

A FREE EXCERPT

Running From Excuses

Stop reacting, start rebuilding

Chapter One

Playing From Behind

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Playing From Behind

Everyone has a story. Some begin with celebration. Some begin with opportunity. Some begin with heartbreak. Mine began with a question that stayed with me through most of my life.

Why me?

As I've grown older, I've stopped asking that question quite as often. It isn't that I suddenly have all the answers; it's that I've come to understand that asking, "Why me?" rarely changes anything. A much better question is, "What am I going to do with the story I've been given?" But before I could ever ask that question, there was another one that came first: why did my story have to begin this way?

I have no memory of my mother. Not because I've forgotten her, but because I never had the chance to remember her in the first place.

She died when I was just seventeen days old.

Every now and then someone will tell a story about their mom. They'll laugh about something she used to say, describe the way she comforted them after a difficult day, or remember birthday cakes, bedtime stories, family vacations, and all the little moments that become treasured memories later in life. I love listening to those stories. They don't make me jealous anymore. Instead, they remind me that every one of us begins life differently.

For a long stretch of my life, I wondered about the smallest things. What did her voice sound like? Did I have her smile? Would she have been the loudest person cheering from the stands at my football games? Would she have loved to travel? Would she have laughed at my sarcasm? Those questions will never be answered.

As a little boy, though, I didn't spend much time thinking about them. Children don't compare their lives to everyone else's. They accept the world they've been given, exactly as it comes to them. That's one of the things I've learned about childhood: children don't know what "normal" is. Whatever happens inside their home becomes normal. Whatever love looks like,

whatever conflict looks like, whatever encouragement—or criticism—sounds like, that becomes their definition of life.

In hindsight, I wasn't angry that other kids had mothers and I didn't. I just noticed there was an empty space everyone else seemed to take for granted. At football games I watched mothers cheering from the stands. At school programs I saw them straightening collars before pictures and hugging their children afterward. At church I watched whole families sitting together. None of those scenes devastated me. They were quiet reminders that my story had started differently than everyone else's.

What I didn't understand at the time was that God had already begun placing extraordinary people in my life. People who couldn't replace my mother, but people who would become anchors when I needed them most. My father. My grandparents. Teachers. Coaches. Families from church. Families through 4-H and stock shows. Now I can see that they were quietly shaping a little boy without ever knowing how much they were helping.

No one influenced those early years more than my grandmother. If I close my eyes today, I can still picture her walking through her rose garden. She never hurried. Every morning she quietly inspected each bush, trimming what needed trimming, pulling weeds before they spread, watering what needed attention, and caring for details most people would have walked right past. As a little boy, I thought she just loved roses. As an adult, I understand she was teaching me something without ever saying a word. Everything worthwhile requires care. Everything worthwhile requires attention. Everything worthwhile grows slowly.

The garden wasn't merely something she maintained. It reflected who she was. Patient. Gentle. Intentional. She carried those same qualities into every part of her life. Meals were homemade. Vegetables came from a huge garden she had spent months tending. She canned food. She baked. She welcomed people into her home. Nothing about her life felt rushed, and nothing felt halfway. She had a remarkable ability to make people feel important for no other reason than that they were with her.

When I was with my grandparents, life felt different. At the time I couldn't explain why. Today I can.

I felt safe.

Children understand safety long before they can define it. They know where they can breathe. They know where they can laugh. They know where they don't have to wonder which version of an adult they're going to meet. My grandparents' house became that place for me.

Those weekends weren't extravagant. They were normal. TGIF Friday TV series, Johnny Carson, Golden Girls, and Hee Haw were shows we always watched. Church on Sunday morning. A home-cooked meal. Watching the Dallas Cowboys on Sunday afternoon. Working outside. Talking around the table longer than anyone planned. Nothing about those weekends seemed extraordinary then. Today they're priceless.

Every year my grandmother also took me to Virginia and Washington, D.C. At the time I thought we were just taking vacations. Now I can see she was giving me something much greater than a vacation: she was expanding my world. We walked through the Smithsonian museums. We toured the White House. We visited the Capitol, the Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, Arlington Cemetery. I remember standing on the very tree stump where Patrick Henry delivered one of his famous speeches, liberty or death, although I was far too young to appreciate its significance. She never turned those trips into lectures. She exposed me to history, service, character, curiosity, and a world much larger than the little West Texas town where I was growing up, and she let all of it speak for itself.

