

One More
Child
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This book is dedicated to my husband, Jeff.
Thank you for asking me to marry you
and for all the wonderful years.

To Neal and Christina, children of my younger years,
and to Nicholas, Anne, and Michael,
the children of my Elizabethan age.
You have all made my life special.

Published in 2018 on the 50th Anniversary of
Humanae Vitae

CONTENTS

Preface.....	vii
Introduction.....	xi
CHAPTER 1 Life Begins.....	1
CHAPTER 2 Life Circumstances.....	11
CHAPTER 3 Intelletual Information.....	23
CHAPTER 4 Reality of Life	31
CHAPTER 5 Happily Ever After.....	37
CHAPTER 6 Devastating News	43
CHAPTER 7 Coming Home.....	53
CHAPTER 8 Life with Kids	69
CHAPTER 9 Unexpected Blessings	83
About the Author	93

Preface

Does “happily ever after” happen in real life, or is it merely a fairy tale perpetuated by the media? This is a question each of us needs to answer. Happiness comes in all shapes and sizes. Maybe you’ve asked yourself the following questions: What is the plan for my life? What will I do for a profession? Where will I live? Whom will I marry? How many children will I have? If you think about them seriously, the answers to these questions are fluid. As we grow and mature, our ideas often change. We can hope to live a happily-ever-after type of life that meets our goals, ideals, and dreams, but life has a way of shaking our convictions. Obviously, only God knows the future.

For many people, happiness depends on our family life. I believe that children are gifted to us by God. Many people decide to limit this gift due to a preconceived notion of how they wish to live their lives. God has a wonderful plan, and many of the struggles against His plan are caused by our free-will choices. Emotional ups and downs in our lives are often a direct cause of our decisions. Sure, some things are totally out of our control, but the way we react to these events reveals much about our true selves. Stopping to

analyze our state of mind or, more importantly, our reactions to uncontrollable life events will show us where we are in our walk with God.

I don't have all the answers. I have dragged my feet for years trying not to write this book. I've had misgivings because discussing birth control or other permanent solutions is a touchy subject. Openness to God's plan for love and life is a subject about which even the most even-tempered people vehemently disagree. How dare I discuss the idea of being open to having children—especially to having more children? No one likes advice about such a personal decision, no matter how well-meaning. Our world is inhospitable not only to children but also to the idea of motherhood. Over the years, my own views of authentic womanhood and motherhood have changed, and I'm still learning and growing in my walk with God.

I'm writing this book to put to rest the persistent and nagging sense that some of you may need to hear what I must say. Or perhaps, like me, you have misgivings about limiting the number of children in your life. I've learned that many moms and dads are hurting and confused. They feel pressure from well-meaning family and friends, as well as societal viewpoints, all claiming to know what is best when it comes to family size. They hear questions such as "Of course you are done by now?" or "Really? Another baby?" or "Do you know what causes that?" or "Are you trying for your own baseball team?" or in my case, "How old are you?"

The answers to my personal decisions involving these questions and more are explored in this book. For a public speaker, podcaster, and author, I'm an anomaly. I'm actually a private and shy person—but no one seems to believe that about me! The very fact that I'd reveal a portion of my life—a

One More Child

tragic mistake that no one needs to know about—to all of you is an act of obedience to the God I serve.

Perhaps I couldn't share this story if it didn't have a happy ending. In fact, this wonderful outcome could only happen by the grace of God's merciful and forgiving love for me. And the best news? God's answers to our prayers are so much better than anything we can imagine—and believe me, I have an amazing imagination! God has an abundance of grace that He is happy to share with all of you as well.

Introduction

It has taken me over five years to write my story because the timing did not seem right, or so I told myself. As I think back over the events, time seems to stand still and I clearly see the day when God made it clear that I needed to share my story with you.

It isn't every day that I think I hear God as I'm travelling seventy-five miles per hour on the interstate with my family. It happened suddenly without any warning, and it was so real that I wanted to turn around to look behind me. I thought, "He's right there!" Before you think I'm certifiable, let me explain.

We were travelling to a theme park about two hours from home. As we drove toward Tampa, we passed a billboard advertising the doctor who had performed our vasectomy reversal. This doctor is striking, and his face is plastered on the billboard along with the word *Vasectomy* for the entire world to see. Seeing the billboard arouses anger inside of me each time I see it because it brings back mixed feelings.

