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## FACE-TO-FACE WITH MY ENEMY

“Just one more time,” I thought, holding out my arm, waiting for my love to shoot me up again. He hated to do it, but I begged and begged every time until he gave in. All I wanted was that first cool, sweet rush, like I had never done it before, but would do over and over again. It was mind blowing. As he pushed the needle into my arm and drained the syringe of cocaine into my veins, I knew it was going to be good. The taste of the cocaine in my mouth was strong. It was then, at the very moment the taste became stronger than ever before, I knew I had mixed it too strong. Something wasn’t right.

I felt different, deathly sick to my stomach, and riddled with fear. As I stood in front of the sink at a local motel room, looking at myself in the mirror, gasping for breath, trying to take the inhale that wasn’t coming, I felt my heart begin to drum wildly and then stop. Panic began to set in as I grabbed Jim’s arm and tried to talk, but the words would not come. He immediately knew something was wrong, and the fear in his eyes said more than a thousand words could ever say. I then turned back to the mirror, made eye contact

with myself, and grabbed the sink with a death grip. But I grew faint.

Thoughts began to flood my mind as reality set in. I thought, *This could be it. I am going to die. I am going to hell.* It is amazing how, in such a short amount of time, that every sermon you heard preached, every word your mother spoke, the cries of repentance, and the promises you continually make to God can all converge simultaneously in a way that oddly makes sense. While all of this echoed in my mind, Jim turned on the faucet and began splashing cold water on my face. I remember, in my mind, screaming out the name: *Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.* About the time I gasped for breath, all I could hear was the name of Jesus being repeated faintly over and over again and the sound of running water. I felt weak, ready to cave in, and then he grabbed me and helped me to a seat on the commode in the bathroom. I remember trying to scream but could only weakly say, "Turn off the water." My ears were so sensitive to sound that it felt as though I were standing at the bottom of Niagara Falls.

I can't describe it any other way than to say my whole body felt numb. My legs were numb; it was hard to walk. I asked him to help me to the bed to lie down, and he picked me up and gently carried me to the bed. All I kept saying was, "I feel bad, real bad. I don't want to die."

Although I could breathe, I was not convinced I was going to live. I was scared to close my eyes, in fear I would not wake up. My heart leaped up and down erratically, but I felt lifeless. I began to sob and think, *What have I done to my life?* Most everyone thought I had it made. My life was perfect. How easy it is to fool those who think they know you. On the perimeter I can see where it looked as though I had it all together, but inside I was living a lie. I remember lying on the bed of a cheap motel room, curled up in a ball sobbing and praying, as I held onto a pillow for dear life. I was scared. I begin to cry out to God, "Why me? If I'm going to die lost and go to a devil's hell, why did you raise me from the dead? Why did you

give me life when I died as a baby, so small and helpless? And why, please tell me, *why* did you give me life in this very moment when I'm at my lowest and most unworthy of your love?"



## 2

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# A PATH OF SELF-DESTRUCTION

Funny how quickly life can go from having a good time, doing what feels good, to a reality check, all in such a short span of time. As I laid there sobbing, trying to figure out the mess I had made of my life, I quickly began to realize that the choices I had made in an effort to find acceptance and love were leading me down a path going nowhere quickly. I began reasoning, desperately trying to figure out how I got here. Right here. This very moment.

My mind immediately raced back to the story I had heard growing up from my parents, grandparents, and saints in the church.

One Sunday evening when I was about eighteen months old, my family was at church, enjoying the presence of God. This particular evening, my mother, Jerrie, was holding me in her arms when I became very ill. They had just finished the worship service as the last song had been sung and the pastor, Joseph Todd, took the pulpit to preach. As he began reading a portion of Scripture from where he planned to preach, I began to get fretful. The pastor's wife, Sister Todd, asked my mother if I was okay. My mother told her no, that

my cheeks were flushed and I was burning hot with a fever. My mother knew that something was wrong, but did not quite know the severity. Sister Todd told my mother to go have me prayed for, but since pastor was getting ready to preach, my mother thought she would wait a minute. Then, as I lay in my mother's arms, my body fell limp. My head and heels hung as to make a perfect circle. Without another thought about interrupting the service, my mom and dad jumped up and ran to the front of the church to have the pastor pray for me. As my grandmother Lula and Sister Todd saw my limp body, they ran to the front, joining my parents, and began to pray, sensing the urgency of the moment.