She understood something I wouldn't grasp until decades later: experiences are among life's greatest investments. The money they cost has nothing to do with it. Their value lies in the way they shape who we become. From where I stand today, I don't think she was preparing me to remember history. I think she was preparing me for life. I just didn't know it yet.

* * *

One of my favorite memories from childhood wasn't Christmas morning or a birthday party. It was Sunday afternoon.

Every weekend after church, I went back to my grandparents' house. My grandmother would somehow cook enough food for the masses. There were usually just the three of us, but there was always room for one more at the

table. After lunch, we settled into the living room to watch the Dallas Cowboys.

To most people, that's just another football game. To me, it became something much more. As the fourth quarter wound down, I would feel a knot slowly forming in my stomach. I wasn't thinking about school the next morning. I wasn't thinking about homework. I was thinking about going home.

For a long time I thought I was remembering football. Only later did I understand that I wasn't remembering football at all. I was remembering what came after it.

Trauma has an incredible way of attaching itself to everyday moments. A song. A smell. A season. A garage door. Most people experience those things without giving them a second thought, but someone carrying invisible wounds experiences them very differently. Even today, certain sounds can transport me back decades before my mind even understands why. That understanding didn't come until much later, though. As a little boy, all I knew was that I wished Sunday afternoons could last forever.

I'll come back to what came after. But first, you have to understand why being anywhere my dad was felt like the safest place on earth, because without that, the rest of it never quite makes sense.

Something else has become clear to me since then. For most of my life I thought I loved hunting. The truth is, I loved being with my dad. The early mornings, the cold West Texas air, sitting quietly in a deer blind for hours—those aren't the memories that stayed with me. Being beside my father did.

The same thing happened with skiing. My dad put me on skis when I was three years old, and I still remember standing between his skis as he slowly guided me down the mountain. He never made a speech about courage or confidence. He just stayed close enough that I felt safe. Today, taking my daughters skiing every year has very little to do with skiing. It's about creating the same memories my father quietly created for me.

Baseball was no different. He coached my Little League teams, and at the time I thought I loved baseball. Today I know I loved having my dad there. He worked long days, yet somehow still found time to coach practices, throw

batting practice, and encourage a group of kids who probably had no idea how much of a sacrifice that required. Children rarely remember every score. They remember who showed up.

My father showed up.

Those days became some of the greatest gifts he ever gave me. But there was another reason I wanted to be anywhere my dad was, and I only came to see it clearly later. Everything felt peaceful until “she” came home.

That sentence is difficult to write because it’s painfully true. When my dad was there, I felt safe. When he wasn’t, I didn’t. That’s why I wanted to go everywhere with him. People probably assumed I just enjoyed riding around checking irrigation pivots, sitting quietly in a banker’s office, visiting the accountant, repairing windmills, checking cattle, or driving across miles of ranchland fixing fences in the middle of a West Texas summer. The truth was much plainer than that. I’d rather spend an entire day standing beside my father while he worked than spend an afternoon at home.

At the time, I couldn’t explain why. Now I can. Being with him meant I could breathe. Being with him meant I knew exactly who was coming home with me that evening. There wasn’t uncertainty. There wasn’t fear. There was just my dad. And as a little boy, that was enough.

When I think about my father today, hunting trips and baseball games certainly come to mind. But more than anything else, I think about work. Hard work. The kind of work that most people never see anymore. My great-grandfather helped establish our family farm and ranch in 1941. My grandfather spent his life building it. My father continued carrying that responsibility.

If you’ve never lived around farming and ranching, it’s difficult to explain the lifestyle. The cattle don’t care if you’re tired. Windmills still break. Fences still fall. Crops don’t wait because it’s your birthday. The work is there every single morning, waiting. My dad’s father farmed and ranched until his health would no longer allow, and then he still kept going. My grandfather on my mother’s side farmed into his eighties, climbing onto tractors long after most people would have retired. Nobody complained.

Nobody looked for shortcuts. Nobody made excuses. They did the work, day after day, without ceremony.

I didn't understand it then, but those men were quietly giving me an example that would eventually call me back years later, when I had become someone who made excuses. The irony still isn't lost on me. I grew up surrounded by men who quietly did the work every single day. Somewhere along the way, I stopped living like them.

* * *

For a little while, life actually felt like it was moving in the right direction. My father remarried.

Years later, he shared something with me that completely changed the way I viewed that decision. He said, "Randall, I wasn't looking for another wife. I was looking for a mother for you."

