

THE LAST DANCE FOR GRACE

Excerpt of three chapters
from full book for
press review only.



BY **CRYSTAL MANGUM**
WITH **VINCENT CLARK**

The Last Dance for Grace

The Crystal Mangum Story

by Crystal Mangum

with

Vincent Clark



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This work is based on true events. Names, places and incidents are the best recollections of the author. Some of the names have been changed to protect individuals who have requested anonymity or could not be contacted.

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Meeting

Before Crystal walked in the room, I imagined she would be like a streetwalker or hooker in an episode from some 1970's crime drama: Streetwise, chewing gum, and popping bubbles when she talked. Instead, in walked a very small woman. Perhaps she was no bigger than 5'1" and 100 pounds. After I got to know her, and when we were in the mall looking for clothes, I realized she was a size zero. Occasionally she had to buy clothes in the kids' section. Because of the ruckus the case generated, I had always pictured her being so much taller and fuller. Besides being shocked by how small she was, I was also taken aback when she opened her mouth to speak. She talked deliberately and spoke clearly.

"Crystal, how can I help you?" I asked.

She was definitely uncomfortable but looked directly at me. I knew she was suspicious of me and probably everyone she had encountered since the incident. By the time we met, the case had fallen apart completely. There were people trying to make

money from her story. Plus, the defense lawyers and a group of right-wing bloggers had spent nearly a year on a campaign smearing her. There was not one positive thing I had seen or read about this woman, and she had no way of knowing if I believed what I had read about her.

“I just want people to know the truth.”

I tried to keep eye contact; I wanted to gain her trust. “What is the truth, Crystal?”

In a strong clear voice she answered. “I’m not who they say I am. I’m not lying. Something did happen to me.”

From that moment I believed something had happened, too. This person sitting in front of me was supposed to be delusional. I had met plenty of people like that and this person did not strike me that way. As we talked and she became more comfortable with me, I realized that she had been paying close attention to the news coverage. She knew which talk show hosts had said what and understood the politics of her case.

During that meeting we agreed to see each other as often as we could. The goal, from the beginning, was to get her side of the story out. Not a single newspaper or network tried to do any investigation after the defense attorneys began swaying public opinion. This was going to be more than difficult because I did not want this to become a story about specific people who had been charged. This had to be about Crystal and what she had experienced. At this point it did not matter who did what and exactly how they did it because the attorney general and the North Carolina Bar had made their point. The criminal case was closed, and it would serve no purpose to fight that. Nevertheless, it was and still is important to tell Crystal's side of the story.

The first few meetings with Crystal were difficult for me. She answered without hesitation all of the questions I asked. Never once did she seem to be hiding anything about her past or that night in March 2006. What bothered me the most is that there was this completely different person being described on the blogs and television and not the person sitting in front of me. Crystal could talk about news events, politics, and sophisticated concepts in psychology. I learned early on that she was not just some B-average student as many Internet rumors were reporting. She was carrying a nearly 3.7 GPA when the case broke. What exactly was going on? Who were these people who spent their time trying to defame Crystal? If I had not been meeting with her, I would have expected that she could barely hold her head up straight. I certainly didn't expect her to be one of the best students in her department.

I have met plenty of famous and high profile people, and plenty of manipulators as well. Crystal seemed as ordinary as you could be.

I needed to square the two portraits of this woman. As difficult as it was, I read as many of the blogs as I could. It appeared that that is where the news media was getting most of its information anyway. Sean Hannity made constant tirades against Crystal. I began to notice that most of his rants were identical to people such as Internet columnists Michael Gaynor, Stuart Taylor, and K.C. Johnson. I found it amazing that these non-local people invested so much time and energy on the case. Most people I talked with just wanted the case resolved as fairly as possible.

