



LEAD SINGER OF CREED

SCOTT STAPP

WITH DAVID RITZ

SINNER'S
A MEMOIR
CREED

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Sinner's Creed

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FOR A LONG TIME I believed in irreconcilable divisions—good and evil, heaven and hell, absolute right and absolute wrong. There was no gray in the world where my morality was molded.

Gaining God's love required work. Pleasing Him meant demonstrating near-perfect behavior. God's demands were not subject to negotiation or alteration. God's commandments, as revealed in His Word to Moses on Mount Sinai, were written in stone by the finger of the Almighty Himself.

The law was the law.

But somewhere deep down, I knew there was also love, the most wondrous of all human and divine qualities. If we are the creations of a loving God, shouldn't that love be the law that guides us? And if we are to love—love God, love others, love ourselves—doesn't that require compassion, patience, and understanding, qualities that defy an ethical order based strictly on ironclad law?

For a long time I didn't allow such questions to enter my consciousness. I challenged their legitimacy. I dismissed them as diversionary tactics concocted by a clever enemy. I couldn't tolerate the uncertainty they created. I couldn't live without uncompromising clarity.

And yet the story of my life is profoundly unclear. It is a rock-and-roll story and, at the same time, a story of my walk with Christ. The two are melded together in ways both unpredictable and unsure.

What remains clear, though, is my passion for the God of love. That passion saw me through. In every stage of my journey, that passion never died. I did compromise my principles through acts that were destructive to myself and harmful to others, but I never lost my faith.

This, then, is my simple testimony:

That God is real.

That I am His child.

That I'm grateful for His boundless mercy and loving grace.

That by confessing my frailties and my sin, I can embrace new freedom and deeper forgiveness.

And that this book, written in the blood of a Christian who lost his way in the maze of life on earth, is dedicated to Him.

Scott Stapp

FALL 2012

The Delano Hotel
Miami Beach, Florida
November 18, 2006

SOUTH BEACH is the hippest section of Miami Beach, and the Delano, where a suite can cost \$4,000 a night, is one of its slickest hotels. I didn't know it at the time, but that is where I went to die.

This was after the first three Creed albums—*My Own Prison*, *Human Clay*, and *Weathered*—had sold more than thirty million copies worldwide. My solo album, *The Great Divide*, had been released the year before and had gone platinum. For more than a decade I'd been the front man for one of the most popular rock-and-roll bands in the world. My precious son, Jagger, was eight, and in answer to my prayers, I'd married Jaclyn Nesheiwat, the woman of my dreams, in February of that year. I had gone from the poverty of my youth to considerable wealth—and I was only thirty-three. How could things be any better?

How could things be any worse? I'd been assailed by a battery of pernicious drugs—prednisone for my ailing throat, OxyContin for the injuries sustained in a car accident—whose side effects fueled my undiagnosed chronic depression. I was a mess.

Beyond that, the brotherhood of our band had collapsed. Lifelong friendships were shattered; feelings were smashed; jealousy and greed had replaced the innocent dreams of college boys who just wanted to

rock and roll. Our modest hope had been to make a living making music—we'd never counted on making a fortune. Yet our fortune seemed to have done us in. We were unprepared for the pressures and pitfalls of overnight success. It was all too soon, too heady, too much.

Drinking—especially binge drinking—had become my way of coping with confusion. And because I was prone to blackouts, bingeing provided the ultimate escape. I realized it was also the ultimate irresponsibility, but that realization only fed my guilt. My guilt fueled my self-contempt, and my self-contempt whispered in my ear, *Why not? You're a miserable moral failure anyway. Why not ruin everything you've worked for? That's all you deserve—humiliation and failure.*

That thinking had me running from the prospect of a happy home life and a rapidly expanding career in music. It also allowed me to ignore the kinds of spiritual questions that had plagued me for years.

"Aren't you a Christian band?" people kept asking me.

"No," I said. "We're a rock-and-roll band. We don't proselytize. We don't evangelize. We just play rock and roll."