My husband and I both knew that we had made a tragic mistake. At first we realized it individually, and then Jeff was bold enough to share with me his regret for having

a vasectomy. That was an important turning point for us individually, for our faith, for our marriage, and for our future children, if we had any more. You see, this doctor hadn't wanted to perform Jeff's reversal surgery, although he was very skilled at the procedure. We already had a boy and a girl, so he couldn't imagine us wanting more children. Also, we had waited twelve years before seeking a reversal. The doctor had given Jeff so many dire warnings the first time we went for a consultation that we left without scheduling the surgery. It had taken another full year of prayer and discussion before we attempted scheduling this surgery again, and then another presurgery consultation had been required. This time, however, we had both been convinced that this was something the Lord wanted us to do, so Jeff had the surgery.

After reading the words on the billboard for the umpteenth time, I heard the Lord speak: "How long will you continue to allow Me to be mocked?"

What?! I wanted to turn around because the voice was so real, and I knew whose voice it was. I had no doubt! The voice and the message were strong and convicting. I knew exactly what He meant in an instant of grace. So what was I supposed to do with this knowledge? Start boycotting the doctor? No, he does good work when he performs reversals. So what then?

I prayed. Slowly, I realized that I should tell my story, and I didn't like it. Yet I knew in my heart it was what I needed to do. I needed to make my story public. Yes, I was already an author, but this wasn't the type of thing I write. In fact, as a consultant, I often advise aspiring authors against writing autobiographies or memoirs because few people want to read them except when they are about famous people.

So why am I writing a memoir almost five years after I heard the voice? Because God's timing is not my timing. And many things needed to fall into place for this book to happen. In fact, as I was mulling over the idea of writing a book and arguing in my mind with the Lord that He had the wrong person, it hit me that I had the perfect excuse! I prayed, "Lord, you know that authors need a platform. How can I invest money in publishing this book if I have nowhere to speak and tell people my story?" There—that was done! I thought I was off the hook until several days later I received a phone call from a ministry where I volunteer, asking me to give my testimony!

At that point I had been involved with this ministry for over ten years but had never been asked to speak. Why were they asking now? No one knew about my pleading with the Lord to be relieved of this perceived mission . . . but He knew. Being asked to speak was no coincidence. I knew that the Lord had provided a platform for the book and that I would be His hands and feet in this, no matter what the cost.

This book is about my journey in spiritual growth, specifically by the power of God. The power of the Holy Spirit produces good fruit that gives us the grace to move to make changes in our life for the better.

As you read my story, please understand that I'm not pointing any fingers or saying that if you do such-and-such, you are going to hell. I am not the type of person to condemn. Only God knows each of our hearts and motivations. In addition, this isn't the story of a perfect life with a formula for you to follow so that you will be singing with the angels in heaven alongside me. However, this book does have a very strong and important message: God has

a beautiful plan for authentic womanhood for each of us, married or unmarried. And this plan runs counter to the secular view of womanhood that has duped many of us far too long.

I wrote *One More Child* in the hope that you too will feel the call to be open to new life. To emphasize that, I've included information about the nine months of the growth of a baby in the womb at the beginning of each chapter, with accompanying Scripture verses.

In reading this book, you will see how, with the grace of God, I answered the question that God asked me, "How long will you allow Me to be mocked?" This book explains my answer: "Not one second longer, Lord. Not one more second!"

 CHAPTER 1 
Life Begins

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew
you, before you were born I dedicated you,
a prophet to the nations I appoint you.*

—Jeremiah 1:5

Month One

The miracle of life begins after fertilization. The dividing cells organize themselves in groups, a plan that God, the creator, put into the essence of what it means to be human.

In a few weeks, the heartbeat can be heard, often before the mother knows she is pregnant. At three weeks, the baby has developed all the necessary genetic material, and the sex is already determined.



We don't get to choose our parents—something my kids probably lament in private! My parents were wonderful, and I realize that more with every passing year since their deaths. Both were born in Sicily, and both were uneducated by the world's benchmarks. My mother finished the sixth grade in Palermo, and my father completed the fifth grade on the coast of Messina. However, both were financially successful due to determination, hard work, and entrepreneurship. My grandmother who lived with us demonstrated unfailing faith and strength. I never imagined my friends' families being different from mine, but I soon learned I was mistaken.

Being born in a family of Italian immigrants had its advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, there was an abundance and variety of food. We ate well! In our family, there are big distinctions among linguine, spaghetti, and fettuccine; in fact, we had arguments over when to use each type of pasta. On the flip side, being an American-born kid in an Italian family of immigrants created a lot of pressure to succeed. My mother, who came to America at age twelve, never let me forget that this country was a wonderful land of opportunity.

Although my parents were born in Italy, my mother's first marriage was arranged here in the United States. She waited until she was almost thirty years old because her sisters had to marry first, as is custom. She and her sisters worked in the garment district in New York City. She always credited the union with the fact that she had fabulous hospital care when I was born at Mt. Sinai Hospital. The arranged marriage was very

short lived, and my biological father left right after I was born. The circumstances were never discussed.

