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# Blessed in the Valley: The Life Story of Billi Ewing

Billi Ewing

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# *Blessed in the Valley: The Life Story of Billi Ewing*

STORYTELLER: Billi Ewing

## **HARRISON TOWNSHIP**

The word “valley” can be defined as an “elongated depression in Earth’s surface—a low point or condition.” *Hold that concept and walk with me ...*

**FROM MY EARLIEST CHILDHOOD MEMORIES, I ALWAYS KNEW I WAS “DIFFERENT.”** My friends and family knew it too, giving me nicknames like “Woman, SugarLump, and Wild Bill” to name a few. Once I learned and understood my beginning, it all came clear to me where my “differences” came from and why they were embraced by most people I encountered in life rather than isolating me from them. My father was a fifty-four-year-old wise, retired, handsome gentleman, originally from Chicago, who was a child during the Great Depression, so he lived

a pretty hard life. And my mother was a twenty-seven-year-old feisty, beautiful, soul singing divorcee from Dayton raising two little girls by herself when they met and fell in love. So, when I meet new people and they ask, “You’re not like most people I meet, where are you from?” or say, “There’s something about you...” I tell them “Well there’s literally a wise, old man who takes no crap and a nurturing, determined, vibrant woman who loves everyone within me, so that’s why I’m different.”

I was officially identified as a gifted learner as a second grader attending Meadowdale Elementary and ended up transferring to Lincoln I.G.E. (Individually Guided Education) Elementary School for the Gifted and Talented, a unique academic institution that no longer exists, in the third grade through my sixth-grade year. From there, I went on to attend Stivers School for the Arts, where I followed my desire to play another instrument, to accompany the piano and my budding beautiful voice. My childhood up to my early teen years didn’t look like most of my friends’. While they were playing sports, going skating, bowling, & just hanging out in the neighborhood, I was busy taking ballet, piano, & violin lessons, singing in the church choir, preparing for talent shows, speech contests, chess matches, science fairs and spelling bees, along with attending

meetings for the various youth organizations and groups I was involved in. My mother was a well-known servant leader in the community, employed by the Dayton Urban League at that time so I sat in on numerous community organization boards, such as Catholic Social Services, National Council of Negro Women and more. She instilled that spirit and the importance of sharing our gifts and giving back to others in me since I could remember and I have been following her footsteps ever since.

With such a diverse, structured, caring Christian background and upbringing, one would not think to add teen mother to that list, but somehow, I did. I learned that I was pregnant the summer before entering my tenth-grade year at Meadowdale High School while attending Wright State’s Wright STEPP camp. I’d gotten sick, which I just figured was from the late-night over-indulgence of Squirt Pop and Doritos my dormmates and I engaged in. But per camp protocol, all students had to be sent home to get checked out if any symptoms of illness were present and it was in that moment the true source of my nausea was revealed. Also per camp protocols, I was no longer eligible to complete the summer camp, blowing my chances at the 4 years of free tuition I was working so hard to earn—so I thought.



**OF ALL THE DESIRES AND DEMANDS PARENTS CAN HAVE FOR THEIR CHILDREN, MY MOTHER'S ONLY REQUEST WAS THAT WE ALL GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL WITHOUT HAVING A BABY OR GOING TO JAIL. NOWADAYS THAT CONVERSATION IS USUALLY DIRECTED TOWARDS YOUNG, BLACK MEN IN MY COMMUNITY, BUT MY MOTHER KNEW THAT IT COULD HAPPEN TO ANYONE, BECAUSE IT HAPPENED TO HER, SO I WAS IN THAT DISCUSSION.** Imagine how I, and the community felt when word got out that the “smart one,” Bill Boy’s little girl, was pregnant. Instead of shutting down and giving up, I kept my eye on the prize, which was to graduate at the top of my class and still attend college like I’d always intended. Unbeknownst to me, others were watching and following my new journey as mother and student, and were proud of the tenacity I’d shown through it all. So much so, that I was still awarded a four year Wright STEPP scholarship, allowing me to attend and graduate from college with my now three-year-old daughter!

Fast forward fourteen years, and that little girl who was also a Stivers student, is now a Senior preparing to graduate from Skidmore. I found out, after having a series of tests with multiple doctors, that the vision issues I’d been noticing in my right eye since October 2013 were the result of a slow-growing brain tumor that was pressing on my optic nerve. I thought

about the first “valley” I experienced in my life, about how those two teen parents who have now been husband and wife for fourteen years, and all the blessings we received from that “mistake.” On September 9th, 2014, instead of choosing fear, I chose faith and agreed to have a life-saving thirteen-hour craniotomy to remove a benign atypical meningioma at caring and capable hands of Dr. Mario Zuccarello of the Mayfield Clinic at the University of Cincinnati Hospital.

**SINCE THAT DAY, THAT SAME TENACITY AND DESIRE TO HELP OTHERS HELPED ME THROUGH THIS PARTICULAR “VALLEY.”** My willingness to share my story with anyone who would listen turned into me becoming an advocate for brain tumor awareness and birthing a movement entitled “Billi’s BELievers—From Tumor to Triumph!” in support of and with the help of the medical entities and organizations that have played a tremendous role in my journey towards restoration. Because of my advocacy, I received awards such as one of the 2016 “Top 25 Women to Watch in the Miami Valley” through wIBN, proving again that being a little different is okay and that you can be blessed while in the valleys of life.

