



DESERT STREAM™
LIVING WATERS
A publication of Desert Stream Ministries

Home Again:

Healing the Body's Deepest Wound



By Andrew Comiskey

*The righteous
cry out, and the Lord
hears them;*

*he delivers them
from all their
troubles.*

*The Lord is close to
the brokenhearted
and saves those who
are crushed in spirit.
Psalm 34:17-18*

CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE robs the innocent of a safe place: one's own body. Instead, the body becomes a place of fear, shame, and unwanted desires. Knowing the dignity and integrity He intends for each body, Jesus acts decisively to restore persons impacted by this profound violation.

First, some history: Desert Stream Ministries laid its foundation in the eighties, a decade when the world began to wake up to abuse's prevalence and devastation. The seminary where I studied theology and psychology began to offer a course on restoring adults who as children were fractured by adult sexual acts. And a local preschool well-known to Annette and me where relatives had attended was exposed as the base for multiple abuses of students by one lead teacher. This prompted Annette to begin to take

seriously her own rape as a 4-year-old by a visiting relative (see her story), a healing process that included me and a close circle of friends who surrounded her. As many of our Desert Stream members had been abused, we began to take seriously their needs for understanding, sensitive prayer, and good boundaries. That became an intrinsic part of the Living Waters program.

Some things we learned as we walked with persons: sexual abuse is always profoundly disruptive to one's integrity and well-being. Being-formed-lives need protection while their bodies grow and they grow into their gendered bodies. Abuse blasts a big gash in that development. It undercuts one's capacity to be a good gatekeeper over one's own 'house.' Invaders leave one uncertain and often disabled in their capacity to refuse another's advances. So the task

of learning to let good sources of love in and keep toxic ones out is arrested. Touch becomes traumatic; the body short-circuits and is mistrusted.

Yet we also learned that Jesus helps the most wounded. Through ongoing relationships centered on Jesus, one comes into the light of love where blame shifts from the abused to the abuser and Jesus becomes the safe One who bears the unbearable. He is uniquely qualified to bear another's perversion and to quicken freedom from its shameful residue. One can also begin to experience good needs for connection and community, like green shoots from scorched earth. Long contained emotions begin to air. Integration occurs slowly as one discovers the Cross in community as an inspired focus to direct one's hurt.

We discovered that healing from abuse is also freedom to resume the journey to sexual wholeness. Recent studies have confirmed that persons who 'gay'-identify as adults are 4-7 times more likely than others to have been sexually violated as pre-adults. As most abusers are men, premature sexual exposure for some boys plants seeds of "I must be 'gay'"; for some girls, "I will never give myself to a man." Incorporating one's abuse history into future decisions to open to the opposite gender is a path to freedom. It means freedom from the abuser's power to determine one's destiny, freedom for loving another in the light.

Some persons who experienced abuse as teens get stuck in those experiences and stay fixed on teen sexuality, memories of sensual connection that still drive them. Here is the paradox of abuse; although always disruptive and shameful, it can also be a sensational point of belonging. One needs to forthrightly refuse these counterfeit bonds

until they are broken. If they are not, they can drive one to mass destruction. A beloved adult staff person, unbeknown to us, nourished these memories and the prospect of seducing teens as an adult. He did not act upon those feelings (as far as we know) until we began a trial effort to minister to teens in the early nineties. He rapidly took his advantage and seduced at least two male teens in our midst. When we discovered this, we fired him, turned him over to the police, and fell on our faces. We had become abusers. Lord, have mercy.

Knowing the devastation of abuse, we become our brother's keeper. If he sins and we do not act, we abuse. A child's integrity is at stake, as is his or her vision of Jesus and His body when ministers are the violators. We were devastated and stayed faced down a long time as lawsuits and legal interrogation persisted. We asked God to take our life as a ministry if He wanted that. We deserved it. We aided (unwittingly) in the destruction of two lives, at least.

