



Out of the Depths: A Story of Child Abuse and Cancer

Rebeca Delgadillo did not choose to be born into an abusive home. She did not want a mean, neglectful mother or a sexually abusive stepfather. She endured these terrors in order to protect her younger siblings. This is the story of the pain that she suffered. It is what she revisits on the path to making herself whole again, healing her mind and her cancer.

Abused by Both Parents I grew up as the oldest of seven children. I am the oldest by default because my older sister, who was seven at the time, ran into the street and was killed by a drag racer. Only days after that horrific accident, my mother gave birth to one of my brothers and she completely checked out, leaving me alone to raise him. I was only three at the time. My mother became mean to her children. There was no one to look out for us, and I became a victim of sexual abuse. The perpetrator was my stepfather. He used his position to manipulate me, by making sure I knew that being the oldest meant protecting my younger siblings from my mother's abuse. Only, he was another kind of abuser.

My sexual abuse started when I was young and lasted into my teenage years. I felt alone and isolated. I felt no one would or could help me, certainly not my mother who hated me. She hated any children after the loss of my sister, and yet, she popped out 6 babies year after year with this man. I had to take on the role of the mother. It was me they asked for at night, me who changed diapers, me who fed them, and me who looked after them.

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She hated the role I took on. I hated the role I took on. My stepfather told me I was a good little mother. He was someone I looked up to as a father. He was smart and positioned himself in the household as the only breadwinner, so he had the upper hand on everything in the home. No one could question him. He also made sure he positioned himself well in the school and the community so he could have the upper hand there, too. When I went to tell the nuns, all they would say was that they would pray that the situation would improve. As I grew older, he would often remind me to keep quiet or he would hurt my siblings. We all grew up in a home where physical, emotional and verbal violence was a daily occurrence, so the sexual abuse was just another situation we all learned to sweep under the rug. This taught me to keep quiet and hold all those feelings in. He used the Bible against me and told me incest was natural and rightly so because it was written in the Bible. He also told me that I was causing him to do what he did. I was confused. I did not and could not turn to anyone. It wasn't rational why I didn't, I just didn't. It was difficult to think for myself. I often felt dumb and stupid, so I isolated myself. I tried not to let anyone in.

Victimization by a Father Figure I didn't realize I was seeking a father figure and so I looked for one in anyone older. In doing so, I was exposed to more sexual abuse. This other relative did not live with us, so I did have a choice about whether to visit or not, and whether or not to allow myself be alone with him. He was smart. He would take all of us to the store to buy candy and told all of my siblings to go and pick while he held me back in the car, or in a room alone. Again, I held it in. Again, I was told it was my fault. Again, I felt stupid, scared, and now even dumber, because I thought I had put myself in that situation.

The voice of a child is not heard. Who could I turn to? Who would I trust? Who would understand what I was trying to say? Who would protect my brothers and sisters? I wanted many times to run away, but I could not. I felt responsible. He made me responsible. They made me responsible. I was filled with despair. I felt broken like no one could repair me.

Facing the Hurt and the Cancer that was Inside Despair in my life turned into mental and health issues. It wasn't until traumatic events during my adult life that I truly faced, on a deeper level, all that I had suppressed, all that I had bottled up, and how broken I felt. One event was a car-jacking and the other was a diagnosis of bone cancer and fibromyalgia. The therapy that I received due to these traumatic events helped me see that my past was affecting my present. If I do not process the hurts of my past, they will continue to affect my future.

How do you deal with so much injustice and pain? The emotions last a lifetime. They rear their heads in the form of physical illnesses that appear years later. I go to therapy and work hard to deal with my mental state. I see a huge round of doctors to deal with my health issues in the hopes that my mental and physical state can become one of a healthy, strong survivor. I am a work in progress. I take things one step at a time. I am strong. I am a survivor.

Resources

Don Howell. “Molestation: Adults Should Have Asked, Children Are Not at Fault for Not Telling.” Cancer InCytes Blog, March 25, 2014.

URL: <http://cancerincytes.blogspot.com/2014/03/molestation-adults-should-have-asked.html?q=molestation>

Vincent J. Felitti. “Childhood Trauma Linked to Chronic Diseases in Adulthood.” Cancer InCytes, Volume 2, Issue 1, 2013.

URL: <http://www.cancerincytes.org/#!childhood-trauma-linked-to-chronic-diseases-in-adulthood/c1jot>

National Cancer Institute: Bone Cancer

URL: <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Sites-Types/bone>

University of Maryland Medical Center: Fibromyalgia

URL: <http://umm.edu/health/medical/reports/articles/fibromyalgia>