Of course you can only imagine my parents' helplessness and the fear that raced through their hearts as they realized something was wrong with their baby girl. By this time the situation had become chaotic; the whole church began to realize something was wrong and came flooding around us. The pastor stopped preaching and came down to the front where my parents were. He took my lifeless body into his arms and began to pray the prayer of faith for God's mercy. At this time the church had gathered around the altar where my limp body was and began praying intensely for a miracle. During this time, my big blue eyes had become fixed in my head and were not moving or blinking. Breath had left my body. There was no pulse. They knew that nothing short of a miracle would bring me back. I had died.

I can just hear the cries of desperation that poured out of the hearts of my parents, grandparents, and church family as reality was setting in that I was gone. Brother Todd was a man of prayer and the church was a praying church, so as you can imagine, they laid me on that altar and began to pray for a miracle. After several minutes had passed, which seemed like an eternity to my parents and others who prayed, they said I just sat up on the altar and looked around like, "Why are all you people gathered around me, crying and praying?" My parents grabbed me in their arms and held me and praised God with a thankful heart, as He just gave them

their little girl again for the second time. Everyone was amazed, as I didn't act like anything was wrong with me. My fever was gone. My mother, of course, took me to the doctor to find out what happened, and the doctor looked at my mom as if to say, "Why are you bringing a well baby to see me. She is fine."

God had performed His first miracle in my life. The verse that has been etched in my mind is Ephesians 1:11–12, "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."

Oftentimes I thought, *If God is love, why do I feel all of this pain?* I grew up on a church pew. I experienced the power of God. I knew what it was like to experience a genuine move of God's Spirit. My life growing up was pretty good, with a few exceptions. God blessed me to be raised in a family where I was loved and didn't want for much. I did not grow up rich by any stretch of the imagination, but my parents worked hard to see that my brother and I didn't have to experience poverty as they did growing up. They wanted us to have more. My parents went to church regularly and were heavily involved in the ministry of that local assembly. I do not recall a lot of my childhood, but I do remember the incident that changed the course of direction for my family.

My mother was deeply wounded by someone in the ministry and never fully recovered. I remember as a small child watching my mom try to make amends with the one who hurt her, and even in an attempt to do the right thing, complete healing never occurred; the wound never healed. The Devil began to use this one event to unravel the life of a wonderful lady. It started with missing a service here and a service there until a month went by. Then the feelings of guilt and shame set in, which made it harder for her to go back. Shortly after my mother stopped attending church, my dad stopped going to worship as well. It seemed that in a moment of time our priorities as a family changed.

Do not underestimate the power of being offended. If left alone and not given to God, it WILL destroy you. The sad part is, Satan doesn't just want you. He wants the generations that come after you as well.

I had praying grandparents, thank God, who saw to it that I never missed a church service. I loved church. One Sunday evening while everyone was at the altar, I felt the urge to go pray. I wanted to receive the Spirit of God. I watched others receive it, and I wanted to experience it for myself. I remember walking to the altar and kneeling down to pray. Before I knew it, I was standing on my feet, praising the Lord as others were praying with me, and God filled me with the wonderful gift of the Holy Ghost at age six. My granny made it her mission to make sure I was at every service, youth activity, and anything else the church provided that I could be involved in. She realized if I was going to be saved, she must instill something in me, and that she did. Granny Lulu was my spiritual rock.

Around the age of seven, I began to be subjected to sexual abuse. I can honestly say there are years of my life I can't recall. It's funny how our mind works as a defense mechanism to protect us from trauma. My innocence was stolen. My ability to think as a normal child was gone. No child should ever have to experience this nightmare. I lived in fear, shame, and guilt. I felt cheap and dirty, like something was wrong with me. I wanted to cry out and tell somebody, but I didn't want to hurt others by exposing this secret. The older I got, I realized just how wrong this was, but I knew exposing this secret would create incredible pain and turmoil for the ones I loved. I just couldn't speak up. What if I told them and they didn't believe me or blamed me? I would lose everything that meant anything to me. I realize now that it wouldn't have happened, but when you are a child trying to reason through an adult situation, you just don't see things very clearly.

