

Healing

for our Soul Gardens

Restoration and Wholeness After Sexual Abuse

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Acknowledgments

“Other people are going to find healing in your wounds. Your greatest life messages and your most effective ministry will come out of your deepest hurts.” —Rick Warren

I love how God's Word tells us “He refreshes and restores my soul (life)” in Psalm 23:3 (AMP). God truly has done an amazing work in my life over the past twenty-nine years since I accepted Jesus into my heart and life. Restoration for myself and others has become my lifelong passion as I have ministered in the various roles God has used me in over the years.

My husband, Rick, has been an amazing support to me over the years. He was the one who held me when I cried and comforted me when I was working through the healing process in my own life. He has been my biggest fan and support as I have transitioned from the broken, to the restored, to the one who helps the wounded. For him I will always be grateful and cherish his love and support.

My children, Kaitlyn and Ross, are a testament to the power and restoration of God in my life and I feel so honored to be called mom, mother, or yo mama by them both!

In my life I have been very blessed to have an amazing support system through my healing process and as I have transitioned to one who walks with others through their healing process. Three people have been “my people” - my go to people for many years and their love, support, prayers, encouragement, and belief in me has been a gift. They have seen who I was in Christ, before I even realized it and I am forever grateful for them. Sandy and Bob Prosser, mom and dad, have been spiritual parents to me and have loved and spoken life into my dry bones when I didn't see who I was or could be in Christ. Janet Brown has been a friend, a sister in Christ,

whose friendship and love I will always cherish. I truly believe that Bob and Janet are celebrating with me as they are in heaven with Jesus.

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Finally, I am thankful for God's presence in my life. Without Christ I would not be the woman of God I am today. I am truly blessed by God's love and faithfulness. To turn this broken vessel into a restored treasure is beyond what I could imagine! To God be ALL glory, honor and praise!

With Love, Kristin

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Introduction

This book is a story of restoration, healing, and new beginnings. This is a journey I have taken, and my prayer is that you will find healing and restoration as I did. This path is not easy, but it is necessary that you take back your life and no longer be a victim of what happened to you. When I first began the healing process, I often wondered if a day would ever go by when I wouldn't think about my experience. Would I ever be normal again, or would I forever be marked by the negative experiences I've had? Now, I don't think about it every day. I am as normal as I can be, if that's possible. (My friends can attest to that one.) And even though I am marked by what happened to me, it does not define who I am and what my purpose in life is.

The intention of this book is not so much to tell the story of what I experienced but to share the healing process I went through to find my life again. It is my hope and prayer that you, too, will go on this journey and find the wholeness I believe God has for you as well.

For the past few years, God has been speaking to me through the analogy of comparing my life to a garden. I love to garden. In my early adult years, I did not have a green thumb, nor was I a master gardener. I knew little about gardens, which may have been more symbolic than I realized at the time. As the years have gone by, I have learned to love and understand gardening. I have found so much joy and rest in my time in my own garden. It has become a place where my creativity flows. I have savored the moments when my hands are in the soil, and I am at work creating. It is in those moments that God speaks to me in His kind, gentle way and talks with me about my own garden, my soul, and of the work He has done to restore me to the garden of life He created me to have. This is the journey I would like you to take with me. It is a journey of healing, revelation, peace, understanding, newness, forgiveness, and beauty.

How It Began

I remember the details. They are as clear to me as if it were yesterday.

It's about six o'clock in the morning, and I am walking down the street. Tears are coming down my cheeks, but I feel numb and oblivious to what is around me. So many emotions are going through me at one time, and I'm not sure what to do with all I'm feeling. I'm confused, scared, and relieved all at the same time. I'm angry at my friends who left me at that house, and I still can't believe they betrayed me that way. They said they would come back; I thought they would be right back, but they never came. Did they not realize what happened to me? *No*, I think to myself, *they have no idea*. They thought I was safe. I thought I was safe. These things don't happen to people we know. This can't be happening to me again. I quickly put out of my mind those memories from a few years before. I can't allow those emotions to come tumbling out and mingle with the emotions I am now feeling.