That conversation stopped me in my tracks. As a child, I never considered what that season must have been like for him. He wasn't only grieving the loss of his wife. He was trying to raise a little boy who had lost his mother before he ever had the chance to know her. He wasn't trying to replace anyone. He was trying to give me something he believed every little boy deserved: a mother, a family, a chance at something that looked a little more normal.

For a short time, I believed we had found it. She seemed kind. She smiled. She laughed. She genuinely tried. I remember thinking that maybe this was what everyone else's family felt like. Children don't need much evidence to believe tomorrow will be better than yesterday, and I believed it.

Then, almost overnight, everything changed.

Now I understand that trauma has a way of making timelines blur together. I can't tell you the exact day. I can't even tell you the exact year. What I can tell you is that somewhere around six or seven years old, my world quietly shifted. The warmth disappeared. The kindness disappeared. The woman I thought I knew disappeared.

The mask came off.

There is one thing I want to be very careful about here. This chapter isn't about creating a villain, and it isn't about making anyone look evil. It's about helping you understand what repeated trauma does to a child. That's the story. Not revenge. Not blame. Understanding.

The physical abuse started first. As painful as those episodes were, the physical pain was never what stayed with me. Bruises heal. Words don't.

Every afternoon followed almost the same pattern. The school bus dropped me off a little after four o'clock, and for a short while, I was alone. Dad was usually somewhere on the farm or ranch finishing another day's work. Those few minutes became the quietest part of my day. Then I'd begin watching the clock—not out of excitement, but because I knew what was coming.

Sometime after five o'clock, I'd hear the garage door. Even though my bedroom was on the opposite side of the house, I could hear that garage door every single afternoon. To this day, certain garage doors still catch my attention before my mind even understands why.

Then came the second sound: the back door. Not gently closing. Slamming. Hard. Almost as though she wanted me to know she was home. From that instant, I knew I had only seconds. She never stopped in the kitchen. She never changed clothes. She never sat down to unwind after work. She came directly to my room.

The living room had carpet. The entryway had tile. The hallway had carpet again. The instant her high heels hit that tile floor, I knew exactly where she was. Even now, decades later, hearing high heels echo across a tile floor still gets my attention.

Then came the perfume. Strong. Overpowering. For most of my adult life I couldn't understand why certain perfumes instantly made me uncomfortable. Now I know. My body remembered long before my mind did.

The bedroom door would fly open, and the yelling usually started before I even had a chance to speak. She wasn't just raising her voice; she was screaming at the top of her lungs. Sometimes there was a reason. Sometimes a reason was quickly invented. A spoon left in the sink. A sock behind the dryer. Something forgotten. Something imperfect. Honestly, I don't think the

reason mattered very much. The anger was already there. I used to make a quiet game of it in my head, placing bets on what the day's reason would be. The reasons never ran out. I've since talked with military veterans about boot camp and drill sergeants. In boot camp, nothing is ever good enough, and the instructors will always find fault, even if they have to invent it. This was my daily routine, except I was a kid, and I wasn't in the military.

One memory has stayed with me my entire life. I told her I had a headache. She asked why, and as honestly as a little boy knew how, I answered, "I think I'm stressed."

Whether I was seven, eight, or nine, I honestly don't know. Those years blend together. What I remember perfectly is what happened next.

Screaming, "What does a little boy have to be stressed about?"

The next thing I remember was being hit with a frying pan.

That wasn't an isolated incident. Most of the time it was belts, wooden spoons, or bare hands, but it became my normal, day after day, year after year. But the deepest wounds weren't physical. They were verbal. Almost every afternoon I heard some version of the same messages. "You're lazy." "You're worthless." "Nobody likes you." "You're never going to amount to anything." "You're stupid."

Then came the words that would follow me for decades.

"Your mother killed herself because of you." And, "You don't need to be here anymore." There was so much I didn't understand as a child. But I understood that perfectly. She made sure of it.

Even writing those words today feels heavy. As an adult, I know how impossible those statements were. As a little boy, I didn't. Children believe adults—especially the adults they fear.

What made it even worse was that hearing those lies wasn't enough. Many times I was forced to repeat them back. Out loud. Again. And again. Imagine hearing something so many times that you stop questioning whether it's true. Imagine repeating those words yourself until they begin sounding familiar. That's how lies become identities. Not all at once. One repetition, one afternoon, one year at a time.

* * *

Children don't usually fight lies with logic. They absorb them. That's exactly what I did. The abuse wasn't just changing how I felt. It was quietly changing who I believed I was.