"But your lyrics are filled with Christian imagery and Christian thoughts."

"Yes, because I write the lyrics and I'm a Christian."

"Then you *are* a Christian band."

"I'm just one of the four guys."

"If you're writing and singing Christian lyrics, shouldn't you be living a Christian life?"

The easy answer should have been yes. I knew that my drunken behavior was incompatible with my beliefs. At the same time, I had never announced myself as some kind of Christian role model. My rock-and-roll hero was Jim Morrison. I also loved U2 and Bono. *Bono is a Christian*, I thought. *Why isn't his band regarded as a Christian band?* I didn't understand why Creed got burdened with that label.

Or was the burden really a blessing in disguise? These were

questions I could not answer. They served only to confuse me and to drive me back to the bottle.

* * *

In Miami Beach that November, I had been awake for days. Beyond the booze, there was an array of drugs, all easily accessible on South Beach's nightlife scene. But by then, alone in my hotel room, party joy had been replaced by paranoia. I was hearing noises that weren't there. I was sure the sirens of cop cars were blaring just outside.

I became convinced the police were right on my heels. *That must be them on their way up the elevator! Now they're running down the hallway, approaching my door, getting ready to break it down. They're about to arrest me!* I had to escape.

I rushed to the balcony of my room, sixteen stories above the street. My only getaway was to leap from my balcony to the one below. I stood at the edge and looked down. There were sixteen stories between me and the street. It was crazy to jump, but I was sure I heard banging on the door. I couldn't let the cops see me in this condition. I'd be arrested, and the press would eat me alive. What would my family say? My fans? My God? I had to do something. And I did.

I climbed over the railing and hung from the ledge, trying to maneuver down to the next balcony. Then all at once I lost my grip. I fell twenty feet and landed on my forehead. I found out later I'd fractured my skull and broken my hip, arm, and nose. The only reason I hadn't fallen to my death was the presence of a thin concrete ridge twenty feet below, installed to protect the balcony from bird waste. I was now face-down in bird waste, still conscious and in excruciating pain. Looking back, I now know I was face-to-face with what I had become.

I managed to lift my head and saw that the nearest guest room appeared to be unoccupied. I yelled for help, but no one responded. At that moment, I thought no one would find me. I thought I would surely die.

I started screaming out loud to God as though He were on the ledge right in front of me. My words were delusional, my thoughts scattered. "How could You allow all this to happen to me?" I yelled. "You know I love You and my heart's in the right place. Why didn't You protect me? Do You know what humiliation this is going to bring to me? I'm going to be another one of those Christians who embarrass You. Listen, just take my life. I don't care. But please spare my wife and son from shame. They've been through enough. I'll never understand why You would bless me so much only to take it all away."

I felt like I was in the middle of an epic battle between God and Lucifer, good and evil, life and death. At that moment I couldn't deny that the devil had complete control over me, but I also knew I had a heart that loved God. At many times throughout my life, I felt I was living under His divine control and following His purposes for me. So how could the devil have won? This wasn't the way my story was supposed to end.

I struggled to keep my eyes open. Closing them would have meant surrender. The longer my eyes were open, I reasoned, the greater my chance of being discovered. I had to maintain consciousness. I had to be found.

Two hours later, with my eyes still open and the pain reaching unbearable limits, I saw a light turn on in the room below. I could make out shadows of people. One was walking toward the balcony. I used every last ounce of energy at my command to call out, but with the balcony door closed, my cry wasn't loud enough to get the person's attention. He kept walking from one side of the room to the other, never looking up in my direction.

"Help me!" I screamed. "Help me!"

Finally the balcony door opened. As it did, I leaned my head over the edge, and a puddle of blood splattered at the feet of the gentleman standing there. He looked up toward the ledge. I saw his face and thought, *Wait a minute, I know this guy.*

He was wearing a baseball cap with the University of Alabama logo. Don't ask me why, but the only words I was able to whisper were "Roll Tide," referring to the University of Alabama Crimson Tide football team.

