

A TRUE STORY OF FAITH

TO THE GIRL
WHO WAS
SEXUALLY

Abused

THERE IS HOPE

Z A I B E L T O R R E S

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ABUSED**

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*Christian Young Adults
Biography*

TO THE GIRL WHO WAS SEXUALLY ABUSED

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all my sisters. To the women who lost their childhood to trauma. To the young girl who is silently suffering. To the women choking from the secrets that make them sick. I pray as you turn each page you find the path you seek, and the peace you long for. Above all else I hope you see the one who has returned to rescue you.

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Contents

Preface:.....	1
Chapter One:.....	2

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Preface:

As you read this book, I need you to set aside your feelings. Allow me to explain: When I was in high school, I took EMT training and learned a great deal about the human body. For example, *hypothermia*. Did you know that the majority of people who freeze to death are found naked? This is because, in a last-ditch effort to warm up freezing tissue in your limbs, the body dilates blood vessels.

So imagine you're outside with friends bundled up in your snow gear sleigh riding. You're having too much fun to realize that you dropped your keys in the snow and your cell phone is locked away safely in the car. As the day passes, the sun sets, and the temperature drops to a point where you can no longer handle it; even with all your snow gear on, you head to the car to find that you don't have your keys. Hours later, someone sees flashlights in the distance and calls 911. By the time the paramedics arrive, you're slipping into shock, and hypothermia sets in. Your blood vessels dilate, and suddenly, you feel like you're burning up. The paramedics cover you with blankets to keep you warm, but you start yelling, "I don't need a blanket. I'm too hot!"

The paramedics have a full understanding of what is happening to you, but you don't. If you follow the direction of your feelings, you will only freeze to death. So even though you are burning up, they keep you warm to save your life. This is one of those books. You will have to push your feelings aside and trust that the paramedic, in this case, the Holy Spirit — the Holy Spirit is making every attempt to save your life by keeping you warm. Ignore every impulse to put this book down; push through it, as it will brush against the grain of your feelings. Remember, as with life-and-death situations, feelings can be misleading. May God open your heart and mind so you can see His truth, which will set you free.

Chapter One:

“You have to understand how bad it was to understand the level of rescue.”

There is a story in the Bible found in three places: Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-21 and Luke 8:26-40. The story begins with Jesus in a boat, traveling across to Gerasenes. There was a man there who lived in the tombs, naked and filled with demons. The Bible describes how the people of the community tried to restrain him with chains, but the man was so strong that he broke them. Day and night, this man walked the burial tombs, howling and cutting himself with sharp stones. The Bible says that the community members attempted to chain him several times. I can't imagine what life must have been like for this man. Hidden in darkness, tormented day and night by demons, and days spent chained by those who feared him but couldn't help him.

There are many stories in the Bible where Jesus heals, but very few give us the backstory of the person's life. The man in the tombs had a reputation; he was violent and often restrained. I can imagine that, with Jesus docking in the area, the people restrained him to avoid encounters with guests or perhaps simply out of protection as he was violent. He was marginalized, outcast, and kept out of sight and mind. I'm sure the occasional howling served as a reminder to the community that they were at a safe distance from the demon-possessed man.

I have read this story many times and wondered why Jesus left the crowd. The crowd intently listened to him, and he decided to go across the lake. The Bible does not explain why, other than Jesus wanting to cross the lake. The demon-possessed man lived in tombs — a place off limits to Jews, as contact with death would make them unclean. All of this blows my mind because I can't see any other reason for Jesus to cross the lake other than to reach this man. A Jew getting remotely close to unclean

territory was unheard of. The people in the area were hog farmers, so we know it was gentile territory as Jews consider pigs unclean. What was Jesus doing there? And why does the Bible give us so much detail about this man's agonizing life?

When Jesus arrived, the man saw him from a distance, ran to him, fell at his feet, and asked why Jesus had come. Jesus asked for the man's name and discovered many demons possessed the man. In today's society, people would likely freak out over this. The demon, named Legion because there were many, asked Jesus to cast them into a herd of pigs. Jesus permitted this, and the pigs ran off a cliff, fell into the water and drowned — all 2,000 pigs. As a heads-up, pigs can swim, so this wasn't a gentle fall into the water; it was suicide.

There stood the man, no longer a demon-possessed man but a man fully clothed at the feet of Jesus. The surrounding community all came running to see what had happened. They saw the man, completely healed, in his right mind, and clothed at Jesus's feet. But the people did not care about this man. They did not love him or try to get him help. Therefore, his healing amazed them, for they knew his backstory, but that was not their concern.

