

Alive Again

By Katie Baughman

Editor's Note: *Of all the "Humpty Dumptys" I have known, Katie Baughman is among those who have taken the hardest fall. This woman, whose life was once so utterly shattered, shares the careful process through which God put her back together again. Find out how God has used many ways and many people to help Katie "kick her addictions [and much more] to the curb!" I have no doubt that God has already appointed Katie to be a beacon for others who sometimes feel like a lone ship lost in rough seas.*

Sexual abuse is terrible, especially when a child is involved. It affects every part of a person. Since most of the wounding from sexual abuse influences the deepest part of a person's soul, it is not easily seen by others.

As a very small child I was the victim of sexual abuse. (The offender is now deceased.) The abuse was so terrifying that I pushed many of my memories away. For many years I convinced myself that terrible things never happen to me.

As I grew up I felt alone, abandoned, unloved, and disconnected from myself, as well as from others. I also had depression, trust issues, suicidal tendencies, and no self-worth or sense of self-care. In fact, for most of my life I felt like I was a bother to people with nothing of value to say. I did not allow myself to dream of the future, or imagine what I wanted to be as an adult. I often wondered why I had been born and questioned my purpose on earth.

In this article, I will discuss the developmental stages of my life and how the sexual abuse affected me emotionally, psychologically, mentally, physically, spiritually and relationally.

Rising Storm

At age five, I began using food as my source of comfort and acceptance. When I reached out to food, I never felt rejected, judged or abandoned.

I was a shy teenager, emotionally dependent upon my mother until I was 14. At 16 I began to find other things, including pornography and drinking, to help me fill the large, empty hole in my heart. I went to bars where I drank beer. The beer and the pornography made me feel numb and happy, as if I didn't have a care in the world. This is when I became promiscuous. Over time I found three terrible crutches that gave me a false positive self image: food, drinking and sex.

After high school I got my first real job working at a bank. I bought my first new car and new clothes. I also had spending money and friends. All of this made me feel good.

I had a girlfriend who also came from a dysfunctional home. One weekend when we went dancing, I met a guy from another country who was enrolled at USC. He was handsome and had dark hair, chestnut brown eyes, and olive brown skin. I was love-starved, and the big hole in my heart had grown larger and deeper. When he began to show me some attention, all he had to do was flash his dreamy eyes, and I was his.

I decided to move out, but my mother protested greatly. How I wish I had listened to her! I would have avoided a lot of pain and suffering. I was young and hurt and broken and abused, and I thought living with him would solve my problems. I thought he loved me. However, I soon discovered he was physically abusive, jealous, extremely possessive, and emotionally unavailable.

At first I thought he was the greatest man I had ever known. I wanted to get married but he did not. I tried everything to convince him that getting married would be great. But my words didn't work, so I used deception to convince him that I needed to stop taking the birth control pill. I wrongly assumed he would marry me if I became pregnant. Within a few months I was pregnant and he gave me two choices—him or my baby. It was a stupid decision, but I decided to have the abortion, which cost me a great deal of mental and emotional pain for many years.

From there our relationship quickly went downhill. I felt anger, bitterness and hatred toward him. The following April I moved out but con-

tinued to see him until that July, when we broke up for the final time. Our relationship would continue to control my life for the next ten years as I struggled to live without him.

Atmospheric Pressure

I moved back home which was not what I wanted to do. But I was completely torn up on the inside, as though I was mourning someone who died. I could not eat, sleep, work or think. All I wanted to do was cry. My mother told me to get a backbone and stop crying. I tried to live my life the best I could—in my own strength, which proved to be a further disaster.

I went into a self-destructive mode for seven years. I ate large amounts of food and quickly gained a lot of weight. I stayed busy each day, hoping for a good night's sleep, but I often had terrible nightmares. Whether awake or asleep, I was tormented. I never had rest in my mind or body; I was constantly exhausted physically, emotionally, mentally—and I was running from God.

When I was 29, I experienced my darkest time since I was born. My life was quickly spiraling further into the pit of depression and despair and I was very close to committing suicide. I shared my feelings with my mother but she said, “We all feel like killing ourselves sometimes but we get over it.” Another response was “Every dog has his day.”

