I never fully understood Ava, she was a person who lived in the moment, but she chose to be best friends with someone who kept her tied to reality. I loved Ava my whole life, we grew up living next to each other and doing everything together, but she was just so different from me. She broke the rules, stuck up for herself, and questioned everything. Where I chose to obey, follow the rules, and keep quiet. Because of both of our stubbornness to change, we ended up losing each other, but I never thought I would one day actually lose her.

She was the strongest person I knew, growing up in a time of segregation and still never backing down on equality. I remember her better than I remember myself, I remember her as a strong woman who always knew who she was and what she wanted, and what she wanted was change. She never stopped fighting for her rights and everyone’s rights. She was a beautiful thing too, but the kind where she didn’t even know it or didn’t care about it. She had curly brown hair that went to her shoulders that had the volume of a lion’s mane, she wore a white collared shirt and a skirt everyday, always leaving it untucked no matter how often I told her to fix it. She was everything I aspired to be, bold and confident, but my ways were too set. I followed all the rules of the twisted up world I grew up in; didn’t go into the wrong line at the store, didn’t drink from the wrong water fountain, and at work I didn’t speak unless spoken to, didn’t ask for anything, I was born into a time where slavery was abolished but I still felt like a slave myself.

I didn’t understand any of it or know how I felt inside until one of the people who was closest to me died, Ava’s mom who was buried only a little over five years ago, she was like a mother to me. She fed me when my Mama had no food to give me, letting me sleep in her cramped house when Mama had special guests over, talking to me about problems I couldn’t share with anyone else, she was the mother I had always wanted. My Mama was never really there for me, she had an awful drinking problem, which I had to tend to and get her the alcohol whenever she craved it. But Ava’s mother, Evaline, was my role model, my angel, she gave birth to one of my closest friends, and then she got ripped away from me. She was beaten to death by her employer, Mr. Brooke, after supposedly stealing Mrs. Brooke’s wedding ring; they found the ring in the vent a month later.

My heart was ripped out of my chest when it happened, but by this time Me and Ava were no longer speaking so I didn’t know who to confide to about these angry feelings, and later on my depression, so I talked to the Lord. He has gotten me through everything, Ava, Evaline, no one was there for me, he was. Through him I learned to channel my anger into acts of useful peace. I learned how to make my anger into a super power for change. I didn’t know where to start though, so that was why I tried to seek out Ava, when she didn’t answer any of my calls, I thought it was because she still held a grudge towards me, but what I found out was much worse. What I found out a week after, trying to contact her, Ava’s father told me she was kidnapped and raped until they eventually found her and rushed her to a hospital, where she died. Two tragedies happened within one family, my best friend and my mother figure, had died. I was so confused on what to do next, I felt depressed and I had no one to turn to about it besides God, who was very helpful, but I wanted a fresh start.

That was when I decided to join the Black Panthers, so I could be working towards something and make sure no one else around me was hurt from people who were more powerful. It was hard work, I joined when I was only nineteen, two years ago today. They put me through the most brutal training and harassment I had ever gone through, I had never done anything like this in my life, I usually kept out of trouble. I did it for only about a year and a half maybe, I think I realized I wasn’t doing it for the right reason. I didn’t really know why I was apart of the Black Panthers, but now I do, I was angry. I was so so angry, I was furious with myself, with society, with racism, with everything, I didn’t want to admit it though, I wanted to believe that God could get me through it and that would be enough. I tried to convince myself that being humble and having faith towards God was enough to make me feel better and have change in my life but I soon realized it wasn’t enough, that I had to do something for myself as well, so I started to think about what I wanted, how I could make myself better, and then I could focus on how to make this country and this world a better place.

So I sat down, counted all of the money I had saved up since I was ten years old and decided to take all of it and start a life in Philadelphia and go to college there. I rode the bus and also hitchhiked my way from Georgia all the way to Philadelphia. It was hard, having so little money and trying to make a life for myself, a life I could enjoy, I remember how I would steal food because I need to save all of my money for either the bus or for college, and I used to get such a bad feeling of guilt, that little voice in my head that said to listen to the rules was still in there I guess. I remember how cold I got at night, with the thin clothes I had on while I waited on the street for someone who might give me a ride, I held my bag filled with everything I owned. I remember how scared I was, how the feeling of doubt would creep up in my mind and make the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, how I was so scared to be venturing out into the unknown and how much I wanted to run just run all the way back home. But I didn’t run back home. Now I don’t know if it was because I was determined, or maybe it was because I didn’t have enough money to had back now, or if maybe I just did it because I wasn’t thinking straight, but I like to think it was because of Ava and her mom. I’ll never know for sure, but I believe that I didn’t turn back when I was so terrified or cold was because I knew I had to do this for them, to honor them, to do well in my life so I could eventually work with others and make their lives better too.

I did eventually make it to Philadelphia, I to community college and worked as a waitress, taking every shift I could to try and make ends meet. It was hard and painful, living paycheck by paycheck, getting good grades, and having no help through it all, but I’m glad I went through what I did. It gave me a really good story to write, to inspire others, and going through that process and eventually finding my home in Philadelphia also helped me find friends. I met people who were at community college for the same reasons as me, to find their purpose and make a difference. I even met my future husband there. I remember when I first met him and he was exactly like me, having gone through all the racism and feeling like you have to oblige to these rules for the sake of your own conscious, he understood me and he became that person I could tell everything to and have as a rock. Today is a little over five years since Evaline has been dead, and only three years since Ava's death, and I’m standing here proud remembering the anniversary of their death. I am happy and content knowing I honored them throughout my life by making a difference in this world by publishing a book and going to every protest I can to fight against segregation. They are greatly missed and I'm more than grateful for them to have been in my life.