Through all of it, I carried a question no child should ever have to ask: why couldn't anyone else see it? Around other people, she became someone completely different—especially around my dad. She smiled. She laughed. She appeared kind. The woman everyone else knew wasn't the woman I lived with.

As a little boy, that was incredibly confusing. How could someone be so different depending on who was in the room? Year after year I wondered if maybe I was the problem. Maybe I deserved it. Maybe everyone else saw something wrong with me that I couldn't see. That's what abuse does. It doesn't merely hurt you. It convinces you that you deserve to be hurt.

People often ask a question whenever they hear stories like mine: "Why didn't you just tell your dad?" That's a fair question, and the answer is straightforward. I was terrified. She had made something crystal clear: "If you tell anyone...it'll be twice as bad."

When you're a child, you don't weigh the odds. You don't think through every possible outcome. You survive. Fear became another prison. I loved my father. I trusted my father. I wasn't protecting him. I was trying to survive. My heart breaks now for that little boy, because he believed silence was safer than truth. Fear convinced me of that, and fear is incredibly convincing when you're young.

That's why I wanted to go everywhere with my dad—every errand, every fence line, every long day of work I described earlier. Now you understand the real reason. Most people probably thought I just enjoyed tagging along, and I did, but not for the reasons they assumed. Those places represented something much bigger than errands. They represented safety. I'd rather sit quietly in a chair at the bank for hours than spend another afternoon wondering what version of home I was about to walk into. None of it was exciting on its own. Being beside my dad was. Safety always is.

My father eventually sensed that something had changed. He didn't know what. He only knew his son wasn't the same little boy anymore. The outgoing kid who laughed easily had become quiet. The little boy who loved talking had become guarded. Something was wrong; he just couldn't see what it was. From where I stand today, I can't imagine how confusing that must have been for him. He was grieving. Running a farm and ranch. Trying to raise a little boy. Working from before sunrise until after sunset. He couldn't possibly see everything.

Eventually, family counseling was suggested. At the time, I didn't really know what counseling meant, and I certainly wasn't expecting it to change my life. In hindsight, I think it probably saved it.

The counselor asked questions. Real questions. Questions that couldn't be answered with rehearsed smiles. Questions that slowly exposed what had been hidden through all those afternoons. For the first time, I felt like someone actually saw me. If you've never experienced that after years of believing no one noticed, it's difficult to describe.

Being believed creates hope.

Eventually, I told the truth. Not part of it. All of it. I told my grandparents. I told my father. I told them about the abuse, the threats, the lies. Everything.

Shortly afterward, she was gone.

I never saw her again.

Many people would assume that's where the story ends. It wasn't. It was only the end of one chapter. The abuse stopped, but the lies didn't. They became quieter, that's all. Instead of hearing them from someone else, I started hearing them from myself.

It took me decades to understand that. The most dangerous lies aren't always the ones spoken to us. Sometimes they're the ones we eventually begin repeating in our own minds.

Those lies followed me into junior high. They followed me into high school. They followed me into college. They followed me into marriage. They followed me into business. They followed me into fatherhood. And years later, sitting in a rocking chair holding my daughter, they came back

with the exact same message they had whispered to a little boy: “The people you love would be better off without you.”

That wasn’t a new lie. It was an old one. It had been waiting all along.

That’s why I believe unresolved pain never really disappears. It waits. Patiently. Until something causes it to surface again. The abuse had ended, but the fear hadn’t. The words had stopped, but the beliefs hadn’t. Through most of my adult life I thought I was carrying nothing more than difficult memories. Now I understand I was carrying an identity that had been built on lies. And before I could ever rebuild my life, I would first have to discover that those lies were never true.

* * *

As I’ve grown older, I’ve also come to see how incredibly blessed I was to have all four of my grandparents. For a long time, though, I didn’t appreciate that.

My father’s parents were woven into my everyday life. Granny and Papa were always there. Every Little League game. Every football game. Every stock show. Every milestone. My grandmother eventually struggled just to climb the bleachers, but she still found a way. My grandfather almost always had a video camera in his hands. Every season. Every game. Every memory.

Near the end of my football career, I finally told him, “Papa, you don’t have to film anymore. Just watch the game.” He smiled. I don’t know that he ever completely stopped recording. That was who he was, plain and simple. He wanted to preserve moments, and today I understand why. Those small moments eventually become priceless. My grandparents didn’t merely attend events. They attended my life.

