

it probably hurt him. Always being small in stature, and a girl, and already feeling rejected by my daddy, I began having some social problems in school. They weren't bad, but enough to notice. I was tough and wanted everyone to know it. I made up my mind that I wasn't going to be hurt again if I could help it.

The years flew by and we moved again when I was in the sixth grade. This was a difficult move for me, going to a new school and having to start all over again. I decided that I would have to be extra-tough at this new school in order to survive. I also decided that the kids weren't going to like me unless I was good at something. Schoolwork wasn't my greatest interest, especially with degrading teachers who made fun of my Michigan accent. So, I turned to sports. As I look back, nobody really cared that I was good at track; they ridiculed me all the same.

We changed schools again the fall of my freshman year. My parents sacrificed a lot to send us to a Catholic high school, hoping for a better education for my sister and me. Although that was true, the flip side was that the drugs were better, and the boys all had their own cars. I was thirteen entering the ninth grade; it was such an intimidating time. The girls were vicious and the boys were, well, cute. I assessed the situation and decided that to survive, I would befriend the guys. The wolf pack was too much for me to handle.

At fourteen I had a boyfriend who was two years older than me. Of course, sex came up, since that was all they were interested in anyway. He asked if I had any experience in this category, and I flashed back to when I was four. I told him as much, and he informed me that since I was already defiled, there was no going back. In my distorted thinking, I thought he was right. I did consider the rule about not having sex before marriage. I thought it was all about what color dress you could wear on your wedding day—cream color vs. white. I decided I didn't care what color my dress was, and from that moment on, I

entered into years of sexual promiscuity and blinding heartaches.

I entered college at seventeen. Educationally, I was able to keep up, but maturity-wise, I was definitely lacking. Finally out of the house and free to do what I wanted, booze and boys were at my disposal. The summer after my first year of college, I was a stripper. I justified that it was okay since I had to pay for college myself. What I was really doing was taking one step closer to the pit of depravity and sugar-coating it. My parents knew of my career-choice and were thoroughly disappointed but didn't say much since I was on my own. It was now sink or swim.

The next year at school, I bragged about my summer job to several friends, and later discovered that word had gotten out. The snowball was getting bigger and was just about to crash down upon me. A man who was the National Champion several years running in wrestling asked me out on a date. We went out several times, and things seemed fine. Then one night he came over and was all coked out. He invited me back to his place where he proceeded to rape me repeatedly all night. I tried to talk him down and leave several times, but he would stand by the door and punch holes in the wall. The shame and guilt were unbearable, and I despised myself because I thought I was to blame.

I tried to put the past behind me and continued to search for that someone who would fill that sense of longing and loneliness in my heart. I rejected God, and blasphemed His name, not knowing that He alone could heal all my wounds. I tried church several times and always felt good after coming home, but nobody ever talked about Jesus, the repairer of the breach. It was just religion with no real life application.

I went from one boyfriend to another, broke off my engagement to a man who had cheated on me, and moved west with another man. I was never without someone at my side and a longing in my heart for something more. I would do whatever a man asked, thinking that

by doing so, I was gaining approval and acceptance and wouldn't be rejected. I couldn't understand why it backfired on me every time. The man I moved west with turned out to be extremely manipulative and abusive. His jealousy flared at every turn, so he decided to give me an "incurable STD" so that no other man would want to have me. He thought that by doing so, I would never leave him, and he said as much. I left, of course, and moved in with another man. At first it was a roommate situation, but it didn't take long for me to work myself into a better position.

I was pregnant within two months and completely freaked out. As the good Catholic girl that I was, I had decided to have the baby. I thought he would be excited about it or at least warm-up to the idea. I knew abortions were wrong and had never considered having one myself, but codependency knows no bounds. When I told him that I was pregnant, he was extremely upset. It was "all my fault," of course, and so I was going to have to "take care of it." He gave me the ultimate ultimatum, "It's either me or the baby, but if you have the baby, I will have nothing to do with either of you - ever!" I was crushed and made the wrong decision once again. I stayed with him for another two years after that, enduring the tyrannical behavior of a jealous man and devastating verbal abuse. I began drinking with a vengeance and had talked myself into thinking I could handle it. The very thing I despised my daddy for, I was now doing myself. My parents saw the change in me and were very concerned, but didn't know what they could do to help. I was depressed all the time, crying without reason and hiding behind the mask of "party girl." I was becoming someone I hated, and I knew I was in trouble.