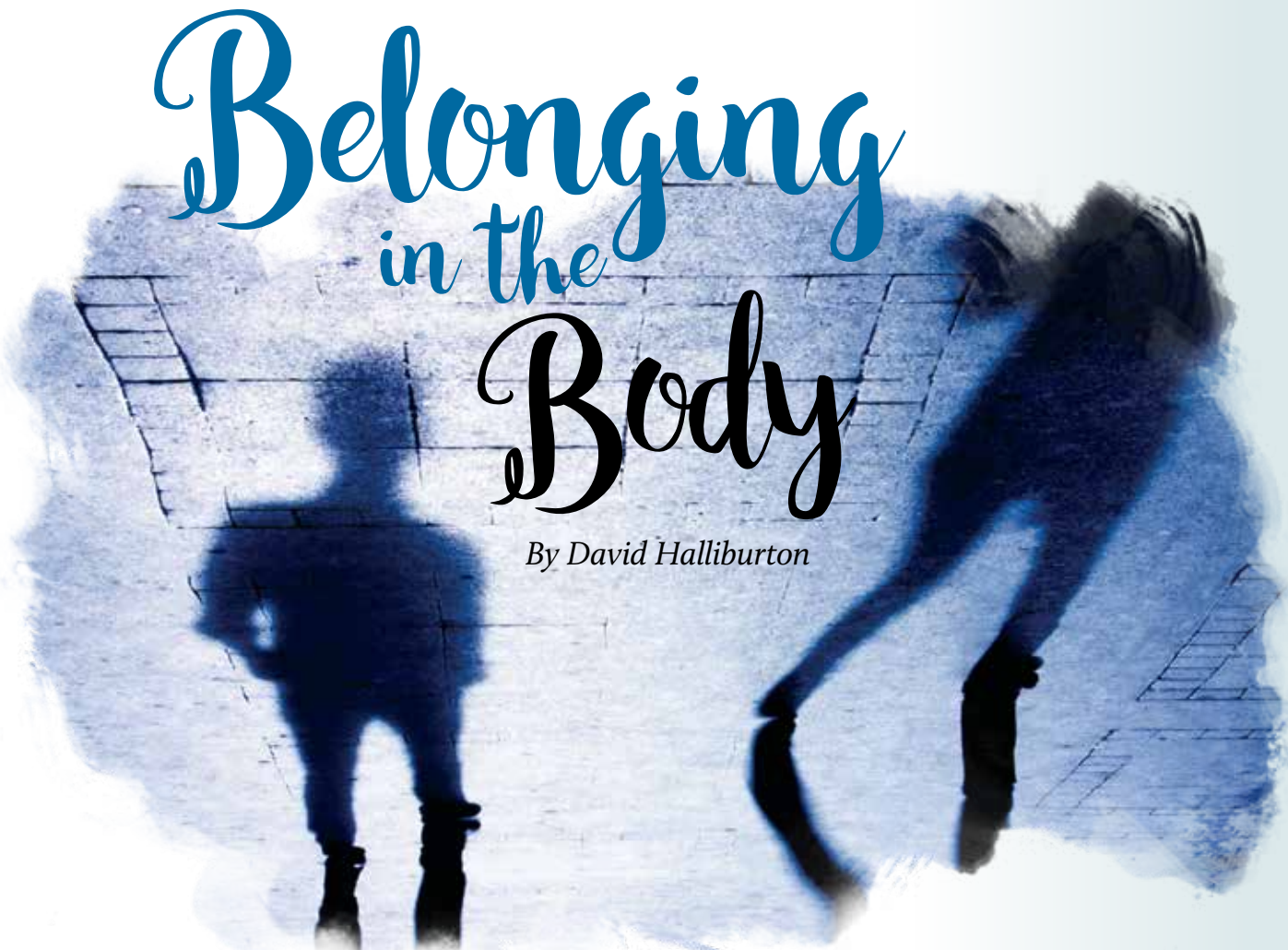
Apparently, God saw fit to spare us. Jesus is the judge, but His mercy triumphs over His justice. He gave us mandates through wise counsel about ensuring the quality of our care. As a lay-driven movement of wounded healers, we had to ensure that our ministry interactions were: with fellow adults, took place in a group setting, and any individual meeting involved two caregivers. It also mandated our preexisting value of bringing our worst desires into the light in order to vanquish evil action. Discipline is good, boundaries matter for the protection of vulnerable lives—for healers and those being healed. We are grateful for the freedom today to advocate for persons in need of healing from sexual abuse. **DSM**

MY HOME LIFE was filled with a significant amount of fear, insecurity, and turmoil. My Dad was preoccupied—an alcoholic prone to unpredictable rage and Mom was co-dependent, fearful of abandonment and isolation. My sisters and I learned early on to keep secrets at all cost.

