dream. I knew what it should look like—that All-American home. Finally, in 1995, I had a huge falling out with my adoptive mother. She was always nitpicking me to death — “Why wasn’t I this?” “Why wasn’t I that?” — meaning more like her. I finally got in her face and told her bluntly, “You just don’t get it? I AM LIKE NO ONE!”

I said it with such anguish and hurt. I so badly wanted to connect with someone, but my walls were too thick. Finally, those words permeated her heart. A few short weeks later she told me that she’d heard me. For the first time, a light came on in her head. She began to feel my hurt, and to understand how I must feel not knowing where I came from.

That day my life began to change. She said she and my dad wanted me to go back and find Victoria, my birth mom, and they would help. As a people pleaser, I would never have done such a thing on my own. I would have felt I was being disloyal to my adoptive parents. But when she told me they wanted to help, I said, “You would do that for me?”

Weeks before, on the same day that my mother and I had words, I’d had an odd experience. I had gone to a park at Toledo Bend Reservoir and sat on a picnic bench by the water. As I sat there in pain, I watched a motor home drive up in front of me. God and I were having a talk, and my spirit kept hearing, “Sonja, don’t you want to know?” Over and over, “Don’t you want to know?”

As I watched, a man and woman get out of the motor home, and I realize they are vacationers. I begin to watch them closely. They are foreigners, speaking a different language. I get up and walk a little closer to hear their words.

At that moment, my heart skips a beat. They are German! And I still keep hearing in my spirit, “Don’t you want to know who you are?” I so badly want to run up to them and talk to them, to question them about their country—MY country. . . .

But I was too scared, too unsure. Little did I know that I had just had a divine meeting with the Lord.

After all these years I was standing here in the realization that my adoptive parents wanted me to go back—to find my past and make peace with it. Over the next few months I began for the first time to experience God and his sovereign will for my life. I felt him. He was right there with me every step of the way.

Providence Unfolding

A few days later, watching TV, we saw an advertisement for the book, *International Adoptions*. My dad said, “Let’s order that.”

When it arrived, we learned of Lonnie Boehmer, a German lady living in Phoenix, Arizona. She had helped adoptees from Germany go back and find their biological families. She knew how the German legal system worked.

Within six weeks of contacting her, she found my birth mom! Now, if that isn’t a divine alignment of coincidences? I knew it was a God thing. That’s the only way I knew how to describe it.

From there the events began to unfold quickly. She found my birth mother, Victoria, living right next door to where I had lived with her, decades ago. After all those years, she was only one door over! You see, Europeans do not move around like Americans. Mrs. Boehmer asked me to write a letter to Victoria and she would then mail it for me.

Now, this is where the most astonishing events of God's Providence began to unfold in my life. My husband at the time worked in Orange, Texas, for a German company named Bayer. And somehow, through the grapevine, word got out about my situation. I soon received a phone call from the plant manager's wife, Rose Marie Keller. She introduced herself to me and said, "I hear you are writing your birth mom a letter. May I help translate your letter into German, so she can read it?"

I was speechless and overcome with gratitude for what God was doing in my life.

In a few short weeks, I received a voicemail. I will never forget my husband calling me that day. He told me there was a strange voicemail from a woman named Petra! I recognized her name right away. My adoptive parents had always told me about a cousin my age who lived with me. It was her, the daughter of my birth mother's sister.

We had all lived together in a two-room apartment. There were my grandparents, me, my biological mom, and my aunt and Petra. My heart skipped a few beats as I rushed home to listen to her message. I was shaking so much, it took me 30 minutes to dial her number. When she answered, it was so surreal. She said, "Sonja I have always known about you. My mom loved you so much!"

Her mom was my aunt. My parents had told me that when they got me at 19 months old, I continually said, "*Tante*," which means *aunt* in German. My parents knew I must have had a special relationship with her.

Petra then said, “I want you to know you were the blessed one. My life was so hard growing up poor, and I always wondered why you were the lucky one?”

For the first time in my life, I realized I was the blessed one. I replied, “Wow. I always wondered why they kept you and gave me away?” I had always felt like the rejected one.

She explained how her mom tried to feed and take care of both of us. It was just too hard. My biological mom drank heavily. So much so that the *Jugendamt* (German child protection service) warned her repeatedly about it. Unless she straightened up and got a job, they would have to take me away from her.

My next question to her was, “Petra, do I look like her?”

Petra paused and said, “Who?”

I said, “Victoria?”

The next words out of her mouth completely threw me for a loop. Petra said, “I hope not,” with a giggle.

It was so comical, but also profound, because it definitely broke all the tension. I was not expecting that answer. I broke down laughing with tears. She explained that she wasn't trying to be rude, but Victoria was large and broad-shouldered, an authentic German woman!

She then told me in excitement that she was leaving for vacation in two weeks. She asked, “Would you like me to change my plans and fly to the U.S.?”

I was ecstatic with joy as I said, “Yes. YES!” through my tears.

It had always been her dream to come to the U.S. She described how she and her mom would sit on a park bench when she was growing up. American families often walked by. And if they had a little girl, she would say, “I wonder if that could be Sonja?”