These people were more concerned about what they had lost — the pigs. They were hog farmers, and the pigs were a source of income. They were more upset about their financial loss than the man's healing. The man had spent years in the tombs, cutting himself, likely struggling with suicidal thoughts. So when the demons left him and entered the pigs, the pigs immediately committed suicide. I imagined they knew precisely what they were doing as they asked Jesus to allow them to enter the pigs. The people were so upset they asked Jesus to leave. Imagine having a man in front of you who could perform the impossible; you have access to your healing — Jesus, a man who could make blind people see, and you ask him to leave.

As Jesus was leaving, the man begged to go with him, but Jesus did not let him. Instead, he said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” Mark 5:19

It only seemed fitting to begin this book with this prologue because these are the words God gave me to encourage me to write this story. The Bible shows us how bad things were so that we can understand the level of rescue, redemption, and restoration.

I don't know how old I was because much of my sense of time is lost to me, due to disassociating myself from the trauma. However, I remember the deck surrounding the pool, where I jumped off into the water that seemed like an ocean then. I couldn't reach the bottom of the pool, even though it was only 4 feet deep. My dad was in the pool, pulling himself close to me, wrapping my little legs around him as he swam backward to create a whirlpool. It was one of the things I enjoyed most at that age as I felt like I could swim fast, disillusioned by the push of the water and my dad's muscular legs.

I am the youngest of three — we were at my aunt's house enjoying a picnic. The whole family disappeared from the deck to get out of the sun and get food. I was left with my dad, who made funny movements under the water while holding me tight. I could feel something hard growing between my legs which was why I would pretend that I was drowning so I could make my escape. He would always say sorry, kiss me gently on the forehead, lift me out of the water, and place me on the deck. I was small enough for him to lift me out of the water. I wish I could say that was the only time, but it was not — many such moments sadly stretched over the years.

There was a time when I was fascinated by ninjas because they could move without being heard. As a kid, I would sneak my favorite juices before bed despite my mother's instructions not to drink anything beforehand. Consequently, I would end up using the bathroom in the

middle of the night. I was good at navigating my home like a ninja, only to be betrayed by the flush of the toilet and greeted by my dad outside the door.

As a child, I often shouldered the blame for the turmoil surrounding me. I was so young and innocent, believing this was how life was for everyone. It never crossed my mind to tell anyone about the darkness that seeped into my home. Perhaps I stayed silent because I knew, deep down, that speaking out could unleash a storm. I had seen it before — those moments when my father, consumed by alcohol, would erupt into violent rages. His anger was like wildfire: unpredictable and devastating, with my mother and siblings always bearing the brunt of it.

No one dared question him; no one challenged his authority. We all knew the unspoken rules: obey or suffer the consequences. If, by some miracle, I managed to escape his wrath, I knew my mother would not be so lucky. Once bright with hope, her eyes were now dimmed with a weariness that could only come from years of enduring pain in silence.

As I write these words, a lump forms in my throat, and I feel a tremor in my hands. Revisiting these memories is like reopening an old wound that never truly healed. But you need to understand how deep the scars run and how suffocating the darkness was so you can understand the level of rescue, redemption, and restoration that followed — not just for me, but for all of us.

Just like the man who hid in the caves tormented by a legion of demons, I was often locked away in my room, tormented night after night for a few years. The part that pains me the most is that as I got older, my body started to respond in ways that I wish it would not. A sensation that sent a chill up my spine and put me to sleep. I believe that feeling started when I was ten or eleven, and it turned something on in me that left me with deep shame. In a moment where my body was being victimized, my body responded with pleasure.

My parents were church-going people, and I attended church my entire life. My mom, I tell you with confidence, is a woman of prayer but

was a victim to the man she loved. My tall, dark, handsome dad could charm an audience to love him with his charisma. He was also very talented. There wasn't anything he couldn't build, and he was often cast in the church plays because he was a stellar actor. It wasn't till I was an adult that I could focus on all the valuable lessons he imparted in my life when he was sober. However, the days that he drank to the point where you could smell it through his pores were the nights to dread the most. In my adolescent years, I was no different than the man who hid in the caves, cutting himself.

The sexual abuse stopped the day he left my room and found my mom on the other side of the door. I will never forget how she pounced on him like a tiger, ripping her nails into his face and drawing blood. My siblings woke up to see that my mom had cornered my dad in the bathroom with her arms swinging with the might of a warrior. My dad was scared for the first time and didn't know what it was about. For years, I thought my mom discovered what he had done and came to my rescue, and I think my dad did, too. She didn't know it, but she is my hero. She ended the visits; it all happened that night. I thought at the time the fight was for me. However, my mom got a call from a co-worker telling her that her daughter had been seeing an older man, and she confirmed it was my father.

My poor mother tolerated so much of my father's abuse. She knew my dad's story before her, before us; she knew his struggles, at least the ones he made known to her. My mom often looked at my dad as if he was a victim in his own body. I didn't understand it then, but I do now. He was a broken, hurt person, and my mom met him and fell in love with him before he picked up the bottle. Before he started to drown his sorrows in the drink, my dad was the perfect guy. My mom was always fervently praying for it to stop and often protected us, but she had reached a breaking point that night. She had thought that since I was a baby, I was his favorite, and he frequented my room because I wanted "my dad" to read a story or tuck me in as I struggled with night terrors. Little did she know, he was my night terror.