As a 9-year-old boy, longing and looking for safe relationships with male peers, I was unknowingly vulnerable. A 17-year-old neighborhood boy began to show interest in me. He was well-attuned to me and gained my trust. He was more interested in me than my father. He knew my interests better than my parents did. This neighbor became my abuser.

He targeted me and masterfully groomed me in order to silence my voice by crafting the neighborhood football games as a place to first abuse me. I felt affirmed when first he singled me out among peers to be on his team. In the huddle, he chose me to hike the football and then began to fondle me. I couldn't speak, I was in shock. Emotions overwhelmed me. I wanted to run, but the touch aroused me, and I felt confusion and shame. I was afraid to tell anyone. If I quit, I imagined he would tell lies about me. I was trapped.

For the next 9 years, I was periodically subjected to my abuser as his sex toy; I continued to experience powerful feelings of guilt and shame. Why did my body respond to something so dirty and



Belonging in the Body

By David Halliburton

uninvited? Yet this connection satisfied a need in me. What was wrong with me? Without a voice, and in constant fear of my secret being discovered, I became isolated. I was ashamed and traumatized by the years of sexual abuse and felt powerless to walk away. I neither had the understanding nor the language to describe the complexity of feeling cared for and shamefully used. This went on until I was 18-years-old.

I spent the following years secretly viewing pornography and then would repent and seek out accountability. At 28-years, interning at a Vineyard Church in Southern California, I heard of Living Waters and decided to attend, but was not fully willing to step into my pain and admit my addiction. I entered full-time-ministry as a 'family' pas-

tor still using pornography. I was a husband to my beautiful wife, Elizabeth and a father to 4 wonderful children. It was a cycle I battled without victory or consistent sobriety for 33 years, which caused my wife devastating heartache, impacted my kids, and distorted every area of my life. I did not understand how my viewing pornography was a reenactment of my childhood cycles of abuse.

Out of a severe mercy God exposed my secret life of pornography and led me to a posture of total surrender and the embrace of my Heavenly Father. When I was discovered I was asked to resign from my pastoral position, but invited to stay and continue to attend our church with the promise we would have support and love to stay the course of recovery. My wife stood

with me as 4 brothers in Christ committed to journey with me on a path of brotherly friendship that was raw and transparent. I knew I could be extremely vulnerable with the deep secrets of my life with my wife and these friends.

I opened my closet door, removed my mask, poured out my heart and confessed sins I thought I would take to the grave. My wife and brothers stayed with me. In the Living Waters guidebook Andrew says: "Only Jesus, through His tender and gracious Presence, can call us out from behind the thick walls of our defense; He frees the wounded heart to tell its story of abuse."

Nothing feels more naked than shame, or more dangerous. Shame is dark. I thought if I could just get everyone to like me, work hard,

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. Psalm 147:3

stay busy in serving the church, the shame and guilt would go away. It did for a while. But through the light of exposure, God was inviting me in to overcome shame through abundance, delight, joy and desire. God invited me to walk through the shame and resolve it. Only Jesus can restore the numb and shamed-based soul.

God provided more support for my wife and I to recover through a Christian counselor who specialized in addiction; we met with her weekly for 2 years. Next, God opened a door for me to attend a “Men’s Recovery Week” with Dr. Dan Allender. I stepped into the week with 12 other men who had stories of sexual abuse. There I learned to face the uncomfortable truth and to tell my story, sexual struggles and fears in order to find healing.

At the heart of the Gospel is the truth that our brokenness does not separate us from the love of God. It actually connects us to His love. Jesus has already fought for me on the Cross and won! God’s heart is penned in Scripture that He walks with us through our struggles rather than transporting us out of them. God is not ashamed of us. I discovered that my addiction was not a form of self-medication but a way of re-enacting my trauma. There I would re-confirm the belief of how unwanted I felt. Yet the truth was God wanted me and could heal those years of alienation.