My heart was so full. I had never known they cared so much for me. I have another beautiful story about Petra that I will save for another time. Also, a few days before Petra arrived, I had an encounter with what I believe was an angel, who gave me a message that I should write a book someday!

For now, just know it was a God-given, divine moment, and the next few weeks were pure joy. Petra brought pictures of my birth mom, her own mom (my aunt), and our grandparents. Unfortunately, her mom had passed away from cancer two years before. Petra said that her mom was the happiest angel in heaven, looking down on us together. I believed that with my whole heart.

Victoria

Six months later, in 1996, I flew to Germany to meet Victoria. My heart was prepared for what I was to see. God was preparing me. I knew she was a binge drinker, but even at age 33, nothing can quite prepare you for that sort of thing. Luckily for me, she showed up sober. She greeted me at the airport with tears streaming down her face. She had never been to an airport before, and I believe she was 54, about the same age I am now.

As I rode the escalator up toward her, my mind drifted back to a repressed memory, so long ago. It was the scene I'd flashed back to in the hospital, surfacing again. . . .

I am riding in a little VW Bug between a tall man and a skinny lady. I hear the windshield wipers flipping back and forth. I can hear the raindrops. I can feel the sadness. I can hear faint sounds of a heavy-set woman sobbing softly in the back seat. I know this woman with the long black hair is my mother, and my heart hurts. When the little VW bug pulls up to the curb, my heart aches, because I already know. I know that when the car doors open, I will never see her again. . . .

At 19 months old, my heart felt it. I was sad, but even then, I knew she could not take care of me. In a weird way, as a wise little soul, I knew what was happening was right.

So now, here I was, standing in front of her after 33 years. And as she wrapped her arms around me, crying, I knew I still loved her after all those years. I never hated her; I always loved her.

After my 2-week visit, I arrived back in the States, with a little more wholeness in my brokenness. I returned with much-needed closure, realizing Victoria could never have been a functional mom to me. There was much more to my visit, but I will save it for another time.

What I learned was that Victoria was not willing to help me find my older brother or younger sister. Both were also adopted by Americans and were living here in the U.S. So, I pulled up my big girl panties and did the only thing I knew how: Pray! I said, "Please, God, if it is your will, help me find my brother and sister. I am up against a brick wall. And please, if you do help me, let it be while we are young enough to enjoy each other. Please do not make us wait until we are old."

So, my life carried on.



A Sister I Never Knew

Three years later, I was walking out of a department store. I will never forget what happened. I heard two women cackling inside, and I stopped and turned back to look at them. They were holding up a man's shirt, and looked so much alike, I knew they were sisters. As I walked on, I looked up to God and said, "I wish so badly I could find my sister."

As I look through my life, I can see that before each divine appointment, God prepared my heart for what was to come. That day had been Friday, and it was Father's Day weekend. Those two women were in the store to buy their father a Father's Day gift!

Saturday morning, I got an unexpected phone call from Petra. Our relationship had grown through the years, and she was like a sister to me. We talked about twice a month. When I answered the phone, I heard her say, "Sonja, you'd better sit down. I have some news for you. You have a sister seven years younger than you, living here in Stuttgart. She is looking for you right now!"

After I sat down, I had to have her repeat it back to me. She said Victoria had handed her a letter, and that on Monday, I needed to call the courthouse as soon as it opened. I was beside myself in shock, of course. I had only known of a sister three years younger and a brother four years older.

It was an eternity until Monday morning! The courthouse opened at 9 a.m. in Germany. So, I got up at 2 a.m., our time, and dialed the number. When the lady on the other end answered, I explained that I was Sonja Henry from the U.S., calling from Texas. She let out a shriek that sent chills up my spine. She was talking hysterically, telling me she and my sister had been searching for me for two years!

I was still in shock while she spoke. Through her tears, she explained that two years earlier, she had noticed Carmen, my sister, coming to the courthouse every other day. Her curiosity got the best of her and one day she stopped and befriended her. She asked Carmen what brought her there so often?

Carmen explained that she had been adopted but knew only that her biological mom lived in the next town over. She did not want to meet her mother, but she began having dreams that she had siblings. And the dreams just would not go away!

You see, this is where my testimony comes in. This happened more than 20 years ago, long before DNA testing was available. It was those dreams Carmen had that led her to search. I know in my heart that when we pray, we may not get immediate answers. But all the while, God is working in our behalf—working out what is best for us. Her dreams were from the Holy Spirit! And Carmen was visiting the same courthouse I had been to three years before, searching the records to look for my siblings! Carmen and I had been going to the same place, looking through the same books. Coincidence?

The lady and Carmen soon became friends. She told Carmen, “You don’t have to meet your mom, but at least write her a letter asking if she had more children.”

The woman said that Carmen had sent the letter.

One year later, my birth mom walked into her office. She sat down in a chair and said, “I do have another daughter. Her name is Sonja Henry and she lives in Texas.”

The lady told me that she and Carmen were overwhelmed with joy! But it did not take them long to realize that finding me would be harder than they expected. She said, “Do you know how many Sonja Henrys live in Texas?”

