

## Woman draws from her painful past to help victims of sexual abuse

Contributed by Bette Alseth, For Living Stones News  
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Bette Alseth of rural Duluth area boldly writes of her childhood rape and molestation and how God has healed her completely. She uses the "gift" of sexual abuse to bring God's healing to others.

Jesus Christ came to pull us out of the muddy pit that life's experiences have buried us in. Christ's heart, life and ministry are about restoration, healing and setting people free so that they can walk through life's circumstances with peace, joy and freedom. Then He gives us our marching orders. That is what He has done over and over again in my life.

Heidi Lynn-Holbeck / Living Stones News Bette Alseth (pictured at right with her husband, Don) has a powerful testimony of how God healed her broken childhood and helped her aid other victims of sexual abuse.

My story is not special or unique. The only thing special about my story is Christ who healed me. I am bearing my heart with faith that God will use it to bring truth, light and freedom to those who are bogged down by the bonds of childhood rape and molestation.

I was born in 1944 and grew up in the supposed age of innocence. Our family was middle class. I had four older brothers. Mom and Dad both worked, which gave us children a lot of freedom.

The married couple who lived next door to us were Mina, an American nurse, and Abby, her Filipino husband. Both were World War II vets. A war injury kept Abby dependent on crutches to get around. He did the housekeeping while Mina was at work. Who would suspect that such an innocent-looking, handicapped man could harbor such treachery or wield such power over an innocent young girl?

It all started innocently with Abby's invitations for all five of us kids to record our voices on his Victrola. He gained the trust of my parents and all of us children. He was fun and loving. He came to our fence and asked me if I wanted to visit with him. I naively agreed.

I don't remember how he lured me into his bed. I only remember the pain and the threat he gave me afterward. He took a butcher knife from the rack on the kitchen wall, held it in front of my face and said, "If you don't come when I tell you to or if you tell anybody about this, I will kill you."

A spirit of fear and powerlessness entered into my life that day that only God could take away.

How many times I went back at his beckoning I don't recall. I only know that it happened over and over again. I was too young and frightened to even think I had any other option than to obey his orders. The fear of that butcher knife and the fear that my dad would kill this person silenced my plea for help. My thinking was of what would happen to our family if Dad was sent to prison or even executed.

The realization of the shameful of my experience came when I was a little older and learned sexual intimacy was meant for married couples. I asked Abby why he was doing this to me. His reply was, "Because my wife won't do this with me." To him it was as simple as that. To me it was terrifying!

The ramifications of what I experienced were many and lasted for many years. The worst was "the terror of the night"; I suffered as I lay in bed with the shadows of the lilac bushes igniting my imagination to see the image of him climbing up to my window to kill me. At night, seeing him peer into our living room through his stairway's triangular window was validation of his ability to reach me. I learned to hide from him when I was outside, but he often found me when I had to hang clothes on the backyard clothesline.

The powerlessness of my situation made me feel like I had "easy mark, created to be used for your self-gratification" tattooed on my forehead. Being alone out in public with a victim's thought pattern and body language opened the door to more molestation by other men.

Self-worth and confidence were not part of my existence. I felt dirty and unworthy of love. I went through my teen years and into marriage relying on someone else to validate the value of my existence. When someone got close to my back, I would freak out because it caused me to feel that knife going into my back! My life was set up from a "powerless victim mentality" that kept me from becoming the person God created me to be.

I clearly remember the day I freed myself from his grip. On a beautiful day in the spring of my fifth grade year, I wanted to jump rope on our front sidewalk, and there he was again, staring at me through the triangular window. I made up my mind that no matter what happened, I would no longer respond to his bidding. I defiantly jumped, swirled and twirled in front of him and swore to myself that he would never touch me again. And he didn't!

A few months later, he molested a girl who did tell on him. Shortly after that, he and his wife sold their house and moved away.

Mom and Dad never asked me if Abby violated me. I was too ashamed to tell them. My parents went to their graves not knowing what had happened to me. I had broken free from his power over me physically, but my victim mentality stayed with me long into adulthood.

Being married and raising a family during my 20s brought pure joy into my life. My husband, Don, and I were happy. We had three precious children. The shadows of my past ebbed and waned during those years. It mildly interfered with our family life. I needed to have Don reassure me often that I was worthy of his love and the precious family we had.

We were normal church-going Christians. Our understanding of God took us as far as the foot of the cross and our need for constant forgiveness. It never occurred to us that the victory Christ won had anything to do with my past. Trying to be healed man's way

When I was 30, the dreams and aftereffects of rape re-entered my life. Eventually they began to interfere with my relationship with Don, so I went into counseling. Through secular Gestalt therapy, I was given the tools I needed to use "behavior or thought modification" to handle the reoccurring dreams and ongoing symptoms of the rape.

