

RITUAL ABUSE: A SURVIVOR'S TALE*

I was asked to tell you my story. I need to start by saying that this is a story of hope. It about the Grace of God and about victory. It is about my escape and recovery from a childhood of ritualistic abuse in my family's involvement in a Satanic cult. It is important that you be open-minded. I believe that if you truly work for the Lord, you will have an opportunity to encounter Evil. I want to help you have some idea of what it will look like and how to deal with it.

I am the oldest of three children. I have a younger sister and a younger brother. The first eight years of my life we lived in a small town in North Carolina and my Mother's family were the "up-town" people. They had a lot of power and a lot of control in that small town. My Father's family were the people that were called "country folk;" out of the city limits. They had a lot of land and were farmers.

Up until about two years ago I didn't have any memories of those first eight years. I had a few vague memories of some good times I had spent with my grandfather but I really didn't remember much. We moved away from that town and in moving, left the Coven. I always knew that my family was abusive. Both my parents and my brother and my sister are, today, alcoholics, active alcoholics, and also use drugs regularly. We never went to church as children, and when I was young I used to jokingly and in an off-handed way, tell people that my father was Satan. I really didn't know what I was talking about. Today if you saw a picture of my father it would stop you in your tracks and you would wonder who it was that was looking back at you. The man is walking evil.

When I was little I knew that there were a lot of really bad, really crazy things happening to me and I made a deal with God, as I knew God, as I imagined God. I would build a closet down somewhere in my soul. Whenever something happened that hurt me, or confused me, or frightened me, or that I didn't understand, he would just fast-forward me through that experience and lock it up in the closet. When I got older and in a safe place, I promised to open the door, look at it and try to figure it out. God made the deal, and when I was little and I was being tortured or abused, I would imagine this little man in a long white robe and a long white beard coming and sitting on my shoulder. He would say, "I will never leave you. You will never be alone." I never knew who it was until two years ago. I went back and looked at a children's Bible with pictures. It was Moses. While these things were happening, I would go away and play with Moses. I have this very vivid picture in my head of putting my tiny little hand in his big hand, and him taking me away. We would do the things that I wanted to do when I was a little girl: we would run through fields of wildflowers and pick them; he would tell me

*The author has asked to remain anonymous due to the nature of the material shared. For questions or assistance, please contact the editor.

the names of the wildflowers and we would listen to water going over rocks in a brook, and other things. I really kind of "checked out" when I was being abused. As a result I didn't remember any of the abuse.

I grew up, and was the only person in my family to graduate from high school. I was a real striver and put myself through college. All of my striving, strength and determination was, as far as I was aware, based entirely on my desire to make a liar out of my father. My father always told me that I was a slut, that I was worthless and that I was dog waste. I was going to make a liar out of him because I thought he was a pretty disgusting human being. That drive got me through college. I had good jobs and a great plan for my life. I was never going to get married.

In 1984, some strange things happened in a short period of time. In the last six months of 1984 I had a wonderful job and was working five days and then I was off five days. Living in a mobile home on a very peaceful farm in the middle of nowhere with my dog whom I adored, we were happy. One night there was a tornado, and for the first time in my life I prayed. I asked God to pick up the tornado and carry it over the trailer, set it down and send it on its way. That is what happened. When it was over, I got out of bed and started to walk out of the bedroom, but the rest of the trailer was twisted sideways. I fell down when I stepped out of my bedroom. There was a tree in the front yard that was maybe eight or ten feet from the trailer and about three feet in diameter. It was uprooted and dropped on my end of the trailer. The next day the landlord took his jeep and drove for a mile and a half or two miles in each direction. There was nothing standing over a foot and a half high except my end of the trailer. God had answered my prayer. That was in May.

In September my grandmother had a radical double mastectomy. Right after she came home from the hospital, I discovered a lump. I was 24 years old and was terrified. I thought I was going to have cancer. I prayed. It had worked when the tornado came; maybe it would work again. So I prayed again, had a biopsy and everything came back clear. By this time, God was really getting my attention.

In November there was a job that I wanted. I didn't think I was going to get it, but I did. I made another deal with God. I had told him that if I got this job, I would wear my seat belt since the job was a 45 minute commute from home. I started work on Monday and started to wear my seatbelt. On Wednesday I was in an automobile accident. My car was totaled. If I had not been wearing my seatbelt, I would not be here today. After that I started looking for churches anywhere I could find them. God had my complete, undivided attention. In the accident I was injured, although not too badly, so I was out of work for a while.

