

*one*

## FROM THERE TO HERE



I remember one night in 2000, when Britney was on stage, wearing a beautiful, glittery costume and singing to the rafters of a packed-out arena. Thousands of lighters were flickering all over the room, held by music fans who were swaying and singing along to every lyric of every song.

Something about that scene reminded me, somehow, of the first time Britney was ever on any kind of a stage, as a shy little girl of four, with her head cocked to the side and her hands clasped. It was at the Christmas program of the day care I owned and operated, and she was singing “What Child Is This?” in her tiny angel voice.

How did we ever get from there to here?

Her dreams had come true, beyond her wildest imagination, and now she was up on this huge stage, sharing her gift with so many people. It was such a golden time. My



Golden Girl: Britney's first dance recital.

## THROUGH THE STORM

heart swelled with pride, not only for her, but for her siblings as well. Jamie Lynn was just nine years old, doing well in school and thriving with her social life with her friends. Bryan, my oldest, was in New York City, proving himself as a businessman, making new friends, and becoming the man I knew he could be.

My children's dreams were coming true, and so, in a way, were mine. My marriage had ended, and with it years of pain and shame. I was free of all that for the first time in twenty-four years, and it felt amazing. Britney was building me a big, beautiful home, prettier and more grandiose than anything I ever imagined I would have. The two of us had traveled to some fantastic, exotic locations and had such wonderful times together.

I was on top of the world.

And then things came tumbling down.

It's hard to believe things can change so drastically in seven short years. In January 2007, my sister died, and two weeks later, I got a call that would irrevocably change my life forever. The caller told me something so shocking, so disturbing, I could barely believe that it was true. But soon enough, I was to see the evidence with my own two eyes. I wanted to be in denial, but I couldn't deny the video footage unfolding in front of me. It was Britney, and she was shaving off her beautiful hair. All I could think of was, *How can this be? She used to be the happiest little girl in the world.*

To see that girl, with such despondency in her eyes . . . it broke my heart in a million pieces. My world was crumbling around me. And once again, I wondered, *How did we ever get from there to here?*