

Sexual Abuse (Rapes) Testimony

I struggle with performance-based behaviors and the underlying insecurities that help form such a self-defeating system—shame, fear of rejection and difficulties in trusting people. I have trouble allowing myself to make mistakes, I'm over responsible and tend to martyr my own needs.

You see, performance-based behaviors are built on the lie that we are only loved and accepted when we perform. Our value and acceptance must be earned. Since love and acceptance were something to be earned, I learned to be a good performer (achiever). Of course, I always fell short of those vague and nebulous standards. No matter how much I achieved, I never truly felt I measured up. How tiring. The real problem, of course, is that my true worth and identity is to be in God, not in my performance or achievements no matter how worthy.

To help in Celebrate Recovery I had to go through the 12 Steps and recovery, based on the Beatitudes. As you know, it was designed for people who struggled with addictions, but it was also designed for individuals with hurts, hang-ups and habits. I didn't feel I especially needed it after all I had been in the church most of my life and experienced a significant spiritual rebirth 26 years ago.

My junior high years were very pivotal for me. I was a cheerleader, began swimming on the high school swim team, was an honor student and had my first art show. Even more importantly, at 13 I invited Jesus Christ into my heart. I took it very seriously. My folks, well-meaning and loving Christians, gave me a "practical" talk aimed at keeping me from becoming radical. Soon, in an effort to please all, I relegated Christianity to a very small Sunday-corner of my life. Christianity then wasn't a way of life, just a small part of life.

No one told me it wouldn't work.

Unfortunately, those events were combined with some that weren't so positive. At 15, I was raped. A young man several years older invited me to walk to the drug store for a soda. My folks were playing bridge with friends just two doors down from my home. I checked with them and they permitted me to do so. When we returned to my house, he raped me. While I was devastated, I simply went to my room, cried, and took that event, carefully wrapped it up, found an empty closet within my soul and put it there. You see, if I had told my parents I thought my Dad would shoot him, he's go to jail and that would ruin my family. So, that became a carefully hidden secret.

Not only did I swim on the swim team, do water ballet, but I also taught swimming lessons and lifeguarded. One day when I was 16, ready to go to the

pool several young men stopped by my home. I knew them, but not terribly well. I told them I had to go so my Mom could take me to work. They told my Mom they were going that way, couldn't they just drop me off. She said, "Okay."

On the way to the pool, they turned toward a country area. I began to protest because I really needed to get to work, but they wouldn't listen. They took turns raping me. Then they took me to the pool where I was admonished by my boss for being late. I went to the shower, cried, again placed this event under wraps and placed it in another closet within my soul where it stayed. I never told a soul about either of these traumatic experiences until I was over 50 years old. Regardless, I felt deep shame as if somehow I had caused these horrible things to happen to me. Not only had these young men stolen my purity, they had stolen something much worse—my feelings of self-worth and value.

Why didn't I report it? One of the boys father was the sheriff and in that day if you went to court, they would bring another boy to testify that you slept with them too. Implying, of course, that you just slept around. I had known of such cases. So, I didn't even consider reporting it.

So, my junior and senior high years were truly a mixed bag of events. I was always a high achiever, but have to admit that I was terribly mixed up emotionally, especially when it came to relationships with men. Fortunately, I had a father and brother who were good men and I loved deeply.

During this time, I kept going to church, to be sure, but I was living exactly as I pleased. My life was a contradiction. Outwardly, I appeared to be doing all the right and good things. Unfortunately, I was very mixed up concerning my need for love.

College proved to be my undoing. With my new freedom and determined to be sophisticated, I smoked my first cigarette and drank my first drink at the Welcome Dance. During my freshman year I did all that was expected of me: good grades, sorority, dating. But by my sophomore year I was getting sick and tired of doing good, living up to what I perceived everyone was expecting of me. By the end of my sophomore year I was pregnant and married—in that order.

One of the first questions I encountered in the 12 Step study was, *"What did you do to get attention in your family?"* Interesting. I thought about that for awhile and realized that I was "good" and I "achieved." That was a revealing insight for me because in many ways I continued doing the same into my adulthood and still struggle with performance-based behaviors today.

My life went on. I was living the good, "enlightened" life—at least by the world's standards. I was the first woman executive in an international corporation and was chosen one of 12 Outstanding Working Women in Downtown St. Paul

(Minn.) I was the liberated, capable, independent woman—Jack-of-all-trades, career woman, mother and lover. In short, superwoman. And it was a lie. Inside me there was always a desperation, a longing for something better, a need for comfort and love that no one seemed able to fill.