He saw my face. "Scott Stapp?" he said. "Man, you messed up."
"I know, brother. Help."

I then looked to heaven and thanked God for loving me.

What were the chances that T.I.—the great rapper, whom I knew from doing songs on a companion album to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*—would walk in off the street, check in to the last available room, and arrive just in time to save my life?

"Look, man," he said. "I don't know how you got here, but no cops. You don't want nothing in the news. I'll call an ambulance and get you out of here. I don't know your name—if you know what I mean."

When the medics arrived, they had to use ropes and pulleys to get me off the ledge. Then they put me on a gurney, which turned out to be a major operation. One of the paramedics recognized me immediately and covered me with a sheet so I wouldn't be identified. They carried me through the lobby filled with South Beach revelers in full party mode.

When we got into the ambulance, one of the paramedics said, "I'm a Creed fan. I love you guys. But I gotta ask you something—you weren't trying to kill yourself, were you?"

"No."

"You certain?"

"Absolutely not a suicide. I had too much to drink, and I fell."

"A police officer is going to be here soon," the paramedic said. "That's routine procedure. We're going to clean you up before he gets here. We'll confirm that this was not a suicide attempt, and we'll report it as an accident."

He looked at me and winked. "You have no ID, right?"

"Right."

“Forget your name. You don’t want this in the papers. But believe me, man, I’ve never seen anyone survive a fall like that.”

When I got to the trauma center in Miami, the doctors reached the same conclusion. “We have no medical explanation for why you’re alive. A human skull is not strong enough to survive that kind of direct impact. Your head should have cracked open like a watermelon. It may take you a full year to recover. You’re going to have to relearn how to walk, and it won’t be easy. The truth is, you’ve suffered a severe skull fracture so deep that air entered your brain.”

“So I’m officially an airhead?” I managed to joke.

“You’re officially the luckiest man I’ve ever seen.”

The word *concussion* was the last thing I remember thinking before I fell into semiconsciousness.

I felt my spirit plummeting through the stages of Dante’s *Inferno*. Devils were chasing me with knives and swords, bayonets and scythes. Snakes were curled around my arms, their mouths biting my neck. The Enemy himself, a pitiless beast with eyes of blazing fire, was in pursuit, looking to devour me whole.

Then suddenly there was a bright light. I felt as if I were on a conveyor belt moving me out of these stages of hell and leading me toward heaven. The light got brighter. Then there was a loud *boom!* And another *boom!*

The light flashed off and on, off and on, until I entered the source of light. I felt complete safety, complete warmth. No pain, no fear—just divine love. I smiled and said, “I love You, Father.”

As soon as those words were spoken, the light went out.

Where was I?

What had happened?

CHAPTER I

ANTHONY

AS A YOUNG KID I wanted to fly like Superman, so I'd put a towel around my neck and jump off the roof of my house. I thought I was indestructible. I was born with a burning desire to be a superhero.

For the longest time I thought this was confidence. Now I see it as a complex. Whatever you call it, I had a drive to be great at all things—athletics, academics, music. Everything was a competition, and I wanted to win.

My mother said that even as a baby, I was fearless. In a way, I suppose the circumstances of my life required me to be. My father left my mother, my two baby sisters, and me when I was a kid. From that moment I decided I would be my mom's protector and my family's savior.

We were dirt poor, living in a tiny two-bedroom, one-bathroom house in a low-income community. Like everyone else in our neighborhood, we lived off food stamps. I was going to save my family from poverty.

I remember when I was only about six years old and we were all in bed—Mom, my sisters, and I—and Mom started to cry.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“I don’t know how we’re going to pay our utility bills,” she said.

I stood up on the bed and made a declaration: “When I grow up, I’m going to be bigger than Elvis and pay all the bills and buy you a fancy house and a fancy car. I’m also going to become president of the United States like President Reagan.”