Now 30 years after attending Living Waters the first time,

my wife and I attended a Living Waters Training Week two years ago to receive more healing and be equipped to embrace those with sexual and relational brokenness. Today we are Living Waters coordinators and running the first group in the state of Montana. Our vision is to facilitate new groups throughout the Pacific Northwest.

What I value most about Living Waters is how it is based in the community of a local church. It creates a safe place where significant healing for the body can be realized in the Body! This is the place where wounded hearts and wounded healers choose to be real and allow God’s love to restore the raw, unmasked soul.

Isaiah 61 is Elizabeth’s and my life chapter and leads us to our calling: to journey with the broken hearted, engaging their stories of captivity and inviting Jesus’s healing power to set them free. To restore the voice of the voiceless! It is important that we address sexual brokenness from the truth of our dignity as persons—created by God for godly connection with others. I want to shout out to my brothers and sisters in Christ—sexual brokenness is not an incurable condition, but rather an invitation to heal and to learn who we want to become. Our cure is found in the arms of Jesus and He is waiting for us with open arms! **DSM**

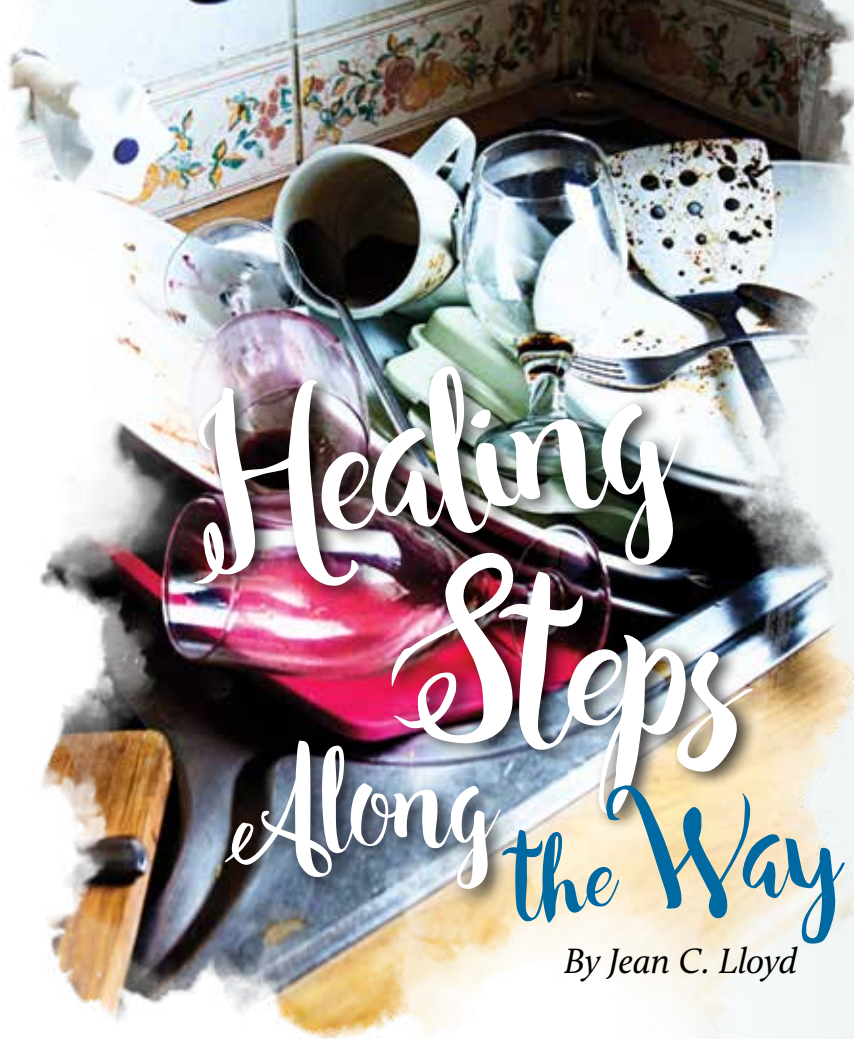
David and his wife Elizabeth serve at Hope Church in Kalispell, Montana as Community Pastors and Living Waters Coordinators

WHEN I WAS TEN, I visited my grandmother for several weeks.