I finally get home and immediately get in the shower. My mom and brother aren't home, so I don't have to talk to anyone about it. As I stand in the shower, I wish the water could wash away what I'm feeling inside, but it doesn't. I'm not sure how long I stand there or how many tears I shed. The water and my tears blend together and fall off my body. My thoughts keep swirling around in my mind like the water swirling down the drain. *What am I going to do?* A voice inside my head repeatedly tells me that I need to tell my mom, but I'm afraid. I know what happened to me was wrong. It was dangerous, and I'm thankful to be alive. I can't believe I survived. I pinch myself to make sure I truly am still alive and it wasn't all just a very bad dream.

By the time I'm done with my shower, I know what I must do. I must tell my mother. This means I must also tell her I lied about where I was the night before, but this weight is too big

for me to carry by myself. I need to talk. I become anxious for her to come home so that I can get it out—so I can tell someone.

The phone rings. It's one of the friends who left me the night before. She asks if I'm okay. I tell her no. She apologizes for leaving me and not coming back. She says she just found out some terrible things about the guy at the house where they left me. She got scared and had to call me immediately to find out how I was. I tell her, "No, I'm not okay." I begin to cry, and then I speak the words for the first time out loud. "He raped me. He wouldn't let me leave. I tried, but then he started hitting me and threw me back onto the bed. I didn't know what to do. I was so scared that he would hurt me or even kill me."

We talk for a little bit more, and she tells me things about him that make my stomach ache. She tells me more about him, but I don't remember what else she says. Words are swirling through my head, but I am unable to process them—my mind goes blank. Everything around me begins to spin, and my body slides down the wall. I land on my kitchen floor in a heap. It feels as if I have been hit again. The tears begin again, and I struggle to breathe. I can't talk anymore and quickly get off the phone.

The rest of the day is a blur. All I know is that I need to talk to my mom. When she finally gets home from work, I try to talk to her a few times, but then I walk away, shaking. Finally, I call her into the bathroom and with tears running down my cheeks, I tell her everything. She's shocked but immediately takes me into her arms as I cry uncontrollably. I was worried about getting into trouble for lying to her, but she says it doesn't matter. She just comforts me and speaks words of encouragement into my ear.

When I finally calm down, my mother gently tells me that we need to report this. I'm scared of what might happen, scared of him, but she reassures me that we need to do it. She goes to the phone and calls the police. As I stand there, I realize that my life is forever changed. There's no going back. As my mother calls the police, I wonder at what lies ahead of me.

The police come, and we make the report. I go with them to show them the house. I must tell them everything that happened and everything he did to me. I am humiliated and embarrassed as I quietly speak to them. One of the officers reassures me that I did the right thing when I stopped fighting him. He tells me I am lucky to be alive or not physically hurt worse, and it was due, in part, to how I handled the situation.

The officer, and later, the district attorney, reassure me that they would not release my name and that the details would be kept confidential. However, word got out, and the knowledge of what happened invaded every aspect of my life. Everyone at my school and throughout our town found out. Some are sympathetic, but many accuse me of lying. I am harassed at school, horrific words are written on my locker, and friends turn their backs on me.

At that time, I was a sophomore in high school, and my life was crumbling down around me. I didn't go to counseling; I just shut down and quit talking to anyone about it. It was 1981, I

was fourteen years old, and everyone knew what had taken place. Those intimate details became public knowledge, and my heart became calloused to all that was good around me. Over the next few years, I turned to drugs and alcohol to find solace and peace but found nothing.

EARLIER YEARS

I was in fifth and sixth grades when my life first changed. Those years are meant for fun. We have friends, we get involved in sports and activities, and we do the school thing. I did it all and had fun, but then something happened to me during this time. It changed my fun to great sadness and confusion. I was repeatedly molested by older neighborhood kids for two years. They were from a family I dearly loved. In many ways, they had become my substitute family because I was raised by a single parent who worked hard to support us. I never knew what it was like to have a large extended family. They filled that gap for me.

Sadly, though, they had a secret, and I was part of it. There was sexual abuse taking place, and I became one of the victims in the line of abuse. Looking back, I can see the grooming process. I was so needy for love, and they saw that. I'm not saying their choices were my fault, but I do see that I was vulnerable to being sexually abused because of my situation.