By the early '70s I was divorced. I dated far too much and while I never thought of myself as being promiscuous during the next 10 years, I guess I really was. I always had extended relationships that lasted several years, but I was sexually active. Frankly, when a relationship got too close, fear took over and I pulled away.

In the mid-70s, my teenage son was drinking and smoking pot. My younger son was somewhat rebellious. Often I screamed and slammed doors, both inwardly and outwardly. I was totally immersed in an affair which I had rationalized as being right and good. About this time my father died and my older son had a brief brush with the law that was very scary for me. Inside I was falling apart. My whole world seemed shaken.

I'm so glad now that it was. I started searching. I wasn't sure then just what I was looking for. I know now that it was Jesus Christ.

Finally, I realized the price that I was paying for disobedience to God. I was living in sin and I needed help. When it came to Jesus, I knew He was a wonderful man, the Son of God, but for some strange reason never knew that my relationship with him was to be very personal. And I didn't even have to "clean up my act" first. He would take me just as I was.

One day my older son came home. He was in college at the time and had a summer job working out of state. I wasn't expecting him home at all. I was home sick and heard the door open. I called out and he answered. I was surprised and wondered what had happened. He sat down and started crying. This was my 21 year old, rugged, 6'5" son. "Oh no," I thought, "What now?"

"Mother," he began, "I'm not crying because I'm sad. I'm crying because I've found Jesus Christ. And Mother, forgive me for all the pain and trouble I've caused you."

My own encounter with God happened like this, my two sons and I were traveling to Wisconsin where I was to interview for a job. I was asleep in the back seat, the boys in the front. I had a dream and in it I was in a small, square cement block building (like a storeroom) and I couldn't get out. I was trapped. I saw the huge, thick door, but there was no doorknob. Then I looked down and there was this tiny pinhole with light shining through it. I thought, "I'll try that. I put my finger on the light and the door swung open into a lush countryside with lots of light streaming down from heaven." Why that dream was so significant to me I'm

not sure, but in the fog of waking up I cried out to God and told Him I was tired of trying to live my life on my own and wasn't doing so well. I had been trying, trying harder and trying my hardest. I was worn out. At that moment, I gave Him all my heart and my life. And He answered. On that spring day in 1979, I was truly born again.

A little over a year later my younger son also received eternal life.

In these past years God has . . .

- Forgiven me.
- Let me know how much I am loved.
- Helped me work on my tendencies toward pride and selfishness.
- End my seven-year affair. Something I could not have done without God's help.
- Helped me give up a 25-year smoking habit
- Faced a brush with death, and the likely death of my older son.

God has changed my life. And He changed my sons.

So, back to Celebrate Recovery. . . I felt God and I had dealt with most of the significant issues in my life. Certainly, there were many that I had brought before Him. Those things so carefully hidden within my soul had to come out. The worst, the hardest to admit, was an abortion during my divorced years. But little by little, God would bring these to mind, I would confess, and He would faithfully, forgive. One of my favorite Scriptures is the one in Isaiah 1:18 that says, *"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though red as crimson, they shall be white as wool."* Oh, He is so faithful to His Word.

So, when I decided to go through Celebrate Recovery and the 12 Steps study, one of my thoughts was, *"Will this be pain revisited?"* I wasn't so sure I wanted to do that, although I certainly did have some hurts, hangups and habits that I could work on.

As I began the 12 Steps I was amazed at some of the things God began to show me. Certainly, I knew that God would always be doing a work in my life, but I have to admit I was surprised at how this ministry opened the door to being made more complete in Him. He showed me in the safety of a group of loving, accepting stepsisters, that there was still some residue from my background that could use exposure to the God's healing light. He showed me that my tendency toward achievement was not always healthy or His will for my life. He showed me areas of jealousy. He showed how my fear of rejection or being hurt by men had caused me to erect some barriers that needed to be torn down.

I am acutely aware now that recovery is truly going to be a lifelong project until the Lord sees fit to take me home. After all, recovery really is just letting God do for us what we cannot do for ourselves while also taking the steps necessary to draw closer to Him.

I encourage you to "keep coming back" on Monday nights so you may experience this rare opportunity to worship our LORD with some incredible people and permit God to bring healing into your life as He is doing in mine. I also encourage you to join a 12 Step study. It is within this opportunity that you'll find the most profound growth in a safe, non-threatening environment.

Footnote: Several years ago I saw the obituary notice for one of the two young men who raped me. It listed his family, his church. I could honestly say the "sting, hurt, resentment" were gone and that in my heart was the cry that I hoped he had come to know Jesus Christ in a personal way and had found the freedom and forgiveness that I have found.

Thank you for letting me share.