During that time, I was abused by a sexually predatory uncle. I returned home filled with shame and wounds that festered into self-hatred. By age 15, I was suicidal and receiving therapeutic intervention. But praise God, in the midst of my despair, Jesus revealed His love to me, and I had a genuine conversion to Christ.

I am now 48 years old. Healing from sexual abuse has been a long process that is still ongoing: arduous and painful, joyful and beautiful by turns, the Lord has been patient and persistent through it all. In this brief space, I will share a few milestones from my journey. I pray hearing of the Lord’s faithfulness to me will encourage you in your own.

Forgiveness: Asking for God’s help to begin the process of forgiveness was a crucial first step in healing. I was consumed with bitterness, and it took a number of years. At times, a new level of anger would surface, and I would have to ask for grace anew to forgive more deeply. But several years ago, I began thinking of God’s love for my uncle. More than just not being bitter, I wanted to have God’s heart for him. Scripture says that God doesn’t want the wicked to die, but wants them to repent and live (e.g. Ezekiel 33:11). So I wrote my uncle a letter expressing my forgiveness and shared the Gospel with him. I had never thought of doing that before. He had divorced out of our family after the abuse came to light, and I never saw him again. Yet in this ongoing journey, the Lord prompted me to write him almost 40 years later.



Healing Steps Along the Way

By Jean C. Lloyd

Renouncing systems of self-sufficiency: When I was 25 years old, I began reading *The Wounded Heart* by Dan Allender. A friend had given it to me seven years earlier, and I had never even opened it. But now, it was time. I also diligently did the workbook. In so doing, God gave me many important insights, especially regarding the way I had created broken and sinful systems of survival in response to the abuse. While these systems help us to cope, they aren't of God and turn into prisons. God began to work on the trauma of the abuse itself, but also the numerous systems I had created out of my own self-sufficiency to survive.

One example of this was my sarcasm. Sarcasm was almost a way of being for me, and I was completely blind to the fact that I was hurting people. When a friend confronted me, I had to pray about where it

was coming from because I was so unaware of it. God showed me that I used it to keep people at a distance so that they wouldn't hurt me. Another example is that I never spent much time on my clothes or appearance, saying I didn't really care how I looked. However, if I saw someone I knew, I would tell myself that I didn't look nice enough; thus, I would have an excuse to hide and avoid them. One time a friend spotted me running away and called me out on it, and the Lord used her to bring this pattern into the light.

Self-protection: As I considered these patterns, I saw that they were rooted in one goal—self-protection. Now God was calling me to let go of these false systems and trust *Him* to be my protector. I was filled with fear and cried for weeks. Finally, I worked my way through all 150 Psalms—I wrote down every instance

of God being a refuge, our protector, shielding from enemies, and so forth. And I made a choice with my will to trust God and lay down my arms. By faith, I came out of my self-made fortress, making myself vulnerable once again. When I shared my decision with my community group, they laid hands on me to pray, and I felt strange waves run through my body. I realized almost immediately why: It was the first time since the abuse that anyone had ever touched me when I had my defenses down.

I also realized that if I had subconsciously been living to protect myself, then I had lived a self-centered life, not one of Christian love. I repented and meditated on 1 Corinthians 13. I was grieved and weeping, and as I got to the end of the chapter, I heard God tenderly say in my spirit, "*Jean, I'm not mad at you for doing what you had to do to survive when you were a child. But you're 26 years old. When are you going to put away childish things?*"

Since then, by God's grace, I have put many childish things away over the years. But recently, God showed me my most pervasive system of all—chaos. From childhood, I have always run late. I am disorganized, never able to keep up with my housecleaning, and so forth. No matter what situation I am in, it always seems to be too much for me. When I was single, I always managed to get by; outwardly, I have been very successful. But now I am married with children, and this pattern created such a stressful household that it brought me to my knees. Why was I still in chaos? Why had it been like this as long as I could remember?