When I left the program, the counselors and I believed I was healed. In reality, I was functional but not healed. It takes more than a bandage to heal a wounded soul. Journey toward God's healing

My journey to God's healing began when I received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. With the baptism came a new and mighty measure of faith and love for God and the people He loves. My spiritual eyes were opened to see people the way Jesus does.

A couple of years later, Don was hungry for what I had, and he received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In 1982, we became members of Morning Star Fellowship, a small church. Between what we were taught by Pastor Jim Naslund in the fellowship and attending an interdenominational Bible study led by Fran Jevning from Silver Bay, both Don and I continued to grow in our faith. Our heart's desire was, and continues to be, to simply serve God.

Soon after the baptism, I became aware that God wanted me to forgive Abby. Even with the baptism, it was the last thing I wanted to do. However, I knew that to not obey would wound God's heart, and for me, that would be a sin. The journey to forgiving him took a long time.

I didn't know if he was still alive. Out of sheer obedience, I started with confessing that I didn't want to forgive him but wanted to please God and needed God to change my heart. The next step was to verbally forgive Abby and ask God to not allow him to hurt anybody else. After doing this for a period of time, God did change my heart. I truly did forgive him, but I couldn't stop there.

Then I heard that Abby, now very elderly, was in a nursing home in California. My fervent prayer for him became,

"God, please don't let him die until you can take him home to be with you." That was my prayer until one day the burden for him lifted. God had taught me that complete forgiveness is to forgive the way He does. My heart's desire is that Abby will be one of the people to greet me at the gates of Heaven. At that time I had no idea of how crucial my obedience and forgiveness were to receiving the healing God had in store for me. The miracle healing

On a beautiful Sunday afternoon in August 1997, my healing came. The members of Morning Star Fellowship were savoring the last few hours of a Spirit-filled retreat at Jim and Karen Naslund's cabin on Lake Kabatogama. Karen asked me where my servant's spirit came from. I started to tell her that it came from the difficult things I experienced growing up.

At that moment God's Spirit began ministering to me through a vision. I saw myself standing there with my arms outstretched. In my hands I held a brightly colored box, a gift from God. I knew that the box represented my experience of rape and molestation. The box was once covered with black mud — mud like quicksand. God transformed the black life-sucking box into a beautiful life-giving gift.

I opened the box. As I reached inside to bring the contents into the light, my healing miracle happened. The scales were removed from my eyes. I realized that all of the hurtful things that happened to me during my childhood were no longer bad. God had transformed those experiences into tools to be used to proclaim His love, grace and mercy for those who are still bound by similar tragedies. God had fulfilled His promise to turn what Satan had meant for evil into good.

During the next five hours, I was beset by a torrent of tears. I had an overpowering headache. The tears were God's healing power cleansing my body. The headache was the release of the bonds that held me captive for more than 40 years. The freaked out feeling I had when people approached me from behind disappeared. Gone was my need to be validated.

I knew that as a child of God I am loved and precious to God, family, friends and community. All I need to do to be a blessing to others is to be true to God and to be the person He created me to be. A Spirit-born confidence welled up in me. No longer was I a victim. Through God's healing power, I walk in the same victory that Christ won with His victory over death on the cross.

My eyes were opened to how much pain God felt every time I was violated. It never was in God's plan that anyone suffer. That is an unavoidable part of life. I am convinced He knows and cares about our pain, and that is why He sent his Son make a way for us to find relief from our pain. That is also why He made a home for us to live with Him in eternity. In Heaven, our pain will not be remembered, and sin and suffering do not exist. The Gift

In 1999, Don and I became members of Glad Tidings Assembly of God Church, now named The River Church. It didn't take long for Pastor Rob Dean to realize that I possessed a gift that could be used to bring the healing power of Christ to other women who have suffered the same violation as I did. Over and over again, God has ministered to hurting women in and out of our church.

Sharing my experience with God's transforming and healing power not only has benefited women, but also the men Don and I work with in Teen Challenge. God has deeply touched their wounded hearts when my story of how God can transform the worst of their experiences into something good, powerful and worthwhile in their lives. We have seen "the light bulb go on" when they realize that true forgiveness is possible through the Holy Spirit. They learn that they can forgive and be forgiven. Hope has been birthed when they realize that when their past is surrendered to Christ, it becomes a gift and part of the key to their future.

The most precious healing came when I was working at Lakeview Christian Academy. I was blessed to give my testimony of God's grace and healing power to the senior high students. As I looked out at the students, I could see a number of girls with heads bowed. I saw their pain. The last sentence the Spirit gave me at the end of my talk was, "The bad thing is that I was raped and the good thing is that I was raped because of the healings God has done through it."

The truth is that if I had to live my life over again, I would not change a thing because God has changed what Satan meant for evil into not only good, but a gift. This gift is one of my most treasured possessions. It is an instrument of healing that God uses to bridge the gap between a hurting soul and Himself. My childhood experiences have become a precious part of who I am today.