Was a normal life too much to ask for? I wanted to feel true love and security, not love polluted by perversion. So, to say the least,



I became a very good actor. No one knew or sensed my pain. As far as everyone else knew, my life on the outside was perfect, while inside I screamed out a muffled, yet desperate unheard cry for help. I did the best I could. It was hard. I blamed God and others. Inside, I resented so many for what I was going through. I felt alone; I dreaded life. I couldn't wait for the day I could take care of myself and take control of my own life.

I knew one thing for sure: I wouldn't cause myself any more pain, or so I thought. The reality is, the pain and scars left behind from sexual abuse are real. It is a taboo subject no one wants to deal with, but it is a reality for more people than we know. The scars don't show on the outside, but deep behind the curtains of our heart, they showcase themselves. They are buried deep inside, but on a constant fight for the surface; it's a constant battle to keep them buried down. It also requires a lot of energy which can lead to depression—all in an effort to stay safe. If they show up on the surface they must be dealt with, and to the hurting heart, dealing with them isn't an attractive option. For any wound to heal properly, it must have the proper attention. Sometimes the pain is too great and too scary to bear, so we keep the issues buried and out of sight. Many of us fear that the pain will crush us, so we keep it hidden or numbed. A scar should not be a reminder of the wound itself, but it should, as a pen so beautifully marks the pages of a heroic tale, tell a story of God's grace, marking the spot as a memorial of His healing. We are often too ashamed to show our scars, but they are not something to hide. Your scars are a trophy of God's infinite grace and love.

As mentioned, I had the privilege to grow up on a church pew and be raised in the church. This was such a great privilege I thank God for, but while dealing with the sexual abuse, it was very confusing for me. I remember when I was a little girl around the age of ten or so, I was so tired of suffering abuse that I ran to the altar to beg God, "Please, make this stop." Sexual abuse can be more traumatic than physical abuse. With physical abuse, everyone can see

the results and many want to help, but with sexual abuse, it's less evident and help always seems elusive. The mental and emotional pain is enough to break anyone.

Situations that I had been subjected to played over and over in my mind like a film reel. I just wanted to get away. I just didn't understand why God would allow this to happen to me. I grew up singing hymns in the church such as "Yes, Jesus Loves Me" and "Jesus Loves the Little Children." So why was this happening to me? Did I do something to God? Was something wrong with me? It was impossible to understand and rationalize all of this at the age of ten. I had to carry a weight no child was meant to carry. Instead of the other kids simply praying for a new toy, I tried and sought after God for understanding. I did everything I knew to do to make sure I was protected, but it was never enough.

Because of the actions of others, I experienced pain. I had to grow up real fast. I would love to say, at that time, I didn't have feelings of resentment, bitterness, and hatred inside of me, but I did. I felt cheated, abandoned, and cheapened. When I was around others who displayed normal relationships and carefree lives, I couldn't help but be envious. It was a natural reaction to an unnatural experience.

Every person out there wants to feel loved, accepted, and secure. This is the way God made us. I was blessed beyond measure to be surrounded by an incredible youth group and leaders who loved the Lord and truly cared about me. Their guidance and influence forever impacted my life. An evangelist came through our church and prophesied over my life, telling me God had a work for me to do, that I needed to pursue it. But the truth is, I didn't know how or what I was pursuing.

Thoughts continually flooded my mind like scenes on a movie screen as I lay there on the bed of that motel room trying to make sense of this mess I was in. I began to think back to how Jim and I met. I was about six years old when a new family started coming to our church. They had a son named Jim, who was so bright

and handsome. The childhood crush had officially begun. My eyes always lit up around him, and a huge smile crept over my face every time I saw him. I just knew I was “in love.” It was an innocent yet heart-melting experience. Within a few months of attending our church, Jim and I forged an instant connection, as he and my brother were about the same age and soon became friends. As the years progressed, this innocent crush turned into my first kiss, and the older I got, the more intense my feelings grew. He seemed to be in and out of trouble and made some bad choices that derailed his life, but my attraction for him was so great that I was blinded to the warning signs. Soon he would move away and make a choice to not live for God.