Full of anxiety, God showed me that from the time I was abused, I

had been “harried and distressed” in my soul. I had created a system of remaining *in* control by staying *out* of control. It gave me excuses for avoiding responsibilities and kept others’ expectations of me low and manageable, and thus protected me from failing. It has been a very painful way to live, but slowly and surely, God is giving me the power to change the habits that perpetuate it.

Regrets and trust: Along the way, regret has been one of my persistent challenges. After I was abused, my personality completely changed, and depression took over. I have often wondered who I would be had that tragedy not befallen me, and I have often rued my “wasted potential.” Twenty years ago, after wrestling with God over the way my life had played out and grieving over things I had lost as a result, He whispered: “*Love would not allow what Love could not restore.*”

I have cherished this great promise of hope every day since, yet I can still struggle. I recently found piano music from my childhood in order to help teach my young daughter. I recalled being too depressed to practice and quitting altogether as I developed into that suicidal teenager. Weeping afresh over this loss, I began to play. And in the midst of Schumann and my tears, I heard the Lord say, “*I will pull from your life a sweeter strain.*” No matter what has happened, our God is indeed able to triumph and bring forth even sweeter strains from our lives to His glory; if we give Him the ashes, He will bring the beauty. Amen, Lord, so let it be. **DSM**

Jean C. Lloyd, Ph.D., is a teacher, writer, and happily married homeschooling mom. Her articles can be found online at Public Discourse.

Hope

I RECENTLY encountered a lovely young woman in my counseling office. She is an accomplished academic with advanced degrees, a committed Catholic with a deep love for the Lord, a mother of a few children who have stolen her heart, and a wife to a husband whose heart she has stolen. In our meeting, her first step into the therapy world and her own inner healing, she began describing sexual abuse from a brother a decade her elder over many years of her childhood. Her reality? She had never named it as such, which became apparent at one of our first sessions.

This woman was submitting a record of our sessions to her insurance company, so she received a receipt that had a “diagnosis” written near her name: *Z62.810 History of Sexual Abuse in Childhood*. She came to me the next week and shared that she had sat in her car and stared at that piece of paper for a long while. *Is this me?* She described feeling an uncomfortable “sting” as she absorbed the words, seeing them next to her own name, alongside feelings of shock and grief. She had trouble processing her own experience as she saw it labeled in truth.

A similar shock happened as she and her husband processed together. Where he could easily take this naming one step further—and call it incest—this woman was stunned that she wouldn’t have labeled it that way. She had had no real grid for filing the behaviors of her older brother. She had neither

the understanding nor the words to grasp the impact of broken boundaries on her life.

This is not uncommon for survivors of sexual abuse. Her experiences were her “norm” and by not describing her experiences with accurate words like sexual abuse and incest, she perhaps subconsciously believed those labels were reserved for people who had experienced things “much worse than her.”

These descriptions don’t define or pronounce a sentence upon this woman and she knows that. But naming it correctly is giving her a helpful grid to begin working through the impact of these deep scars. It is helping her to see the reality that this experience has influenced how she sees herself, past struggles with depression and self-worth, and the struggle now to experience the full joy of sexual relating (free of residual impacts of her trauma).

*God's grace
compels me to
steward the gift of
my life...I know He
makes a way for
His purpose to be
fulfilled through me.*

and Lament

By Abbey Foard



Dr. Dan Allender talks about the biological and the spiritual impact of sexual abuse. It is trauma. It disrupts our physiology, effecting survivors mentally and physically. Survivors may experience nightmares or flashbacks, hypervigilance and intense startle responses, chronic pain or deeply rooted anxiety and depression. They may find themselves with strange physical and sexual responses where they wish there were none.

It also impacts people spiritually. Early imprints of fear, confusion, distrust and anger ward off peace and order. It can impact a person's ability and desire to reach for God; one can create self-protective walls that defend against pain and the love of God. Where a dark and pernicious evil has flowed from perpetrator to victim, a spiritual darkness threatens that vulnerable soul.

