

The  
Stories

I  
Never

Told

You



The  
Stories



I  
Never  
Told  
You

J O H N   R O Z E M A



REDEMPTION  
PRESS

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2nd Printing 2014.

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022.

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ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-544-0 (Print)

978-1-63232-545-7 (ePub)

978-1-63232-546-4 (Mobi)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2009908344

You wouldn't know it by peeking at my bank account or by looking at my material possessions, but I'm a very rich man! God has blessed me undeservedly and beyond my wildest dreams—with four wonderful treasures.

These include my love and my loyal companion, my wife and my best friend of more than thirty years, Janneke, (a common Dutch name, pronounced Yanukkah);

and my three dear sons,

Dennis, Kevin, and Darren.

Except where otherwise noted, the stories in this book were affectionately written for, and are lovingly dedicated to them.



Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.

—John Newton, 1725–1807





# Author's Note



The stories in this book are true; however, I have changed the names of those who have crossed my path during my life's journey, with the following exceptions: the names of my immediate and extended family members, as well as the names of those dear people who have given me their consent to use their names. In addition, with the kind permission of his family, I have included the name of Richard Lee Fisher, an architect from Southern California who had a bright and promising future. A great friend, Richard tragically died from a brain tumor in 1991 at age thirty-eight.

I have not changed the names of the Commander of the United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), the first American soldier killed in combat in Quang Tri Province, Vietnam, and the name of my commander who was killed in action at Khe Sahn just prior to the onset of the 1968 Tet Offensive battles in the Republic of Vietnam.

Finally, the names of an African American celebrity and an Irish composer, as well as the names of the founders of the Christian ministry Licht im Osten (Light in the East), with its headquarters in Stuttgart-Korntal, Germany, remain unchanged.



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# Acknowledgments



FOR NEARLY HALF a century, I have lived with an inexplicable, inward drive to chronicle the journey of my life. What I present here was mostly written from memory. My ability to vividly recall detailed accounts, especially from my early childhood years, can only be called a gift from God. It is therefore proper and fitting that I should begin by thanking the Lord for allowing me to preserve these memories and for enabling me to express and write down on paper what has been on my heart all these years.

Fundamentals of English Grammar and English Composition 101 were not my favorite topics in school. I think that's because as a student at Pasadena City College in California during the late sixties and early seventies, my mind was notorious for wandering off subjects that didn't tickle my fancy. Writing a collection of short stories and compiling them in book form required the help of my friends. I would like to recognize them here, listing them in the order in which the manuscript was edited.

Many people have encouraged me to write a book, but Dr. John Wine, MD, was the impetus around the time of the 2004 Thanksgiving holiday for me to start writing my life's story. Without my asking, both John and his wife, Barbara, volunteered to proofread my work. They did so on top of carrying a heavy day-to-day workload at the Burkeville

Medical Clinic in southside Virginia, and home schooling their two teenage children.

In April 2007, while I was in a virtual comatose state due to an adverse reaction to chemotherapy, doctors had little hope of my recovery. But I remember Barbara at my bedside, firmly and repeatedly telling me, “You can’t go yet! You must finish writing your book first!” John and Barbara’s efforts were not limited to editing and proofreading; they spent much time praying and seeing the book to its completion. For this I will always be grateful. These two wonderful people, who are pillars at my church, have blessed my family and me in ways I will never forget.

I would also like to thank my friend and former colleague Beth Nutter. While employed with the Department of Social Services, I never permitted official correspondence to leave my desk without first asking Beth to peruse it and make certain that what I had written was error free—for good reason. Beth has a natural, uncanny ability to detect grammatical imperfections. Among the many documents she carefully scrutinized was my yearly, seventy-five-page Employment Services Annual Plan. Beth has sometimes—and rightly so—accused me of being a “comma freak.” Each time I envision Beth looking over my work, I visualize her sitting at her desk behind a machine gun with her finger on the trigger, aiming for those commas. Over the years I have much appreciated her using critical literary eyes and sharing with me her deep thoughts and feelings about the account of my life.

Among those who helped with editing and proofreading the manuscript was Roberta “Bobbi” Page, a homeschooler parent of three boys. Together with her husband, Tom, Bobbi is co-publisher of three weekly community newspapers in southside Virginia: *The Monitor*, *The Sussex-Surry Dispatch*, and *The Prince George Journal*. In fall 2004, when I casually mentioned my intention to write my testimony, she responded, “May I please read it?” She also agreed to be part of our little editing circle. I’m so grateful for her expertise and the many contributions she has made to my writing efforts.

Janet Loeser, assisted by her daughter, Alyce, an English major and a recent graduate of Bluefield College in Virginia, put the finishing touches on the manuscript before submitting it to the publisher. Janet, who once taught English and writing to homeschooled children, sometimes

made me feel like I was a student in her class. She once confided to me that editing and proofreading the manuscript were her ministry. I much appreciate Janet and Alyce's investment in this book based on their keen literary insight and their many recommendations for improvement.

In addition to my editorial friends listed above, I would be remiss if I didn't mention Peter Geudeke from Emmen, the Netherlands, who taught me to minimize superlatives and to "say more with less." Peter assisted me with proofreading and editing the *Rozemagram*, a four-page newsletter published three to four times per year, when we lived in the Netherlands from 1991 to 1994.