Despite this, I had a great childhood surrounded by love. My grandmother and my Uncle Sal, who was deaf, lived with my mom and me. I was literally raised at my grandmother's feet. While I helped her wrap yarn into balls for her knitting, she told me stories about the Bible: Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Mary and Joseph, Jesus, and of course the Apostles. I felt that I knew these people and they were my friends. Of course, the stories of the saints were also second nature. One of my favorites was Padre Pio, now Saint Pio. I loved hearing about his heroic virtues.

In addition, I was surrounded by a big family; I grew up with my cousins, aunts and uncles. Everyone was named Rose, Mary, or Josephine or Anthony, Angelo, Salvatore, or Joseph—except for me. I was named after my maternal grandfather, who died before I was born, so not only was I stuck with the name *Felice*, but it was the male version! It was hard to explain to my teachers when they called me Felicia or Felicity.

When the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* came out, I had never laughed so hard. This was my family, only ours was the Italian version. My two best friends were my cousins Sal and Joe. Often, we'd have slumber parties; at four years old, I insisted that we say a rosary before we went to bed. As you can imagine, my cousins were not too happy with me and often convinced me to say only one decade. Afterward, I'd try to say the rest but fell asleep most of the time.

My mother assured me this was okay because my guardian angel finished it for me.

Life as I knew it was going to change dramatically when I entered the first grade. Kindergarten was not mandatory, and my mother thought I'd learn more at home with my grandmother. I learned to read and write, but my mother was called in to speak to the first-grade teacher about my "delay." Apparently, I had no clue who Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, or the other fairy-tale characters were. I explained to my teacher that I knew all about Adam and Eve, Noah, and the Apostles; and I shared how I loved John, the beloved disciple, because he took care of Jesus' mother after His death. However, this did not impress my teacher.

As part of a big extended family, I was the center of attention. I think my aunts and uncles showered me with their love and their gifts because they felt sorry for the poor girl whose father left her and divorced her mother. I was spoiled! One of my aunts couldn't have children, and I became like a daughter to her. Whenever I learned a new prayer, I was placed on a table, and everyone who came into the house had to hear what little Felicetta did. This helped to shape my ego and pride early on. There wasn't anything I didn't think I could do, and my family encouraged this line of thinking.

My life took a turn when a man came to visit our home. I was so startled to see a strange man walk in the door that I immediately dove under the kitchen table. The only way they could get me out was when my Aunt Betty said a bug had fallen off her bag and she thought she saw it crawl under the table.

I quickly scampered out and came face to face with Nicola DeSalvatore. It appeared that a wedding was in the works. In Catholic families—especially Italian Catholic families—divorce was a disgrace, and no one ever talked about my biological father. All I knew was that my grandmother carried a gun on her person. She said it was for protection. Much later I learned it was for *my* protection! My family feared that my real father would return to take me away.

Nicola not only married my mother, but he also legally adopted me. I don't remember having to learn to spell my new last name. He was a good cook, and other than the mishap in the kitchen when the Babluci (that's Italian for snails) escaped the pot and were crawling up the wall, I enjoyed almost everything he cooked. My grandmother and mother had spoiled me. If I didn't like a specific meal, my grandmother would get up and cook something else for me. This stopped when my new father came into the picture.

Soon we moved to a nice new house in Long Island, next door to my Aunt Betty and Uncle Tony and down the street from my Aunt Lillie and Uncle Sal. They lived in what I thought was a mansion, with a basement, three stories, and a vast garden. Uncle Sal would measure me yearly with his tomato plants to be sure I was growing. He also had an abundance of fruit trees, and the cherry were my favorite. We ate many meals in their garden patio outdoors under the lush trees, and I looked up to my older cousins Agatha and Josephine.

My grandmother still lived with us, as well as my mother's older brother Sal, who also worked in the

city. My mother, father, and uncle left early in the morning to take the long train ride into work. I was still watched very closely, and friends outside of the family were discouraged. My grandmother continued to carry her gun. With my parents' combined cooking abilities, they decided to open a bakery.

I loved the bakery. The smell and taste of freshly baked bread is one of my favorites, and to this day I enjoy baking—especially sweets. Soon I had two little brothers, seven and eight years younger. My brothers and I spent hours playing with bakery boxes, eating broken cookies that didn't make the display cases, and watching with awe as the flour mixers churned out new recipes. My father liked to experiment. My mother was a people person who charmed the customers with her kindness and her genuine interest in their lives. Soon they had regulars, and the business flourished.