In the spring of 1985 I was back on my feet, and loving my job. The plan was to never be married, and when I turned thirty I was going to adopt a teenager that nobody wanted. We were going to take care of each other. Then I met the man who is now my husband and we were engaged in 18 days. By then I began to think that maybe God had a different plan for me so I got en-

gaged. I had a lot of health problems, which I learned later had to go with the abuse I had suffered. The doctor said, "If you are going to have children you'd better do it soon," so we did, and now have two sons. During both of these pregnancies I went into therapy because I had horrible nightmares. I did not stick with the therapy because after the children were born the nightmares went away. In one of the nightmares with the first pregnancy, I dreamed I was in labor. The obstetrician, who had become a very dear and beloved friend of ours, was delivering the baby. He had a surgical gown and mask on. I could see his hands ready to catch our child. I had complete faith in him. When the baby was born, he pulled down his mask and it was my father. He laughed hysterically, took the baby and ran from the room. I was laying on the table and couldn't move. I was hemorrhaging and he was leaving with my child. I would wake up terrified. It felt like it had happened.

During the second pregnancy I had a lot of dreams about fires and circles and knives and people taking the baby out of my stomach before it was born. I went back into therapy to survive those dreams. At the end of that we did a geneogram, somewhat like a family tree, where the person lists all of their parents' parents and their parents and as far back they can remember. We began to look for the dysfunction in my family. That was a real revelation for me because there were a number of things that I identified in my family that I had known about but never really been aware of. There is a lot of homosexuality as well as a tremendous amount of alcohol and drug abuse. Some people had been hospitalized for mental illness. There was violence, with people in my family shooting each other. There is at least one multiple personality disorder and a thick coating of incestuous relationships along with a fair number of dead babies. That scared me pretty bad and I decided I didn't want to be in therapy anymore, so I quit. I decided the best thing for me was to get away from my family and get my children away from them. We left North Carolina and moved to Ohio. We moved here in April of 1989 and in May God tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Do you remember that promise about the closet?" One day I was tilling up a piece of land about the size of a station-wagon and in less than two hours I was chased by six snakes. Usually when you are digging and you see a snake, it will run away from you. These were not interested in running away from me, they were striking and spitting and coming after me. That day I fell apart. This triggered the closet where all the snakes of my past were hidden. Within three or four days I was on a therapist's couch and I didn't get up for about two and a half hours. I was so fearful of what I was going to remember. I knew what was happening; I knew that I was going to remember my childhood and I was scared to death.

As far as I know, I had four kinds of flashbacks.

1. There was a physical flashback. I would get the physical sensation of whatever it was that had happened to me. Nothing more; just the intense, sudden incredible, unexplainable pain that came out of left field.
2. Sometimes I would get the memory. I would actually remember an abusive situation, something that had happened or a place I had been, but with no emotion connected to it and no physical sensation.

3. Sometimes I would get blindsided by emotion. These were like garbage trucks that fell out of the sky and landed on me. It meant being totally washed over and consumed by an emotion, like fear, that had no place in washing dishes, which is what I happened to be doing at that moment, or with anything else I might be doing. It would just sneak up and grab me. I'd be trapped in that emotion and not be able to get away from it.
4. Sometimes I got the whole package. I'm a very functioning, striving kind of person and honestly, during this time I couldn't even make a peanut butter sandwich. I couldn't be alone with my children. I couldn't concentrate enough to say things like, "it's time to get into the shower," "it's time to get dressed," "it's time to make breakfast." It took every bit of concentration I had to do anything because I was getting all of these flashbacks, all these different kinds of flashbacks.

I really wasn't sure what it was yet so I went back into therapy. The therapist knew long before I did what she was dealing with, and she tried to lead me to it gradually. I started to get a clue as to what was going on when she started to ask me, "do these symbols mean anything to you?" I would just get on the floor, "get me out of here, I don't want to look at that." I couldn't handle it. I was getting to a place where I was going to know what had happened to me. I got very sick. I had encephalitis, mononucleosis, hepatitis and a heart infection all at once. I couldn't go to therapy for a while, so Satan saw to it that I did not get the information that I needed right away. I was sick for two and a half months. I was so sick that I started to pray again. My husband was in seminary, so he was learning and coming home with all of his books and he would say, "Oh, I have so much reading to do," and he would go into his office and close the door. Five minutes later he would be back out and say, "can I read you something?" He would share with me what he had read and it was a big help.

In therapy I had a lot of flashbacks. People always want to know what happened. "What are you talking about, what did they do to you?" I'm going to tell you some of the things, not because I need to be an exhibitionist but because you need to know. Because if people come to you and they say "I had this really weird dream," it may not have been a dream, it might have been a flashback. Just because these things happened to me does not mean it happened to other people.

