

grandma in Louisiana, St. Charles Parish. My relationship with my grandma was really good, but she was strict with me.

My brother and sisters stayed in Georgia with my mom. I talked with my mom some, not a lot. I had a lot of resentment, I guess, for her sending me to live with my grandma when I was so young. I think the problems began when I was around twelve. It was never my grades, it was just that I was in trouble with the juvenile detention people all the time for fighting and running away; I was trying everything to get my mom's attention. I think I realized I was doing it the day I got sent to juvenile hall. Usually I'd just go to the ADAPT Center¹ when I was in trouble, but the last time I ran away, when I was about twelve, I was sent to the St. James Parish Juvenile Detention Center in New Orleans for ten days. I was hurt and mad the day my mama came to see me in juvenile hall. But then I finally realized I shouldn't be doing all this, and when I went home to my grandmother's I just got myself back together.

I got pregnant at seventeen, and my boyfriend and I got an apartment together. I had my first son, Emmanuel, when I was a junior in high school, but I still graduated with a 3.8 GPA. I got help. For instance, there was this lady from Africa who'd opened a school for teen moms. She got government funding to open it, and she'd look after the students' babies, all the way till they were able to go to Head Start.² I didn't have to bring diapers, food, nothing. All I did was drop him off every day, and that was a blessing.

After I graduated high school in 2004 my then-boyfriend and I headed to Augusta, Georgia, in a raggedy car to live with my mom. But my mom let me down, and six months later I moved back to Louisiana to start all over again. I started Bryman College at the beginning of 2005 and I met my new boyfriend, who is now my husband. And then, that August, Hurricane Katrina hit. Before the storm reached us, I got in a car with my boyfriend and baby, and we started heading toward Georgia. We stayed with a friend of my brother's, which was a hectic situation every day. It was only a two-bedroom

¹ A social work and child resources organization.

² A federal program promoting school readiness for young children (ages three to five) in low-income families by offering educational, nutritional, health, and social services.