From the time the case became public and until the day I began writing this book, an attempt was being made to craft a narrative of the Duke Lacrosse case that would suggest that Crystal was just barely a person. The contempt and outright hatred for this

woman proffered was that she had gone out on purpose to bring down innocent men in some kind of conspiracy with the Mike Nifong. Astonishing! It appeared as though the right-winged, disturbed individuals against Crystal had somehow gained access to the case file and could recite details that no one could know. That was, unless they had been granted access by the defense or the families of some of the lacrosse players. It seemed as though all of the energy, daily blog entries, and television coverage were parts of a planned negative public relations campaign.

Not once did those who sought to find faults in Crystal say anything at all about the party hosts. My conversations with Crystal and reporting by other sources suggested the players were a group of young men who were somewhat less ethical than Boy Scouts. At the party on 610 North Buchanan they said some very nasty things and their behavior was not stellar.

In the quest to find the truth, Crystal's judges took a side, but it still did not make sense that they were so concerned about this one woman. When I left my meetings with Crystal, I was more perplexed than ever as I read the descriptions of her in the opinion columns and blogs. Just how did they assume they could know enough about Crystal having never heard her speak? Why not just wait for the legal process to run its course?

The truth lies well beyond the headlines and opinion columns. Many people have failed to see a case that has multiple layers. The clearest one of the layers is race. The deeper I dug into the writings of the most ardent critics of Crystal, one thought constantly emerged. These critics believed that white men in America were the ones who had suffered from discrimination. Their real motive appears to be maintaining the banner of angry white men. They are the people who trade on race, whether for their

benefit or to cast aspersions; they take advantage of situations presented in this case. Then, whenever anyone wants to discuss the merits of the case, no one can really remember any of the facts. We are reduced to repeating propaganda and innuendo that was spread by the winning side.

As I talked with Crystal about the hours leading up to her arriving at the party, I could not get over how different I had pictured her. I assumed she had just come off a street corner somewhere in Durham. Based on what I had read, I never could have imagined her being an ordinary adult college student who had a family, friends, and a desire to work with troubled kids.

She had one brush with the law. While serious, it had been resolved and was not exactly as people painted it. By all accounts, Mangum was a good mother and involved with her children.

It was reasonable to make the ones who planned the party subject to some scrutiny if it was okay to dissect the accuser's life. Why do they get a complete pass when it comes to the significant issue of credibility? It is also curious that some argued that the partygoers' past criminal indiscretions were not a factor at all.

There has been a concerted effort from day one to muddy the waters about the case. While Mike Nifong did little to serve his cause by speaking publicly, it is not unusual for district attorneys to speak about cases. What is unusual here is how quickly and forcefully the weight of the national media, well-connected relatives, and high-priced lawyers came down on the accuser in the case.

It is true that Mike Nifong would have appeared to suffer the most fallout from the case; however, Crystal Mangum got pilloried as well. Her medical history, address,

children's school, and false information about her person quickly and dramatically appeared on the Internet. Some of that information eventually worked its way to mainstream media outlets. It became a part of a narrative that suggested she was a prostitute, drug addict, and ne'er-do-well. It would not help that Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton would wedge themselves into the middle of the case and not attempt to correct some of the bogus information being released about Crystal.

What emerges some two years later is that we can now see that the people who turned this case into a national spectacle were not the ones who wanted justice to prevail. The people who peddled the libelous and slanderous stories about Crystal are the same people who have been behind the Terri Shiavo case and worked on such causes as the Linda Tripp defense fund. Read the continual stream of columns, blogs, and opinion pieces about the Duke case and several names appear time and time again. I hate to encourage more reading of this stuff, but I must so that you can see for yourself. Look at some of the trash that has been written or appeared on television in the guise of legitimate journalism.

While the attorneys have been cautioned not to make public statements while there is still civil litigation, there is nothing to stop the so-called conservative commentators from speaking on behalf of the plaintiffs in the civil suits. Those same people who claim only to want justice were very good at turning the tide of public opinion in the original case. They were so good in fact, the pressure convinced North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper and the North Carolina Bar to take action against a sitting district attorney—something that had never been done in history.