I never told anyone about these incidents, or least I never told anyone in my family. My brother and I had a conversation years later. One day, while sitting on my porch, I briefly shared with him but did not go into details. See, I had a secret, and I was an expert on keeping secrets. I kept the secret out of fear, out of shame, and out of not knowing what to do or where to go for help. I often think that the reason I told my mom I was raped at age fourteen was connected to the weight of the secrets I already held.

As an adult looking back, I often questioned where I got the strength to walk through what I did after I spoke to the officers. My name wasn't to be publicly released; I was a minor. But it was a small town, and that is exactly what occurred. Word got out, and my friends, schoolmates, and the community quickly became the judges. I endured ridicule, name-calling, rumors, lies, and a great deal more because I stood up for myself and told what happened.

I was asked if I wanted to go to a counselor, but I didn't understand what that was, so I said no. I could talk to my friends. However, about six months down the road, one friend came to me as the spokesperson for the rest and said that they thought I was bragging because all I did was talk about it. It wasn't until years later that I learned my desire to talk was part of the process of working through the trauma. I just went to the wrong people with it. Those words hurt me, confused me, filled me with shame, and were the catalyst to the path I followed over the next seven years.

It was 1981, I was fourteen years old, and everyone knew what had taken place.

Obviously, there was something wrong with me, or so I thought. I was dirty, not worth anything, and definitely not likable or wanted unless I played by someone else's rules. These thoughts and so many more plunged me into a lifestyle of drugs, alcohol, and promiscuity. I pushed my hurt, pain, and feelings deep down inside. I put them in a trunk, locked it, wrapped it with chains, and locked the chains. I put the chained trunk in a room deep inside, shut the door, and barricaded it so that no one could get to that part of me, not even myself.

Does this sound familiar to you? Is this similar to what you may have done? It wasn't until I was twenty-one years old that I began to make the steps, at a slow pace, to take my life back once again. It was at this point that I became a Christian, and shortly thereafter, I became pregnant with my daughter. Still, I was filled with hurt, pain, anger, pain, confusion, pain, uncertainty, and yes, even more pain. It was overwhelming. It was unbearable, but I had come to a decision that what I had experienced was no longer going to define me. I was no longer going to live my life as a victim.

I made a choice to fight for my life. I realized I was not created to live as a victim, overflowing with pain and too damaged to do any good in this world. I made a vow. I was going to live my life to the fullest of who and what God created me to be. I didn't want any less. This meant I had work to do. I was tired of what I had been doing before, and I was ready to move into this relationship with God to the fullest.

The journey we are about to go on in this book is about the changes that God did in me as well as my experience as a licensed counselor who works with those suffering from trauma and abuse. It's hard to narrow down all that took place in me into one book, but I will do my best. With the leading of God, I want to focus on those key points of the work He did in me and wants to do in you as well.

I've always said to people that I'm no better than they. If God can do this miraculous healing and restoration in me, then He can do the same in you. God is truly here to touch your heart, your life, your emotions, and your pain and bring you the restoration and healing you so desperately need.

I made a choice to fight for my life. I realized I was not created to live as a victim, overflowing with pain and too damaged to do any good in this world.

I can truly say the Kristin today is who God created her to be. She is not defined by her experiences. She is a daughter of the King, the Most High. She is the apple of His eye; she is His beloved, His precious one. She is loved. She is treasured. She is accepted. She is lovely. She is created in His image, and this makes her beautiful. She was fearfully and wonderfully made. She is all this and beyond what she could imagine to be. God always knew these things about me, but I didn't for many years.

Every day, I wake up feeling blessed—blessed at where God has me and what He is doing in me and through me.

Blessed with a healthy family and children. Blessed with my wonderful church family and friends. Do I still have struggles in life? Yes, we all do, but they no longer overwhelm me, cripple me, and stop me in my tracks like they did before when I saw life through the eyes of a victim. Now I see life, the good and bad, through the eyes of one who has been healed and restored. I know what I have been through. I am a survivor. I've walked through the valley of the shadow of death, and I lived! So, too, can you.

As I have been writing this book, I have been praying for you, believing with you, and standing in the gap for you, that our God will heal your soul and restore you to who He created you to be. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of the great work God is doing in your life.