I was often covered in semen and put in a dog house with dogs and snakes and spiders. There was a mad dog leashed just outside so I could not leave. I stayed in the dog house, scared of being bitten. If I left the dog house I would have been bitten. It was like there was nowhere to go. Often they would cover me with thick, silver duct tape or hot wax and take one of my kittens. I always had kittens. They would disappear and I never knew what happened to them. Now I know what happened to my kittens. They would skin the cat as they pulled the wax or duct tape off me. The message was that this could happen to me if I remembered and if I told and if I wasn't a good little kitten these things could happen to me. They put me in a box (I know now that it was a child's coffin) with a suckling pig. They had cut its throat. They closed the

coffin and randomly stabbed knives here and there and everywhere. I never knew when it was coming or where it was coming from or where to go to get away from it. I just couldn't get small enough. I was so terror-stricken, and when I came out I was always covered in blood. I was trying to find a safe place in there with the pig that was bleeding. I never knew if it was my blood or the pig's blood or who had been cut, me or the pig. When I was having these flashbacks it was like the incidents were happening to me right then, right there, all over again. If I picked up a knife to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, all of a sudden I felt like I was in a coffin with a bleeding pig, and knives were coming from everywhere. I was having a very hard time functioning.

I think that the flashback that was the most difficult was my initiation ceremony. In working with a group of cult survivors I found this to be pretty universal. The others had experienced it too. At about three weeks of age I was lowered into a tub of scalding hot water and held there to see how close to death I could survive. I was brought out and then lowered into a tub of cold water and also held in the water to see how long I would live. I was then brought out and laid on an altar with no cover or clothing of any kind. When I had that flashback the sensations that I had were of burning up and not being able to breathe. I was in the therapist's office, but I was on fire and I could not breathe. Then all of a sudden I was gasping for air, and my skin tingled and burned. Then I was cold and I could not breathe again. Then there was all this space, and I was crying and crying. They did that to test my spirit.

In our family coven, the "chosen one" was the oldest child. I was the oldest child. They had to make sure I had a very strong spirit, and that was part of the way they did it. I was very nauseated during therapy because I would experience smells. They starved me and fed me human waste and other things you would not want to eat. Sometimes when I was in therapy or in recovery I would get these odors and I would get so nauseated that I would not be able to eat anything. I also was not sleeping, because the ultimate threat was that, if I remembered and if I told they would come and get my children. That is why I had those nightmares when I was pregnant. My subconscious knew that I was going to have children now, and that if I remembered, and if I talked, they would come and get my children. On some level, even then, I knew that, but I was unaware. I wasn't sleeping; I wasn't eating; all the knives were taken out of the kitchen.

Believe it or not a funny thing happened. I had to use humor as often as possible to keep from going crazy. At one point we had bought a ham, and we were going to make sandwiches with it. It was in the refrigerator and I was making lunch for my kids one day. I opened the refrigerator and there was that ham, but I didn't see ham; I saw a suckling pig. It was a good ham but I picked it up and threw it into the trash can without even thinking about it. We probably couldn't afford to throw away a ham but I really didn't care. When my husband came home and opened the refrigerator, he said "Did the ham have a transformation today?" I said, "Yes it did. It's in the trash can. Leave it alone." He never questioned, he just left it.

In December we had an opportunity to go to a Christmas party. There were a lot of clergy there, and I really wanted to go and be a good preacher's wife or a good seminary student's wife. I wanted to be humble and sweet and do a good job. I was so afraid, and when we got there I was uncomfortable and having a hard time. People were very nice. I went into the bathroom to try and get myself together. When I looked into the mirror, the whole left side of my face and down to my chest was very red. I had an intense, red rash. Some people believe that evil lives in the left side of your body, and I can tell you that the majority of the physical problems that I have had in my life were on the left side of my body.

I had been journaling on and off. It was a way of staying sane. Some days I couldn't write in complete sentences, and so I would just make lists of words, but I kept on journaling. I didn't know about spiritual warfare. I didn't know about demons. That information was yet to come.

I want to share something with you that I wrote. (I was very good at minimizing things.)

“It's been somewhat of a difficult day. I feel all of the things that I was not allowed to feel as a child, all them at once — spiders, mother, snakes, father. I feel sick; I feel angry, numb. I feel as though I have lived a life of 29 years without a soul of my own. I could go to bed and sleep for days. The urges to escape from within are stronger than any sensation at this point. It is hard to be in the here-and-now when my whole psyche is torn to shreds in yesterday. The black hole, the huge void of loneliness, I can see it, feel, and know that it will always be a part of who I am, lost in hell. Shame, abandonment, terror, fear, rejection, darkness, darkness, darkness.”