I am suggesting that the Duke Lacrosse case narrative that you know and have come to believe is a lie. Going forward, expect to see an increase in the rhetoric coming from the flamethrowers on the political and religious right. There is still public opinion to influence.

I have recorded over 20 hours of interviews concerning Crystal's life and the events of March 13, 2006. The amount of time I've spent with Crystal is something I do not believe the police, Mike Nifong, or special prosecutors for the attorney general of North Carolina have done.

The most surprising thing of all is that when Crystal decided to write a book about her life, she was so open and talked candidly about her depression and past abuse. The journey over the past year as we completed this project has been very tough. We both have been disappointed at some of the responses that we have gotten when trying to get this story out. We've been lied to, threatened, and ignored. Despite all of that, this story is more important than many people realize. There are overwhelmingly complicated issues that need to be discussed. This book alone cannot address them all but it attempts to set a foundation on which they can be discussed rationally.

The insight gained while working with Crystal is something I could have never imagined while reading that first story sitting on that hard plastic chair at Midway Airport. Little did I know that all of the anguish I had experienced from reading the negative coverage about Crystal would become so challenging? This is the quintessential story about unfairness.

The portrait of Crystal Mangum as some delusional, drug-addled stripper is far from what I have experienced. I can say without equivocation that Crystal is not a drug

abuser. She has maintained to me that the abuse of illegal or prescribed drugs has never been one of her problems, and I believe her.

While writing this book, I have had to assist Crystal explore some serious issues about the choices she has made in her life. She knows now that there may have been a time when she could have been a normal student at North Carolina Central University and not the “accuser” in the Duke Lacrosse rape case. This project has forced Crystal to be bold and honest as she reveals her faults, personal tragedies, and just plain bad decisions that led her to 610 North Buchanan Boulevard that night in March 2006.

There is no way after reading this that you can view this case in the same way. You may still not believe that the three young men accused of rape should have been charged. We do not argue that. However, you will not believe all of the negative things you have heard about Crystal.

Because this case ended up being argued by the cable television "talking heads" you should not have expected that the truth was going to come out. I was amazed, and you should be as well, at how so many people spoke with certainty about why the lacrosse players were innocent based on what they assumed was true about Crystal. However, what is the truth? Little if anything you heard about Crystal was based on any firsthand knowledge.

Family members, lawyers, and representatives of organizations who said they spoke on Crystal's behalf could not because they were not authorized to speak for her and most had never even met her. People who sat in judgment of Crystal because they read a police report on the North Carolina Department of Corrections Web site assumed they know everything they needed to know.

It is clear to me that her story deserves to be told. She has never been afforded a safe opportunity to speak for herself, and she wanted a chance to set the record straight. Despite her desire to speak out, Crystal has managed to stay out of the spotlight for almost two years. Some will probably criticize her for hiding from the media, but if you were in the same position, could you stand up to the scrutiny and attacks?

Crystal made it clear to me that the main reason she stayed out of the media glare is because she did not want every word she said to be evaluated and dissected. It would have been especially difficult when she did not have people around her who would be working in her best interest. Crystal really believed she would have her day in court. However, since we now know for absolutely certain that there will never be a trial for those accused of assaulting her, the only choice available is for her to tell her story.

Crystal feels she has been the one on trial. This ordeal has left her a troubled soul, with a tremendous amount of hurt and torment. If the Duke lacrosse players feel their life has been ruined, it goes without saying that Crystal feels the same way and worst. The players and their lawyers have been paid millions and still seek more.

It is with a great deal of pride that I say that I worked with Crystal to put her story on paper. I am proud because I know that the account of her life transcends the night of the party. Her life is a lesson for young girls and young men about the choices they make. It is about how to discern whom means you well and what is in your best interest. It is about how to live through the fire of such an intense amount of scrutiny and still emerge as a whole person.

This project is about helping Crystal repair her damaged life and preparing her to live for the rest of it in the service of others. Her story will also help you as it has

gradually helped me put things into perspective. My life and yours are golden in comparison to millions of others who live with depression and have been burdened by years of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Now she lives with the added weight of always being connected to the Duke Lacrosse case.