In December 1990, the Christmas of my senior year, Jim resurfaced, as he had moved away and had come home to visit. He was now getting ready to deploy for Iraq to serve in Desert Storm. He was twenty-one; I was sixteen. I always had a secret thing for him, but due to our age differences, he was always out of my reach . . . or at least so I thought. On Christmas morning shortly after breakfast, I was watching a special on TV of different soldiers serving in Desert Storm saying hello to their families back home. I began to think of him and thought, *We've been friends for years, and I am going to call to let him know how much I care.* So I did. It was a short but sweet conversation that only intensified my feelings for him. I thought I would write him a letter to where he was stationed at Fort Hood and see what happened.

I knew my parents wouldn't approve, first of all because of the age difference but also because he had been married before and had been in trouble with the law. What they didn't know was I was going to change him. He would be different. Then, as all of these thoughts were rushing through my mind, the reality of what I had done began to set in. Even though I took this step, I was still dating the same guy I had been with since my freshman year of high school. *Oh well,* I thought, *he is just going to read my letter and laugh at me the next time we see each other.* A few days went by, and

I got busy and forgot about the letter. Then, all of a sudden, I got a letter in the mail. It was from him. He wrote that he felt the same way and would be in town the next weekend, and we could talk. I was in a real pickle now.

The weekend came and we talked, and I knew that I wasn't a good liar. I had to make a decision: break up with the guy I had dated since high school and pursue Jim, or not pursue Jim and still break up with my boyfriend. My feelings for my high school sweetheart had dwindled, and my heart wasn't into our relationship any longer. After literally making myself sick over this, I decided to pursue Jim and see what happened. I still to this day cannot tell you how I convinced my parents we were just friends and to let us spend time together, but I did. Our relationship started out great. I would go with his parents down to Fort Hood and spend the weekends with him, or he would come home and we would spend time together. To a teenage girl, it was perfect. Our relationship escalated quickly and, before my parents knew it, he had given me an engagement ring before he left to go serve with the Army during Desert Storm.

The day he left for Saudi Arabia was one of the saddest days of my life. I remember watching the soldiers board the airport bus and seeing families emotionally torn apart because of the commitment their loved one made to serve our wonderful country. It definitely gave me a healthy respect not only for our soldiers but also for the families left behind. The next few months were difficult as I found myself waiting for the mailman every day to see that one letter saying he was okay.

It was also exciting for me because I was closing one chapter of my life and celebrating my high school graduation. At the ceremony, the principal of the academy presented me with a scholarship to Baylor University. I was so surprised and excited. But it was here that I stood at a major crossroads in my life, asking myself: *Do I move forward and get my education, leaving familiar things behind; or, do I stay here, get married, and see where life takes me?*

It was pressing.

The decision of not pursuing my education will be one that I will always regret. After discussing everything with Jim, I made the decision not to go. I didn't want to leave him, but honestly, deep down, I didn't have the self-confidence to go alone. Most of all, I was scared of the unknown, but what does fear of the unknown really mean? The unknown does not exist. Our fear is based on something that literally is not there. Think of a child at a young age: they have no problem going to sleep in their room at night. Then, as they begin to grow older and see things on TV or hear stories from friends, fear suddenly starts creeping in. They begin to say, "Leave the light on, Mommy." Fear shows up at an early age. The sad part of this is, most of what we fear does not exist. Nonetheless, I didn't want to experience any more pain, fear, or loneliness; I just wanted to be rescued and live happily ever after.

After about six months, Jim came home. This was a night I will never forget. The excitement that filled the gymnasium at Fort Hood was electrifying. It was so moving to see children run to meet their moms and dads, husbands and wives unite, and parents hug their children, thanking God for their safe return.

While Jim was in Iraq, I had been hired at the Commercial National Bank as a receptionist. I enjoyed my job, but I enjoyed the money I made even more. After he got home, the battle between Jim and my parents intensified. My mother despised the very sight of him. She was not shy about voicing her opinion either, which put a huge wedge between us. I was being made to choose, and I chose him.

