



A Phoenix Rising: Defining the Moments

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"I learned about inequalities in the eyes of others. Just like oppression it is about ignorance. It is about insecurity selfishness and control. Mostly it is about *fear of the unknown*." This quote articulates the type of treatment Eddie and his sister Cindy endured throughout most of their childhood. Eddie was but a baby when he came to live with Mama Skinner and Papa Lue and his sister Cindy was only 5 and a half. Mama Skinner and her husband took in children for money but the children were never treated any differently than their "natural" children. Mama Skinner read from the Bible every night after all of the children were ready for bed. The children who stayed for a time with Mama Skinner and Papa Lue felt loved and cared for even though they had to perform chores. So it was quite a change when Cindy and Eddie were taken from this home to their Aunt Elaine and Uncle Hank's home. Little did they know that this signaled the end of their innocence.

Cindy and Eddie didn't understand why they had been taken to their Aunt Elaine's home until a few years later. Their aunt and uncle received money every month for taking care of Cindy and Eddie and Aunt Elaine had had a boy about Eddie's age who had died. They both did chores with Cindy doing the most such as cleaning the house washing the dishes and anything else her aunt and uncle desired. Eddie cleaned the bathroom and if Aunt Elaine didn't think it was clean enough she would make him scour it again with a tiny brush. If Aunt Elaine didn't think Cindy and Eddie were obeying her she often beat them causing them to bleed or suffer bruises. Cindy cried during the beatings but Eddie learned early on to hold the tears and not give his aunt and uncle the satisfaction of thinking they were hurting him. The children tried to run away several times but the police always brought them back.

Many "angels" offered Eddie a smile a wave of the hand or a nod of the head. He says these people helped him persevere though the hardships. Cindy was kicked out of her aunt's house when she was eighteen but Eddie stayed for several more years until he was able to escape and live with one of his grandmothers.

This story is a testament to the strength of the human spirit. The author says he learned "to look outside the walls of circumstance and open your heart. Be mindful of those around you for they are there at that very moment for a purpose."

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