I keep thinking about the lacrosse players hosting a party like the one that started this whole thing in the first place. Alcohol and scantily clad women do not make for a good mix if the men in the room cannot hold their liquor and are sexually misguided. What happened in the aftermath of the party should have caused people to consider the significant issues the story raises. Nevertheless, I know that it has not stopped more parties like the one held at 610 North Buchanan Boulevard from happening nightly somewhere in America. Young men do not have to sexually exploit women and drink themselves into oblivion to have a good time and bond with each other. Sadly, the way our culture views it, if you do not do all those things you are not having a male experience.

What does it say about our society that a person feels no shame to bare their bodies for perfect strangers? It seems like there is almost an epidemic among college-aged women to bare themselves for things like *Girls Gone Wild*. What must be missing from a person's judgment center to make it seem reasonable to take off your clothes for very little or no money? To accept catcalls and to be groped by strangers must leave a stain on your psyche. I know women have been entertaining men with sex for centuries. Knowing about Crystal will not bring the practice to a halt. Crystal's story should at least cause some young women to consider what they let men do to them in the name of love or entertainment.

I ponder what would have happened if no protesters stood on the lawn at 610 North Buchanan banging pots. What if women's groups, black separatists, bloggers, satellite trucks, and high-priced lawyers stayed at home and let the court settle this? I'd like to believe justice would have been served either way.

Most of all I wonder about Mike Nifong and the way the case was handled. Surely, he must have had some evidence as he pushed forward. How else could he have brought such a case as far as he did if there was no evidence at all as the attorney general's report suggests. If it was to enable Mike Nifong to win the office of district attorney of Durham County, then he is indeed a very shallow man. The truth is he never needed a case like this to be elected. We could easily find hundreds of other cases handled by the prosecutors who serve the 100 counties in North Carolina where bias and withholding evidence led to convictions. Even so, in the entire history of this state there has never been a district attorney dismissed from an office for misconduct.

I believe the story of the Duke Lacrosse case is about a lot of things but none of them are what we have been told until now. The attorneys for the three accused did what they needed to do to insure their clients did not go to a trial. The strategy was to find the weak link for the prosecution. Unfortunately, it turned out that the weak link was the accuser's life story and not the facts of the case. Many crucial mistakes were made during the investigation that left the accuser, police, and district attorney on the defense. The reasons, I believe, the state of North Carolina intervened in this case were all political and had very little to do with wanting to find the truth. If finding the truth was the desired outcome, then we still do not have it.

If people were willing to tell the truth they would acknowledge that people produced to discredit Crystal were facing their own legal troubles and were represented by lawyers who were members of the players' defense team. They would come forward and tell why Crystal's medical records were leaked to the public to imply she had mental health problems. Others will say how they floated stories implying Crystal had been sexually promiscuous immediately before the alleged events when there was no proof she had been. Perhaps there is one person who will admit they were influenced to turn against Crystal for their own gain.

This is not an episode of “CSI” where everything is resolved in an hour and packaged for a 30-second promo. The intent of this book is not to prove that those who had been previously indicted did anything. What you will know at the end of this book is that Crystal Mangum is a human being above all else. She is not evil, a drug abuser, or a criminal. She has had a difficult life and circumstances brought her to that place and time where things went terribly wrong for a lot of people. There was never any plan to hurt anyone or to cause any suffering. Now you will finally know Crystal Gail Mangum.

You will hear Crystal's story from her because she is capable of expressing what she wants to say. Throughout you will hear from both of us but mostly from Crystal. The way she talks about her life is dramatic and compelling. You will be moved to rethink what you have heard about her and the case.

During the past two years, many people associated with Crystal have been threatened and harassed. So, for their safety, some of the names have been changed when mentioning certain people and events in Crystal's life that do not have anything to do with the Duke Lacrosse case.