“You can’t be both,” Mom told me.

“Yes, I can. I’ll be Elvis during the week and the president on the weekends.”

Mom laughed, but she saw I was serious-minded. She knew she could trust me. By age seven, I was cooking food on a stove for my two young siblings since Mom didn’t get home from her job at JCPenney until 8 p.m. I loved my mother more than life itself. I’d do anything for her. I wanted to be a big boy and fix everything for her and the rest of my family.

* * *

I was born Anthony Scott Flippen on August 8, 1973, at Orlando Regional Medical Center. My biological father was Richard Flippen, whose family had emigrated from Ireland. Richard was in the printing business, and he was also a Marine. I remember him as a man’s man—tall and strong, with big muscles, and very funny. Richard worked out with free weights in our carport. I wanted to be just like him, so I’d follow him around, picking up weights and saying, “I strong, Daddy.”

He mentored the football players at Lake Brantley High, and he would let me watch their practices. Seeing the athletes throw and tackle, block and kick, I would constantly tell him, “I can do that. I’m tougher than that. I’m not scared, Daddy.”

My memories of the man are few, but I cherish the ones I have.

For those first few years of my life, my father made me feel happy and safe.

Then came the day I was sitting in my dad's lap watching a Road Runner cartoon. Dad and I were laughing and having a great time, but I wanted to get closer to the television. So I lay on the floor, as close as I could get to the screen. At one point I turned back to my father to share another laugh and say, "Wasn't that funny, Daddy?" But he was no longer in the chair.

I ran to Mom.

"Where's Daddy?"

"He's not home."

"When's he coming home?"

"He'll be back soon, Anthony."

But he wasn't. He never came back at all.

Mom had nothing to say about Dad's disappearance. No further explanation was given.

I can't remember any fights between my parents. Mom married him when she was eighteen years old, half his age. Later I learned he had been married to someone else before Mom and had two sons. I never got to meet my half brothers. Many years later I learned that his younger son, Ricky, died after a long battle with alcohol and drugs. An overdose. For my entire life, nearly everything about my father's past was shrouded in mystery.

After Dad left, my sisters, Amanda and Amie, and I were sometimes taken to his tiny home in Clermont, Florida, not far from Orlando. We were told to watch television and not move from the couch. We watched *The Gong Show* while he and Mom talked in the bedroom with the door closed.

When it came to his interactions with me, Dad was distant. He didn't seem particularly enthusiastic about our visiting his place. He put up with us, but he didn't act like the dad I had loved or the dad who had once loved me. I never asked what happened between him

and Mom. I just wanted Dad to move back home with us. He never did. Soon those infrequent visits stopped entirely, and just like that, he was out of my life.

With Dad gone and Mom working, I was unsupervised and free to roam the streets. I was a daredevil, and I wasn't afraid to try things other kids wouldn't do. I especially liked to impress the older kids. If one of the big kids wanted to break into a house but could only pry open a window slightly, he'd dare me to slip in. I was never one to pass on a dare. I'd sneak right in and open the front door for him.

At school, other kids made fun of me for not having a dad. They teased me for having to go to the school counselor twice a week for my misbehavior and my radically changing moods. Some of the bullies labeled me as one of the slow kids. I compensated by being the class clown who jumped on top of the desk and cracked jokes whenever the teacher left the room. I loved the attention. In my mind, the only way to win approval and acceptance from my classmates was by acting the fool.

Early on, there were divisions in my behavior—on one hand, the dutiful son wanting to please and protect, and on the other, the rebellious wild child. Even as a kid riding my bike to 7-Eleven to play Pac-Man, I thought I was the head of my household. This ego would haunt me throughout my life—an attitude that said, *There's nothing I can't do; there's nothing too big for me; I can be all things to all people.*

And yet, in the midst of this premature self-reliance and artificially pumped-up self-regard, I was introduced to a force far greater than myself. During this difficult period—before, during, and after my mom and dad broke up—I met God.