In January I started to get unhappy with my therapist. I began to realize that, if part of my problem was I had been sacrificed or given to Satan as a child, why didn't this therapy include learning about God? She wasn't a Christian; she was into channeling and visual imagery and other things. My husband started educating me about spiritual warfare and he provided an opportunity for a deliverance. And I thought, “well, you're crazy.” I just wasn't sure I believed in that, but things deteriorated with the therapist and I was very unhappy. I started to shop around and visit other therapists and I decided to give deliverance a try. I talked to her on the phone and then I had to meet her.

February 9, 1990 I was delivered. It's hard for me to tell you about that, because a lot of it I don't really remember, but what I do remember is very vivid. I remember going to the deliverance in the car. I was anxious, and very aware of a huge power. I knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that if I really concentrated I could make our car blow up. I knew I could make that happen. It scared me and I knew I needed to shut down, so I shut down and went to sleep. During the deliverance, which I think lasted about two and one-half hours, as the spirit was being called away and out, I became aware that on my left side I had a huge big sore, and it was oozing and raw and it hurt really bad. I felt like I was shrinking down into it, and before I could say anything

the woman that did my deliverance came and got down on her knees and put her hand right up on that spot, and it just went away. When she touched me, I felt like a balloon that had filled up with clean fresh air (I was tortured a lot in basements and attics so I have a problem with mold). All of a sudden there was this bright, clean room, the windows were thrown open and there was fresh, clean air, sunshine and warmth in every corner. There was no mold anywhere, I felt like that was my closet to my soul, and it was wonderful.

At one point I was concerned about more memories because I was still getting them and I didn't want to know any more. I didn't need to know any more, I knew why I had felt crazy. I just wanted it to go away. I asked her about it and she said that God was going to bury my memories deeper than blood. Up to that point everything she said had provided a clear image in my mind. But when she said that, that is not what I felt or saw at all. I had a very clear vision of leaves in the fall blowing down the street and blowing away. I was just about to say something when she said "No, daughter, no. You are going to be doubly blessed. The Lord is going to blow your memories away like the leaves of fall." I don't care how many times I tell this or how old I get, I won't ever forget that, because that is what happened. Up until that day I was having about ten flashbacks a day; I wasn't sleeping at night. This last February 9th was one year from the deliverance and I haven't had a flashback, I haven't had a nightmare, I can eat, I can sleep and I can read the Bible, I have a Father. I walk a real fine line of being disrespectful to the Lord because I really needed a father, so that's who I often call on God to be for me. When I feel like I'm getting into trouble or I'm having a hard time, I just sit down and talk like a little girl talks to her father. I don't really know how it should be, but that's what I do. My Dad takes care of me; my Father takes care of me.

As I said, I journaled throughout. I will leave you with this journal entry.

I used to wake up at night unable to breathe, feeling like there was something over my face. There was. I could not put my head under the covers like a frightened child would because I began to suffocate all over again. I cannot stay in control of myself when I see a snake, bug or spider of any kind. I panic and the fear runs down so far through my soul that there is no place for it to go and so it goes up again; it goes down, comes up, goes down. I cannot walk straight up a flight of stairs. I walk sideways so no one can sneak up on me. I cannot be in a room where a man pulls his belt out of all the loops quickly. I cannot close my eyes in the shower, I cannot sleep in the dark, swallow anything slimy, be around cats, be sneaked up on or be around certain kinds of people. Some nights I dream about knives, circles, blood, hot water, cold water, small tight places, being so full I feel as though I will burst open, being starved and fed dog waste.

I want this to be about hope. I want this to be about not being alone anymore ever again, and if it is, it will be an okay thing to be. I want this to be about a good and kind God. I want to write in Scripture and anything else that will comfort and give strength to everyone lost in a

searching soul. In doing this, I want to find another piece of myself worth keeping. I'm so stripped down to nothing. In discarding all the old survival skills that are now inappropriate behaviors, I am left with very little of a self. It took all I could muster to survive as a small child — all the imagination, elusions and escapes I could create to save my life. I am alive and I am so small. I am growing and it is painful. Sometimes the words that come down become objects of my impatience and anger. They are so inadequate in describing what I feel. Maybe what will come out of this is a new language, a language that describes what is like to be two years old, cold, naked, barely standing, in the center, covered with semen waiting for the dogs; all the voices of sexual activity going on around my tiny little wet, cold, hungry, tired self.