This is this first and best opportunity to hear Crystal's voice, and you should take the opportunity to listen.

New Beginning

With the writing of this book, my healing process begins. Whether I can go on with my life will not be important to most people, but it is to me because I plan to go on, be productive, and offer better chances for my children. I believe I have to find healing for myself. I also want to provide healing for those who feel they have been hurt. I know there are many people who are suffering from some kind of trauma and my story may provide a point of common ground where they can start their process of reconciliation. I can only talk about my life. The good, the bad, and the ugly parts have been what I have lived and they have brought me to this place in time. I know how each moment of the life I have lived has had an impact on who and what I am today.

Others have tried to tell my story for me, but they do not have that right. Only I have that right and, due to the circumstances, I believe I have that responsibility to try to set the record straight about a lot of things. I have had to endure almost two years of constant negative talk about my life by people who were only trying to hurt and discredit

me. It is as though my life was destined to be intertwined with Durham, NCCU, and Duke University. My family and I had been patients at the world-renowned Duke University Medical Center several times throughout our lives and so there will always be a connection to Duke. My sister graduated from NCCU, and proudly I have too. I graduated with honors and earned every point of my GPA.

Everyone knows that Duke is a place to get a great education. As much as people know about Duke they know little or nothing about my alma mater. North Carolina Central University is the home of the Eagles and was founded in 1909. It accepted its first students in 1910. Back then it was known as The National Religious Training School and Chautauqua. By 1923 the school started receiving support from the state and became the Durham State Normal School. One of the great ironies—Benjamin Newton Duke was one of the school's early benefactors. He is the same person who would grant money to Trinity College, which would later rename itself Duke University in his family's honor.

Duke and NCCU share a past in playing some of the first interracial college basketball games in the South, even though it was under the cover of darkness and in secret. That occurred when NCCU was the much better team. The Eagles produced some of the greatest athletes in all sports in this country.

The law school at NCCU, while not as renowned as its cross-town cousin, is consistently ranked as one of the best small law schools in the United States and is recognized as a great place for women to attend. It has also produced a governor of North Carolina, Mike Easley, and many of the state's top lawmakers and politicians.

Overall NCCU has been a great institution and produced many outstanding graduates. I felt I had to say something about that because my school has been the subject of bad press because of what people think about me.

I know the people at NCCU tried to show the better side of the university when they had a chance, but they never should have been put in a position to have to do that in the first place. The story became about everything it was not supposed to be. The students at NCCU who came out in support of me were not asking for anything other than to let the system work the case out. Instead they had to endure some of the same treatment that I got. I am sorry the people who had nothing to do with the case were dragged into the middle of it.

Has anyone stopped to think that I did not start the media frenzy? Why would I challenge the reputation, money, and resources that Duke University possesses? Would anyone make up this incident in some misguided and elaborate plan to sue Duke, as some have postulated in the blogs and on some irresponsible media outlets?

I wondered why the media did not add a qualifier to the description of the people who hosted the party. Why not say they were drunken, out-of-control party boys? There was a criminal case going on and the court is the place where things should be decided, not on Hannity and Colmes.

Additionally, I believe in the rape shield laws. It would not have made any sense for me to go public because I believed that it put too much strain on a person who is already traumatized. It was hard enough to go through this in private and alone. Just imagine if I had made appearances on television trying to explain my side of the story. I would have been eaten alive and suffered even harsher ridicule. I was engaged in activities and

living in a lifestyle that few people would approve or would understand. It is true that the people you hang around with will influence what others think about you. I was hanging around people who did not mean me well. Despite those true things, I wanted everyone to know the real me. No news outlet on their own was going to look for the real me.

Now that there has been almost two years since the case began, I can read with a new perspective some of the characterizations of me. My first reaction is always to be angry. The things that were said about my background, my school, and my city were hurtful. What I have found there is hardly a flattering description of any aspects of my life.

So without any reservations or hesitation, I define myself as a mother, student, and daughter before all else. I know others have descriptions of me that are not anything I would use to describe myself.