In his influential book for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse,

The Wounded Heart, Dan Allender gives victims of sexual abuse a good framework for their healing efforts by naming eight truths that may assist one on their healing journey:

1. I have been abused.
2. I am a victim of a crime against my body and soul.
3. As a victim, I am not in any way responsible for the crime, no matter what I may have experienced or gained as a result of the abuse.
4. Abuse has damaged my soul.
5. The damage is due to the interweaving dynamics of:
 - a. Powerlessness
 - b. Betrayal
 - c. Ambivalence
6. My damage is different from others' in extent, intensity, and consequences, but it is worthy to be addressed and worked through no matter what occurred.
7. It will take time to deal with the internal wounds; the process must not be hurried.

8. I must not keep a veil of secrecy and shame over my past, but I am not required to share my past with anyone I feel is untrustworthy or insensitive. (Allender, *The Wounded Heart*)

A number of years ago I poured out my heart to the Lord as I mourned the wounds of a young girl in my care. She had experienced an array of broken sexual boundaries in her life to the point of being paid for sex. Numb to the reality of her life, she couldn't cry for herself. She had a thick protective wall around her heart. In this poem, written about her, my own soul cried out for her and all those who have endured sexual abuse. May we, as a community of wounded healers, wail at the injustice of those whose boundaries have been violated by sexual abuse.

*How dare you take a body, sir, that
wasn't yours to touch?
How dare you take and use as yours
and utter out "such much"
I despise it with a passion that I did
not know I had
I despise that you've abused so much
the girl's not even sad
I wonder if you know the pain your
insolence has caused
I wonder if you'll ever know it can't
be cured with gauze
Let this be a lesson, sir, make
changes from your failing
Take the grace, a second chance...
But don't dare mock our wailing*

DSM

Mercy Pool

By Annette Comiskey

I LOVE CHRISTMAS. It's a time to be with family and celebrate the birth of Jesus. But I have another reason for loving Christmas. It is the time that God loved and healed me in the midst of my greatest wounding.

I was four; it was two days before Christmas when a distant relative came to town for less than 24 hours. Due to many houseguests, he and I had to sleep in the living room. That night he raped me and was gone by morning.

The sin committed against me was deeply damaging. I lived in fear of being hurt again and protected myself with thick boundaries. I struggled for 24 years to come to grips with my wounding and entrust myself to the Lord.

But once I dipped my toe in the mercy pool of healing and experienced the kindness and healing of the Lord, I dived in head first. The Lord has been only gracious and kind and I have been healed at deep levels of my wounding.

I traded my sorrows for joy. I hate that I have been sexually abused but would not trade for anything the love and reliance to which Jesus invited me as I trusted him with the darkness in my heart.

Today, I proclaim healing from one of the deepest wounds: the sexual abuse of a young child.

I still need the mercy of God in vulnerable areas of my life. I struggle with needing to control my environment so that I don't feel trapped. Though crippling bouts of anxiety are gone (thanks to Jesus' healing), I am still tempted by fear and unease. I still tend to take care of myself and struggle with believing others will care for my needs.

Many of us who have been abused and received much healing still live with mild post-traumatic stress. It doesn't mean we aren't "healed"; it means we need to go the mercy pool again and again.

After I was raped my abuser walked me to the bathroom, threw me in with the admonition to be quiet and clean myself up while he stood guard outside the door. That bath, as much as the abuse, cemented in me fear and the belief that no one would ever take care of me.

The Lord gave me a picture that transformed that awful Christmas memory. I saw the Lord sitting beside a deep pool of warm water. As I entered the water I felt the dread and loneliness wash away. My heart was soothed with aromatic oil. I stepped out of the pool and the Lord wrapped me a soft warm towel. I looked at up and saw His love for me. He told me that His mercy and healing was always available for me. I knew I would never be alone. He would always take care of me.

I continue to dive head first into that water time and time again. I first I was discouraged that I wasn't "healed". Now I know that such deep wounding has become a lifeline through which the Lord ever deepens His mercy in me. **DSM**



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Newsletter (Spring and Fall)

Mid-Year Report (Summer)

Year-End Report (Winter)

Mission Statement

Based on the biblical foundations of compassion, integrity, and dependence on God, Desert Stream Ministries proclaims to the world the transforming power of Jesus Christ. We equip the body of Christ to minister healing to the sexually and relationally broken, through healing groups and leadership training for the local church.

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