At that moment, I realized my choice to leave home and pursue a relationship with Jim was really an effort to find true love and security. I just wanted to get away from the pain of one area of my life, and so I jumped ship into an unknown place. But to me, the unknown served as tangible hope for escape from the empty, broken, and painful world that I did know. I thought this would be the best way. The Devil is masterful at making the wrong choices look right.

But if we would turn to God instead of away from Him, listening to His still, small voice deep in our souls, it would prevent us from living as slaves to perpetual bad choices, running from our past.

The haze of the overdose was wearing off. As I lay there taking in the surroundings of that motel room, I watched as Jim kept using drugs. His lack of concern for what had just happened crushed me. *What had I done to my life?* I thought. I felt hopeless. I began to cry out to God, asking “*WHY?*” I wanted to run, but all I had to go back to was bad memories, and I knew without a shadow of doubt, I didn’t want that. I cried until it felt as though my eyes dried up and withered, and I drifted off to sleep.

The next thing I knew, the phone began to ring in the motel room, and the sun pierced through a crack in the curtains. It was morning. I began to feel for the phone and said hello. It was the motel office calling, saying I had a guest who would like to see me. I asked who and they said, “Your dad.” I was shocked. What was *he* doing here? How did he track me down? Frankly, I was scared out of my senses. As I got up to get ready, I felt as though a truck hit me. I was so weak and tired; I just simply didn’t feel well. As I brushed my teeth and hair and threw on some clothes, my mind began to race as to why he was here. Jim was reluctant to let me go. He was afraid my dad wouldn’t let me come back. I didn’t know. I have to admit there was a part of me screaming for him to help me and another part of me rebelling, “Leave me alone. I’m doing okay, but please save me.” I never dreamed the first time I used drugs that I would need saving. For me, the first time I used was out of curiosity, but it soon became a way of escape. Once again, I found myself putting on a mask to cover the pain and act like I had it all together.

As I walked down the stairs, legs wobbling and twitching, I could see my dad standing by his truck. He looked rough, as though he had been up all night. When I got downstairs, he wrapped his arms around me and began to cry. At that moment, I had a hundred emotions flooding my heart. I didn’t know what to do with

them all. He asked me if he could take me to breakfast, to which I agreed. He drove me to the nearest Denny's, and we sat and talked. As he talked, he began to sob, creating a scene. It felt as though everyone at the restaurant was staring a hole right through us.

He said in a fit of tears, "I had to come find you. Are you okay?"

I said, "Yes, why? Dad, please be quiet, everyone is staring at us."

He quickly asked his next question, giving little regard to my request, "Did anything happen to you last night?"

I said, "No, why?"

"Well, your granny came by the house last night after church and said, 'We have to find Misty. I am scared something is terribly wrong with her, and I fear for her life.'"

My parents began to ask why, and she told them what had just happened a few hours ago during their church service. She said that it was a normal Wednesday night service. It was very predictable. They sang a few choruses and Brother Jones got up to read a chapter from the book of Proverbs. But this time, it was different. He began to read as normal, but shortly after he began, he stopped and said, "Church, I feel strongly impressed of God to stop and ask for every saint to begin to cry out for mercy for one of our own children who has strayed. If we do not intercede on their behalf, they will die."

My grandmother said she immediately felt by the impression of God that it was me. She said that a deep prayer began to fill the sanctuary, and instead of having a predictable Wednesday night service, they had a prayer meeting. Just like seventeen years prior when I was a baby, God reached down, answered a prayer for me, and with the mercy only He can show, spared my life.

As he told me this, I could feel goose bumps and the hair rising stiffly on my arms. I knew God knew where I was and, in His mercy, had His saints intercede for me when I was in no shape to pray for myself. I could not hold back the tears. They fell like water from a faucet. I never told my dad what happened, but he knew it was for me. My pride would not allow me to come clean. The Bible

says that pride cometh before a fall. I was destined to fall again.

As I returned to the motel room, I really didn't know what to expect. I wasn't sure if Jim would be there or if he would be angry because I left. To my surprise, he was just happy I came back.