As I think about some of the people who made it a point to hurt me, one of the greatest disappointments is to know that there were people in my own community undermining me and creating the worst rumors. One was a prominent Durham attorney and sports agent who said about me, "C'mon, kids. She wasn't this little poor North Carolina Central student working the fields. She was a whore."

I was not disappointed because he is a big-time lawyer and respected in the community. It did not matter that he was black or from Durham. I was disappointed because he asks people to give his clients the benefit of the doubt all the time. He wants to set aside the records of the criminal defendants he represents so that they get a fair

trial. This is the same attorney who was on the defense team helping to represent Michael Vick and served on the team of attorneys for some of the Duke Lacrosse players.

This attorney turned out to be representing one of the men who produced a videotape allegedly showing me dancing days after the party. The only problem is the tape was from months before the events of March 13, 2006. CBS and other media outlets played the tape over and over. It found a home on the Internet. People argue to this day that the tape somehow proves that I am a liar. Even though people now know better, they have never wanted to go back and correct that kind of attack on me.

So I was supposed to remain silent forever and let everyone else have the last word about me? I freely admit that the jobs I was paid to do are not what I want my daughters to grow up and do. I cannot recommend exotic dancing to be anyone's first choice for a profession. Because of a serious mistake that I made in the past, my job options were limited and I worked in an industry that does not help a person build a stellar reputation.

There were and still are many Web sites and blogs that purport to know every detail about my life, spelling it out authoritatively with charts, graphs, and timelines, but have no compulsion to check the facts. Those people have anointed themselves the repository of official information about me. I talked to only one media outlet about my life and that was very early on in the case. It was an act that I regret very much doing. I did not realize at the time that it was probably best not to say anything at all. Samiha Khana of *The N&O* said she wanted to help me, and that telling my story to her and her colleagues would help bring the people who hurt me to justice. The information I provided to *The*

N&O was only a sketch of my life. I never could have really detailed all the aspects of my life when I gave them limited access through my screen door.

It was not until I began writing down my thoughts that I even thought about some of the things that have happened in my life. It would be much later before I would sit down for extended recorded interviews. After my experience with *The N&O*, I refused to talk to anyone because I could never trust any of the people who said they wanted to help me.

The only time I purposely tried to get my side of the story out to the public was well after the attorney general's report. I allowed CNN to come interview me and spend time with my family in January 2008. I let them follow me to class, come to my church, and even videotape my children. We even sat down for a four-hour interview in a hotel suite near the Raleigh-Durham Airport. There I allowed Soledad O'Brien to ask me whatever questions she wanted. I had nothing to hide and believed if people finally saw and heard me, I could finish the process of making this part of my life truly a part of my past.

Throughout the entire process of working with CNN, I felt they were disappointed that I was not a drug addict and on welfare. They had the opportunity to see me and the people around me, but they would never talk to anyone I mentioned to them or put anyone I suggested in front of the camera. It was as though they did not want to hear from anyone else—my pastor, my professors, my advisors, and experts on North Carolina law that I knew were not important to CNN. I was honest and candid in the interview, but apparently it was not good enough.

After allowing them into personal life and my home, someone at CNN decided this reporting was not something they wanted the public to see. I had even let them read an

early manuscript of this book, but they have refused to share with me any of the video footage they shot of me and my family. I was used again. Now, when I call CNN, no one will take my call. They have nothing to say about what they saw. When I asked why the footage was not going to be shown, I received no answer.

In a world where there is wall-to-wall coverage of the Peterson case or of Natalie Holloway, surely there was a place to show my interview. Even if they did not believe a word I said, they were not protecting me by not showing it. I believe they were protecting other people. If I am not crazy and on drugs, then many of the things other people have said about me are open to liable and slander suits. I'm not the least bit concerned about any of the footage being shown. I presented my life as an open book.

The entire process of working with CNN was not negative. The cameramen, producers, and Soledad O'Brien were all nice to me. Everyone was professional and they went about their work in a serious manner. What I have concerns about is what was the real motivation for spending all that time and money to interview me if it was never going to be aired.