My mother’s parents, Grancy and Grandad, had a very different road with me. It had nothing to do with loving me less. Life had become incredibly complicated after my mother’s death. There were investigations. Rumors. Courtrooms. Questions no family should ever have to answer. My father was trying to grieve while raising a little boy. My mother’s family was grieving a daughter. Everyone was hurting, and the only common denominator was me.

As a child, you recognize when adults become uncomfortable around one another. You just don't understand why. Although my maternal grandparents lived only about fifteen minutes away, our relationship wasn't what it could have been. No one intentionally kept me from them. Everyone believed they were protecting me. Now I can see that clearly. Protection often comes from love. Sometimes it also comes with unintended consequences.

As I grew older, especially during college and adulthood, I slowly built that relationship. The older I became, the more I saw how deeply they loved me. I only wish I had understood it sooner.

Few blessings in my life run deeper than the time I got with all four of my grandparents in their final days. Very few people receive that gift. I did. Today, I carry one regret. It isn't that I didn't love them. It's that I wish I had intentionally spent even more time with them.

That understanding forever changed how I look at relationships. There will always be another meeting. Another sale. Another email. Another excuse. There may not always be another conversation. That's one of the reasons experiences have become so valuable to me. Experiences are the world's greatest currency—not because they can be bought, but because once they're gone, they can never be purchased again.

If this book teaches nothing else, I hope it teaches that. Spend the extra hour. Take the trip. Make the phone call. Sit at the dinner table a little longer. Tell people you love them while they're still here to hear it. One ordinary afternoon may someday become one of the most valuable memories you own.

After the abuse ended, everyone expected life to return to normal, including me. I thought once she was gone, everything would somehow go back to the way it was supposed to be. Children naturally believe changing their circumstances automatically changes how they feel. I learned that isn't always true.

The abuse was over; the fear wasn't. The yelling stopped; the lies didn't. They only grew quieter. The deepest wounds had never been on my body. They were in my mind. The stories she planted followed me everywhere. I wasn't carrying bruises anymore. I was carrying beliefs. Beliefs that I wasn't

enough. Beliefs that I had to earn acceptance. Beliefs that people eventually leave. Beliefs that something must somehow be wrong with me.

The strange thing about lies is that if you hear them often enough, they stop sounding like lies. They become the soundtrack playing quietly in the background of your life.

Without noticing it happen, I became very good at hiding. Deceiving anyone was never the point; hiding had become survival. The outgoing little boy slowly disappeared. I became quieter. More reserved. More observant. I learned to study people's expressions before speaking. I learned to read the room. I learned to smile when I didn't feel like smiling. I learned to say, "I'm fine." Even when I wasn't.

The mask didn't appear overnight. It formed one layer at a time. Every lie added another layer. Every disappointment added another. Every fear added another. Before long, I had become someone who looked perfectly okay on the outside while carrying something entirely different on the inside.

The frightening part is that the mask worked. Teachers didn't know. Friends didn't know. Coaches didn't know. Most family members didn't know. Eventually, I didn't know either. I had worn it for so long that I forgot it was there.

That's what unresolved pain does. It quietly becomes part of your identity. You stop saying, "Something happened to me." You begin believing, "This is simply who I am." For a very long time, I believed exactly that.

Ironically, the places where I felt most alive were also the places where I learned some of life's greatest lessons. Football. Rugby. 4-H. The farm. The ranch. Those weren't hobbies to me. They became outlets.

Football, especially, became my release. I was quiet off the field. Reserved. I rarely caused trouble. But once the helmet went on, everything changed. Every collision became an opportunity to release anger I didn't know how to express anywhere else. Every tackle. Every hit. Every snap. For a few seconds at a time, everything else disappeared.

People often talk about physical pain. The truth is, I didn't feel much of it. Emotional pain had already taught me what real pain felt like, and compared

to that, broken bones didn't seem nearly as significant. During the first scrimmage of my senior season, I broke my wrist. I remember the exact play. I finished the season anyway. After football ended, the orthopedic surgeon looked at the X-rays and shook his head. He smiled and said, "You're either very tough...or very stupid."

Maybe I was a little of both. But I think there was something much deeper happening. I had become so accustomed to carrying emotional pain that physical pain barely registered. Football didn't create my toughness. It revealed it. Rugby did the same.

At the time, I thought sports were saving me. Now I believe God was quietly preparing me—preparing me for a day when I'd finally stop surviving and begin healing.