I had no idea there were so many of me! The beautiful thing about this part of my story is that I'd just had my youngest daughter, Hope. I'd named her Hope for what I had hoped would happen in my lifetime—to find my brother and sister! Hope was five months old when I flew back to Germany to meet my sister, Carmen.

The Godwink Effect

My life took off after that. I met Carmen and we hired a lady in Frankfurt, Germany, to open all the birth records. Within that year I found all my siblings. Yes, all! There were eight of us including me. I had seven siblings, but two had passed away. But I have beautiful stories about meeting each remaining sibling. I met all but one of them in that same overwhelming year!

I had such completeness about myself in the next few years, more because I had seen and experienced God. It was my God thing. That's the only way I know to describe what had taken place in my life.

When Hope was three, I filed for divorce. I was a much stronger, more confident woman. I was still broken from all my wounds, but I had a sense of security I had never known before. I began to read a lot of self-help books along with my faith and my prayer.

It was during that time in my life when I stumbled across my first Godwink book. When I saw it in the book store, I picked it up and was so intrigued by the true stories. I have always loved true stories—it is my own nature after living the life I've had! With that book, I was able to put a name to all the God things that I would speak about in my life. I started using the term, Godwinks. It was so endearing and warm, less threatening to people that were afraid of "Jesus Freaks."

I lived through more trials during my divorce. But through it all, I watched God lead me to an abundant life—a life I thought I would never find. The Godwinks in my life set me on a beautiful bridge that brought me from brokenness to wholeness.

I actually found the “Godly Husband” God had for me. But it was only after I became a whole person and could love with all my heart. I have a beautiful Godwink story about how I met Randy. I submitted my own story and it was published in the book, [The Godwink Effect: 7 Secrets to God’s Signs, Wonders, and Answered Prayers](#).

Dentistry into Ministry

Since then, my Godwinks have been my guideposts, leading me to my purpose—my calling. I now have a ministry of identity. After being in dentistry for 33 years, I asked God, “Is this all you have for me?” In my heart, I clearly heard, “I am taking you from Dentistry into Ministry!”

From there, my Godwinks led me to a girls’ home near me. I am now a mentor for all the girls. They call me “The Godwink Lady.” I introduced myself to them at the beginning of the year. God had given me the idea of bringing God into their life, through true inspirational Godwink stories, and my own testimony. I could never have walked in among these girls and announced we were doing a Bible study!

I have watched since that first day and seen the girls make such a transition. At first jaded and depressed, they had so many walls up. Now, they’ve become welcoming young women with warm smiles and hugs.

I also mentor one of the girls one on one. When I walked in to meet her, I realized she was one of the girls who had been around for the past six months. Every time I showed up for my meetings, she would not take part. I just let her sleep on the couch. My heart knew something was not right.

Little by little, each time I showed up she had seemed a little more responsive. But when I walked in to meet her that day, she ran towards me, arms open wide, with a great big smile and a hug, as she said, “Oh, Mrs. Sonja, I was so glad when they told me I had the Godwinks lady for my mentor!”

I felt tears coming. I had thought she paid no attention in any of those meetings. A week later, in our next session, she opened up completely. She said her mother’s rights had been taken away and that she and her two younger sisters were now up for adoption. She told me that last summer she cried all the time and could not eat.

“So that is what was wrong,” I thought.

I then heard these words, “But Mrs. Sonja, I loved hearing all your stories!” My heart was full. I had broken through those walls, and I was getting through to these precious souls. In just six short months, Godwinks had brought them inspirational stories with hope! These teens need hope!

I share my story, my pain, and my battles as a teen. And then I share the blessings that have happened in my life. I share my Godwinks, and they know God will give them their own Godwinks.

Godwinks is the bridge needed to connect the hurting to the hope in a dark world. We must be the light. I now stand to tell them, the youth, proudly, yet humbly: “I Am Like No One!” And neither are they. God has uniquely and wonderfully made them, and he does have a Grand Purpose for their lives.

God is now more than just an acquaintance.

**Godwink Hugs,
Sonja Henry Harper**



About the Author

Adopted at 19 months old by an American military family, Sonja Harper knows the familiar emotional pain many children suffer due to separation from the only family they knew.

Experience God with her as she shares her testimony of how God led her from brokenness to wholeness during her life-long journey to find her true identity and the calling God's providence had for her.

Finding her biological mother and siblings from Germany before the era of DNA testing was one piece of the journey. And finding her husband at age 50 is a dream she had always hoped for.

Sonja and Randy's story was published by Godwinks author, Squire Rushnell, and appeared in his book, [The Godwink Effect: 7 Secrets to God's Signs, Wonders, and Answered Prayers](#), released in 2017.

For more of Sonja's testimony and stories, visit her website at:

SonjasIdentityStory.com

Or on her Facebook page:

[This is My Identity Story](#)

To read Sonja and Randy's story in Squire Rushnell's book, click the cover to buy it.

Coming This Year:

Sonja's new book is underway. Subscribe on the website or Facebook for updates.