I left that relationship, promising myself for the first time in my life, I was not going to get involved with another man for a very long time. I lasted about two weeks, maybe less, and got involved in a casual sexual relationship. Once the man found out I had the STD, he derided

me to the point of saying that all my children would turn out retarded. Crushed yet again, I went out on a hill and prayed one night. I cried out to God, "What are you trying to tell me?"

At this same time I was spending time with the man who would soon become my husband. I gave him every excuse why he didn't want me, nor I him—he was ten years older; I needed to be independent for the first time in my life; I had to prove to myself that I could make it on my own; blah, blah, blah. I shared with him all of my past, thinking that this might scare him away, but it didn't. Three months later we entered into holy matrimony. Of all my mistakes in the past, I knew that I had finally made one right decision.

Right away my husband and I decided to stop drinking. We slowed down quite a bit, and then one day we stopped altogether. We wanted to have children, and I didn't want to struggle with alcohol while being pregnant. He also encouraged me to read the Bible, but although I had come back from the pit a little, I was not ready to enter into dead religion again.

Two years later I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ. Although I seemed to "have it all," I still had feelings of unworthiness from the past return to haunt and torment me, my biggest failure being the abortion. I now had a child of my own and one on the way, and that made it hurt all the more. One night at the church I was attending, Dennis Jernigan gave a concert. He asked that we would all look inward and find the thing that we thought God couldn't forgive us for. I knew right away what it was for me. He then suggested that we ask God to give us His perspective of the situation. The Lord gave me a beautiful vision of how He took my child up to heaven with Him and my little one was now safe. He then showed me the magnitude of His forgiveness and love and acceptance of me. No, He did not approve of my actions, for which I had to repent, but He did approve of me. There is a big difference between the two. I wept

for days as I began to understand for the first time what I had been searching for my entire life, the unconditional love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. I have since been healed, by the grace of Jesus of the "incurable STD." Jesus' love knows no bounds.

You see it wasn't about a dress color or about being popular; it was about unconditional love from Someone who would never take it away from me because of a lack of performance on my part, or reject me because of past, present, or future sins. The Lord has shown me the difference between godly submission and perverted compliance. He has shown me the better way through His Son, Jesus Christ.

I am no longer a man pleaser, but a bondservant to the Most High God. I have been freed from sin and death, performance, and man pleasing, so that I can serve and love the Lord with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength. The debt that I owed could never be repaid; how do you repay the life of a child? But Jesus Christ has forgiven all that I have done, and sinned against Him and Him alone. Oh yes, beloved, I have been forgiven much, and that is why I love much.

Luke 7:47
"Therefore I say to you, her
sins,
which are many,
are forgiven,
for she loved much.
But to whom little is for-
given, the same loves little."
He Who Has Been Forgiven
Much
Loves Much!

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He Who Has Been Forgiven Much Loves Much!

A True Story of a Young Woman's Search for Acceptance

I remember at about the age of two, we were living in Cortez where my parents owned a leather and candle shop. I could see that contentions were high between my parents, but as a child, you just go about your daily business. During that time, my daddy sat down with my sister and me and we made belts. I got to put in the carved detail and paint it, and then my dad picked out a nice brass belt buckle. (My son still wears the belt thirty-one years later.) In my two year old thinking, it seemed like that was one day, and the next, my parents were divorced. I didn't have the vocabulary to express my feelings, but I do remember wondering where daddy was, and why wasn't he living with us anymore.

We moved several times between the ages of two and four and ended up in Basalt, living in the basement apartment of the people my mom worked for. They had an older son about the age of ten, whom I befriended and spent time with as much as possible. He took advantage of the friendship and sexually violated me on several occasions. I didn't know what was happening, or that it was wrong, but my mom was furious when she found out. We soon moved again to a quieter neighborhood without other children and went on with our lives.

At the age of six, my mom remarried and we moved east. Even though I liked my new dad, I still had trouble understanding why mom and my daddy couldn't work it out. I praise God for my stepdad, who hung in there with me even though