Dissipating Clouds

In April of 1985 my life finally began to change! I gave my life to Jesus. I asked Him to forgive me of my sins and I received Him as my Savior. I began attending church. For the first time in my life I experienced peace, joy—and rest. I was able to receive and extend love to others in ways I had never known before. It felt good, but strange, because all my life I had been shown everything *except* love and acceptance.

When I was 36 I began seeing a counselor to deal with some of the many critical areas in my life: mental, emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual. I needed help with relationships, trust, and wounds from the sexual abuse. I discovered there were big chunks of time in my childhood that I could not remember.

I also had to work through issues of codependency, abortion, and the eventual death of my mother. Because of the abuse, I lost my childhood, identity, purpose in life, self-esteem, joy, happiness, confidence, and the ability to dream about my future. The abortion caused me to lose a child, motherhood and grandchildren. My mother's death cost us time to work through issues in our relationship. I wish we had the chance to have a healthier and godly relationship. Because of serious issues I had concerning trust, I lacked the ability to relate well with God as my father. Since some who were in authority over my life were abusive, emotionally unavailable, or unsafe, I did not trust God's love or His promise to protect me.

I thank God I had a good Christian therapist who helped me work through this. Through the entire counseling process, the Lord used her to show me the unconditional love of Christ, and His grace and mercy.

At first it was very scary to accept my counselor's gift of love, acceptance and mercy. Sometimes I tested her to see what she would do. In the past I had treated others badly so they would reject me. I just could not handle it when other people treated me with kindness; therefore, rejection and abuse were more familiar.

This counselor will always have a special place in my heart. God used her to help me come *back to life again*. She read scriptures from the Bible and prayed for me, and played special songs that touched my heart. She also provided films that helped me see what issues I needed to deal with next.

Mostly Sunny

I have faced many fiery trials, but God has helped me through them all. There have been many ways

through which God has brought healing, restoration and spiritual growth. Among them are: reading Scripture, individual and group therapy, seminars, intensive therapy retreats, inspirational books, Internet research, praise and worship at church and at home, meditation on the promises of God, and personal chats with Him. The many Christian friends I have had in my life have prayed for me, and given me encouragement, support and love. God has used all of this to help me be the person I am today, for which I am grateful.

In 2005, God gave me a mentor through whom I have received God's loving correction in my life. That year He also gave me the courage to face two addictions, one of which is food. God provided a team of people to help me work through these two addictions. The team included a mentor, an accountability person, a prayer partner and friend, a counselor, and the dean of women at Columbia International University. At first it was hard to allow all these people to speak into my life. Because I had such low self-esteem and wasn't sure of my identity as a woman or as a Christian, I lacked confidence that God could use me to bless others.

At times the care from these ladies felt overwhelming, but now I look forward to talking with this team of godly women who have melted my wall that once prevented others from hurting me. Their support has helped me kick my addictions to the curb. Since I have started my recovery from addiction I have not had even one total relapse. In fact, I have been able to lose 88 pounds.

I am very excited and thankful to God. His love is healing, amazing, powerful, and life-changing. I will never be the same again!

I still have some struggles as I work through the root issues of my addictive behaviors, but God is faithful in helping me to stay sober and not act out in these addictions. Praise God!

Recently, God has helped me reduce my caffeine intake. He has helped me kick my addiction to refined sugar. I have not had any candy, cake, pie, cookies or ice-cream in eight months. Praise God!

Today I feel like a brand new person inside and out. Now I have a sense of belonging, and of being loved and accepted. *I have value*. I have my identity, and a very good sense of self-care. I have experienced happiness, joy, hope, and security in knowing God can use me to bless and minister to others. I actually have a relationship of intimacy now with God and others that is *real and pure* for the first time in my life. I am fifty-two years old and in my heart I feel 30. I feel like God has restored and redeemed my adult years. Praise Him!

If you would like for Katie to speak at your church or gathering, please contact her at Katherine.Baughman@ciuonline.com. She is pursuing a MA in Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Formation at Columbia International University (CIU). She is also Founder of Living Waters Ministry. Her vision is to counsel broken and wounded people.