My suspicion is that people who have an interest in the civil cases feel that any portrait of me that is *not* negative will have a harmful effect on their suits in reference to Duke University and the city of Durham. Not airing the program was one more poke in the eye for me. Another attempt to work in good faith with someone and then to be let down again.

Another aspect of the telling of my story by the media and the bloggers that bothers me is their portrayal of the city of Durham. The stories made it seem as though there was so much racial tension as a result of the case that the city was under siege. Durham

is like any other city in America with a significant black population. There are always factions within a city who attempt to care for their own interests. Groups in Durham such as the Committee on the Affairs of Black People have existed since black people were not able to muster enough political or economic power to improve their condition because of overt racism. North Carolina has had to deal with the legacy of segregation and Jim Crow.

Durham has had to transform itself after the death of the tobacco industry that once flourished in the town. The Lucky Strike Tower is the centerpiece of the new downtown revitalization. It was with tobacco money that the city of Durham came into being. It was also cheap black labor that made the industry profitable. The construction of the Durham Freeway did substantial damage to the solidarity and prosperity of the black community.

Durham gets singled out as a community with high crime and bad place to live—these are the Durham working-class people that I come from.

I have experienced the kind of life I do not want for my children or anyone else. I do not want to be remembered as a troubled girl, who ends up being a troubled woman, who ends up saddling her troubled life on the backs of her children and grandchildren. Being the matriarch of a dysfunctional family is a terrible legacy that many women of all races have to live with.

While my story has components of race in it, there are multiple narratives dealing with more than race. However, I am not afraid to acknowledge that the motivation on the part of some who participated in discrediting me was racist.

Perhaps the telling of my story will give us an opportunity to discuss racism calmly.

There are also clearly issues of sexism that exist in my story. Many have criticized my choice to be a dancer but find it hard to condemn men who use women for entertainment. This is despite the fact that men conceived of and hosted the kind of party that had all the elements of bad taste, alcohol abuse, racial animosity, and a sexually charged environment that could lead to nothing but trouble.

Being in the public eye and under so much scrutiny has been difficult. Even as I try to move on with my life, I still find it necessary to take one more stand and fight. I want to assert, without equivocation, that I was assaulted. Make of that what you will. You will decide what that means to you because the state of North Carolina saw fit not to look at all that happened the night I became infamous.

When I spoke, I was accused of changing my story repeatedly. I emphasize now that the story has never changed. The fact is I did not make it to court to state my case because the focus became one of discrediting me and exposing my personal life instead of finding the truth. So I am left to defend myself. I am not looking forward to opening old wounds. I have never in my life intended to hurt anyone; it is the same with me telling you about my life and what happened at 610 North Buchanan.

You already know a lot about me. More than I ever wanted people to know. On account of this incident I have shared with you some things from my past that are very difficult to talk about but necessary. I am not trying to please everyone, but perhaps I can finally please myself.

For all the women who have been beaten by their partners and labeled battered women, for those like me who will forever be despised and dismissed as just someone who made up things, I am writing this book. I am also writing for those women who

have been labeled accusers like me, women who may have not been able to move forward with their lives because of the double violation that they had to suffer—once at the hands of their attacker and then at the hands of the institutions that have the power to ruin lives and enrich others at the stroke of a pen.

So, when I walked across the stage at graduation to receive my degree at NCCU, I knew I was finally putting what had happened behind me. The whole reason why I was at that party in the first place was to pay my tuition. Here I was graduating with honors, and I did not need to dance to accomplish my goal. That is the lesson I learned. There are no short cuts.

On account of what has happened to me, I feel more inspired. I am working as hard as I ever have to help my children grow up to be better people and contribute positively to society. I will show others that there is a way out of misery and an easier path to take to a happier life. If you stumble, it does not mean you will fall. My dreams, my heartache, and my desire to carry on have become the basis for my strength.