* * *

If life has taught me anything, it's that you never truly know what another person is carrying. Nobody wears a hat that says, "I'm hurting." Or, "I'm depressed." Or, "I'm barely hanging on." Or, "I don't know how much longer I can keep pretending."

Most people just smile. They go to work. They coach their kids. They attend church. They post pictures. They laugh at the right moments. Then they quietly carry burdens that almost nobody else ever sees. I know, because I became one of those people long before I recognized it in myself.

That truth has forever changed the way I try to treat people. Today, I don't assume I know someone's story merely because I can see their face. Kindness isn't something people earn. Sometimes it's something they desperately need. One conversation. One encouraging word. One person who genuinely listens. That can change the direction of someone else's day. Sometimes it changes the direction of their life. I know because there were people who unknowingly did exactly that for me.

As I look back on my childhood today, I don't see it through the same eyes I once did. For a long time, all I could see was the pain. Then I saw the abuse. Then I saw the loss. Today, I see something different.

I see people.

I see my father carrying far more than I ever understood as a little boy—a man grieving the loss of his wife while trying to raise a son and keep a farm and ranch alive, a man who wasn't searching for another wife nearly as much as he was searching for a mother for his little boy. I see grandparents quietly stepping into roles they never expected to fill. I see coaches who unknowingly gave me confidence when I had very little. I see teachers who believed in me. I see 4-H families and stock show families who modeled healthy relationships without ever realizing they were doing it.

Now I see seeds. Seeds God had been planting all along. The remarkable thing about seeds is that they spend a long time underground before anyone ever sees evidence of growth. At the time, I couldn't see any of them. All I saw was what hurt. Today I understand that God was preparing me long before I knew why He was preparing me. That perspective has changed everything.

It also finally answered a question I'd carried so long: why didn't I tell someone sooner? It wasn't that I didn't trust my father or that I didn't love my grandparents. It was because I was scared. Fear convinced me that silence was safer than truth. Fear became another story I accepted.

That's the thing about fear. If you don't confront it, it quietly begins writing your future.

The abuse eventually ended. The fear didn't—not for a very long time. The stories followed me into adulthood, quietly influencing decisions I didn't even know I was making. Through most of my adult life I thought I was making adult decisions. Now I understand that many of them were little-boy decisions, made by someone who still believed childhood lies.

That truth was heartbreaking when it landed. It was also incredibly freeing. Because if lies could shape a life, then truth could reshape one.

I didn't know it then, but arriving at that truth would take years. It would take failure. It would take success. It would take alcohol. It would take a failed restaurant. It would take lawsuits. It would take a mirror. It would take a rocking chair. It would take a sleeping little girl in my arms. Only then would I begin replacing old stories with new ones. Not stories someone else created for me. Stories that were actually true.

That's one of the reasons I wanted this book to begin here. My childhood doesn't define me—it doesn't—but it explains me. We don't get to choose the opening chapter of our lives. We do get to decide whether we allow that opening chapter to become the entire book.

For far too long, I unknowingly did. I allowed childhood wounds to influence adult decisions. I allowed fear to become my compass. I allowed someone else's words to determine my worth. Most of all, I accepted stories that were never true. I can see it clearly now: I wasn't simply living life. I was trying to outrun stories I didn't even know I was carrying.

That's why I called this chapter "Playing From Behind." It isn't that life had been unfair, and it isn't that I want sympathy. It's that I started adulthood carrying weight most people couldn't see. Invisible wounds. Invisible fears. Invisible stories.

The strange thing is, I don't think I was alone. I think most people are playing from behind. Some carry rejection. Some carry shame. Some carry addiction. Some carry failure. Some carry grief. Some carry words spoken over them decades ago that they still believe today. The stories are different. The weight feels remarkably similar.

The good news is this.

Stories can be rewritten.

Not by pretending the past never happened. Not by ignoring the pain. But by finally telling yourself the truth. That truth would take me years to discover. Before I could rebuild my life, before I could stop making excuses, before I could run toward the man I wanted to become, I first had to see that I had been believing those old stories all along.

That discovery changed everything. It also marked the beginning of a much different road—one that would eventually force me to confront not only the lies I had been told, but the lies I had begun telling myself.

KEEP GOING

This is where your story turns.

You just read where mine began. The rest of the book is what I did about it — the framework I used to trade excuses for ownership, and to rebuild a life I could finally trust, one decision at a time.

If Chapter One spoke to something in you, the rest will too.

Get the full book — paperback, full color, e-book, and the companion workbook — at **randallbeasley.com**

Stop reacting. Start rebuilding.