My idyllic life was about to change, however. One day during third grade, I arrived home from school to see several cars in the driveway and heard yelling between my uncles and my father. The family thought my grandmother was overworked having to look after me and my little brothers while my parents ran a bakery full time, so we were moving—not down the street or to a nearby town but to another country: Canada! I was heartbroken to be separated from my grandmother and uncle and sobbed along with my mother for what seemed like hours. This was my first life tragedy.

I've since learned that the tragedies we face in life make us strong, but I couldn't imagine then how I could get along without my grandmother. She was

my rock. She was always there for me. Since my mother worked, it was my grandmother who greeted me when I returned from school, taught me my prayers, and emphasized a love of God and family. Moving away from her was almost like being separated from my mother.

We were riding down the interstate in our station wagon pulling a rather large trailer with all of our worldly possessions. I was sobbing as I looked out the open window, and I could hear my mother crying in the front seat. She hadn't wanted to leave either. In fact, none of us wanted to leave. I didn't understand adults.

My foundation was shaken. I couldn't believe God was allowing this to happen. I blamed God because I had learned that all things came from God. In my mind, if we praised Him in all things, shouldn't we equally blame Him? At this point I didn't understand that only *good* comes from God, so I decided to test Him.

Through my tears, I began reciting Bible verses. One that came to mind was Matthew 17:20: *And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you."* So as we passed through the mountain terrain on our way to Canada, I began ordering the mountains to move in the name of Jesus. I watched.

Was He really there? Did He hear my cries? Why didn't He move the mountain as He said He would? The mountains didn't move. I was disappointed

and surprised. Ultimately, this placed a seed of doubt in my mind. A third grader doesn't have much theological understanding; kids take things literally. I didn't realize that I, with the conditional faith of a child, was in no position to test God. All I knew was that He had let me down in more ways than one!

After our move, my friends became my books, and I buried myself in reading. I've loved reading ever since my oldest cousin, Agatha, spoiled me with a gift. She was a college professor and taught French, and I was in awe of her. When I was eleven, she asked if I liked to read, and I said no. She was appalled and credited this to being assigned the wrong books to read in school. I have no idea whether this was true, but she took matters into her own hands when she took me shopping and purchased twelve books. The sheer volume overwhelmed me! What was I going to do with these books? The titles were many of her childhood favorites: *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, *The Little Prince*, the Trixie Belden series, *Treasure Island*, *Little Women*, and so many more. I soon fell in love with reading.

Ontario was an adventure, and it was there that I attended Catholic schools from grades four to six. We often had snow days, and my fondest memories were my father making an ice rink in our backyard for my brothers and me. Our family, now very small, became very close. There was no extended family meddling—no aunts, no uncles, and no cousins. Eventually, my parents reconciled with the rest of the family, and my grandmother and uncle came for short visits.

One life-changing event happened when I was

invited to a friend's ninth birthday party. My parents finally approved although parties had been off limits until this point. I had lost the invitation and didn't have the address, so my friend said she'd meet me at the overpass. My dad dropped me off with strict rules to come back at a specific time. He saw my friend, and we waved happily as we walked toward her house.

When I arrived, I told my friend's mom that I had to leave at a certain time, and she said it would begin to get dark, so she would walk me herself. The party was so much fun that we all lost track of the time. When I finally noticed, I knew it was over an hour later than I had promised my father. My friend's mother walked me to the overpass, and I waited for what seemed like an eternity until I saw my dad's yellow station wagon whipping around the corner. He was furious with me and promised all types of dire consequences. When we arrived home, the house was shrouded in darkness, and I found my mother and brothers praying with lit candles for my safety.

The reunion was a sobbing mess. My family thought someone had taken me and worse. My parents made it clear that parties and friends in general were off limits, and they used this situation as leverage for decisions about my social life for many years. I revisited the incident many times and pondered different strategies I should have employed. Why didn't I ask my friend to write down her address and give it to my father? Why didn't I ask my friend's mother to call my parents with the address when I arrived? I don't know.

I believe some of the traumatic things that

happen in our lives shape us. I knew I had ruined my chances of parties, and I used this life lesson to analyze situations and try to see good out of bad. I still had two best friends. I was a good student and made friends easily—even if we could be friends only at school. Soon, even this situation turned out to be temporary.

We discovered that my little brothers had allergies that were attributed to the weather and some of the foliage. The options were medication or moving to a warmer climate, and my parents opted for the latter. Our neighbors vacationed in Winter Haven, Florida. My mother said that any place with the word *heaven* in the name sounded like a good place. So three years after we moved to Canada we packed up and moved across the continent to Florida! A new adventure was soon to begin.