Although the nightmare ended that night, the residual spiritual implications of this violation were hard to navigate. Boundaries were violated and hard to put in place, and every relationship was difficult to navigate, especially with the opposite sex. Often described as beautiful, it would only remind me of my dad's tears when he apologized and said, "I'm so sorry you're just so beautiful."

So, being a girl was hard, too. I didn't want to be at fault for anyone being tempted by me. Whenever a boy got close to me at school to touch me, I never said no; I waited for them to get their "feel," and when they were done, I ran away.

The implications of child sexual trauma run deep as victims of such trauma can suffer a range of psychological and behavioral problems. The manipulative nature of grooming that many sex offenders use can cause ongoing thoughts of distortion, self-identity issues, relational harm, and isolation.

By the time I was fourteen, I would sunbathe on the roof of my three-story house in Bridgeport, CT. If you have an image of how the houses are built here, you will know they are pretty steep. I often fell asleep hoping I would fall to my death. It wouldn't be suicide if it happened that way, right? Maybe then I could make it to heaven.

Like the man in the caves, most left me alone due to my bad attitude. I can't forget about the man in the tomb story because, like him, God met me in the caves. Like the man in the cave who wanted to follow Jesus in the boat and go with him, but Jesus said, "No, go home to your family, and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been." Ironically, the once-upon-a-time demon-possessed man turned into an evangelist with no seminary degree, no formal training, just an undeniable transformative redemption story, and a deep rescue from darkness. The disciples had not even been commissioned to go and tell everyone, but this man was.

For a long time, my secrets ate me alive like a painful parasite, killing me slowly. Then once my rescue came, I kept that quiet, too. What would people think? How would it impact those I loved? The Bible tells us to honor our mother and father; how do I honor my father by telling the truth? This would be a disgrace to our family name. I remember the night my mother fought back, finally standing up to my father. I confided in someone, desperate for understanding, but their response cut deep: “He wouldn’t do that. Stop lying.” You see, my father was our provider as well as our protector. No one wanted to lose that, and my being free from this secret would outrage those who depended on him. No different than the community who surrounded the man in the tombs.

The belief that a person offers a child who discloses the truth has an impact on the child’s resilience and recovery from sexual abuse. If a child is not believed or supported, it can lead to a higher level of relational trauma for the child to have significantly long-term negative mental health outcomes. By this point in the story, you would say I was screwed. But God had other plans.

Not everyone will receive the truth and you can’t turn a blind eye to what’s already been seen. I often see women, and I can see why they behave the way they do. Deep down, what I see is:

- The promiscuous teen looking to satisfy the craving of her body turned on too early.
- The angry woman who can’t control her rage.
- The woman who is striving to control everything because now she has the power to do so.
- The depressed woman, self-isolating, hoping to die because the secret is too much to bear.
- The young girl cutting herself to feel because the world has made her numb.
- The girl who cries herself to sleep, drowning in her shame
- The women struggling in relationships due to fears

- The helicopter mom struggling with the fear that this will happen again to her child.
- The woman jumping from one failed relationship to another because she feels she deserves that.
- The woman who lost her sense of value.
- The woman who lives in fear.
- The woman who struggles with her identity.

I see them. How do I do nothing? How can I remain quiet when the world around me is sexually charged and grooming children into believing this is what life is when it's far more dangerous than the world is telling you? I have so many friends struggling in therapy, having mental breakdowns from trying to find healing from the sexual trauma. Secrets make us sick; the more I sought the Holy Scriptures, the more answers I found. How do I keep quiet? Do I spew scriptures at them and tell them to trust, never revealing that they are not alone in this journey? Who am I to find deliverance and walk away from all my sisters shambled in chains while holding the key that Jesus himself put in my hand? I can't be that woman.

I often shared my story on one-off instances when God brought these women into my life. Every time I shared it, I was strengthened. Over time, the secret has lost its power, and fear has no grasp on it. As you will soon discover, my story is unique, but not everyone's narrative will be the same. However, the framework is the same. This will be the most difficult journey of your life if your story is similar to mine. Still, I promise you that if you do the work and wholeheartedly seek the Lord Almighty, you will be delivered from the caves, and one day, you will be alongside me, rescued and on the mission to come back and rescue the others. You don't need the credentials or training. You just need Jesus.

Believe it or not, this story will be how I honor my father. The steps I took under the guidance of the Holy Spirit didn't redeem just me. This is my father's story, too. My mother's prayers did not fall on deaf ears.

Let me remove the veil and reveal the truth that kept us chained and trapped in bondage.