Someone else who deserves special recognition is Lonnie Smith, who without giving as much as the slightest hint, volunteered to underwrite the publishing costs. He didn't know that I often asked the Lord where the money was going to come from for the publishing fees. Both Lonnie and his wife, Traci, are two very special people with huge hearts! Lonnie's kind and overly generous offer was an affirmation that the Lord wanted me to proceed with writing and publishing this testimony.

Last but not least, I express my undying love and gratitude to Janneke, who has been my staunchest supporter since the day we fell in love more than thirty-two years ago. Perhaps I should have listed her first because she, the first to see the rough draft, didn't hesitate to point out areas that needed correction or improvement. Janneke also helped me find appropriate Scriptures and was a constant source of encouragement during this extended letter-writing campaign. Without her many prayers, patience, and gentle nudging, these stories would never have been recorded.

To the Lord, under whose wings I have taken refuge, and to all the wonderful people mentioned above, I owe my profound gratitude.





# Foreword



THIS IS A book worth reading! *The Stories I Never Told You* is a series of letters that invite you on a journey worth taking. The letters are a reminder that each of us is a story and that God has written who we are into every detail. Every chapter is like looking into a mirror and reflecting a sense of the hopes and heartaches, tragedies and triumphs, most of us encounter. On several occasions I found myself thinking, *This is my story*. I suspect you will do the same. The author, John Rozema, found a way to write down stories that reflect God's authorship of his life. Recalling past experiences was an invitation to allow God to co-author the rest of his life's story.

Here is a preview of some of the themes that run throughout his letters: every young boy longs for his father's acceptance and approval; our earthly fathers often fail us, but our heavenly Father will forever be faithful; abandoned by his natural father and emotionally abused by his stepfather, John desperately wanted to experience the joy of God-given fatherhood. Instead, he grew up living in fear, rejection, and intimidation.

Though he disliked the home he grew up in, he fell in love with America. John found a warm, inviting home in his new country. For the first time in his life, thanks to his Aunt Julie, he heard the words, "I love you!" John writes, "All the tears that had been bottled up inside

me since I was a little boy—and there must have been an incalculable number—continued to pour out of me with loud weeping and wailing.”

Another theme emerges when John enters the United States Army. Travel with him to Vietnam and listen to how he meets God in a foxhole and later attempts to visit the Vietnam War Memorial while emotionally paralyzed. The memories are agonizing. He says, “With each new day, I was fully cognizant of the possibility that I might not make it back home alive.”

A third theme of mega proportion saturates the last chapters of John’s letters to a “dear friend.” Overcoming his fierce anger against his stepfather and being selected to attend the school of architecture, he proved to himself that he wasn’t “the dumb, stupid, ignorant kid” with big ears he had been made out to be. He had value. More importantly, God heard John’s cry for help; and he has been forever changed. He states, “I was basking in sin, always looking for something to fill that void in my life. And the more I sinned, the greater the void!”

While John lets his readers know that he was a master at wearing many masks, he couldn’t hide from God. Under the terrible weight of sin and guilt, he cried out to God. His fourteenth letter describes the miraculous encounter he experienced. Today he is a real man who by God’s grace has cultivated godly character we would do well to emulate. John wants everyone to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and to experience forgiveness of sin.

John was searching for a father, for freedom, for a family, for a country, and for God. Finding the longings of his heart, he ends his book with letters to a “dear friend” that detail his spiritual transformation and his insatiable desire to be a witness of God’s love to his family in Holland.

The Bible says that a wife is a gift from God. John describes another longing of his heart, God’s gift—Janneke van de Koot—on his wedding day: “To be in that idyllic, picturesque church building with a radiant, beautiful young bride standing at my side, looking like a princess in a fairytale, was almost too much for me to handle.”

His agonizing bout with cancer and the loving support of his church, New Covenant Fellowship, will warm your heart. Throughout each story is the truth that God is sovereign and personally involved in the affairs

of men. You will be challenged to recall your own past experiences and to find the meaning God has written there. I suspect that by the end of John's letters, you will gain a clear sense of how God has written the chapters of his life. Conversely, you will see how God is leading you into the rest of *your* story.

What a privilege it has been to write this foreword about the life of a man who demonstrates such awesome humility! John, *you* are a real man, a spiritual man, one with whom God is obviously pleased; and a man whom I greatly admire and respect. Thank you for the gift of your life's stories.

Your friend, pastor, and counselor,

David "Kirk" Kirkendall  
Crewe, Virginia



# Part One

## Preparatory School

There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under heaven:  
a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.

—Ecclesiastes 3:1–8



# How it All Began



My dear friend,

The Japanese invasion of Java Island in March 1942 shattered the tranquility of the beautiful, pristine, tropical paradise of the eastern shores of Java in the Netherlands' East Indies, where my mother lived with her parents, Hein and Isah Rozema.

During World War II, the Imperial Japanese Army confiscated all homes and properties belonging to Dutch citizens and confined them to detention centers under cruel and harsh conditions. During these difficult circumstances I was born.

Grandfather Hein was serving as a nineteen-year-old conscript in the Royal Dutch Army when he was shipped to the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) around the turn of the twentieth century. He and thousands of other young soldiers were transported to the tropical islands to wage war against native "savages" in an effort to colonize the islands. Like many of its western European neighbors, Holland was a colonial power.

## **A SHY NATIVE GIRL**

Soon after his arrival, Grandfather met Isah, a beautiful, shy native girl. Birth records are silent, but by best estimates she must have been fifteen or sixteen when she met my grandfather and fell in love with him.

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Leaving her native village and family, she accompanied him wherever the army sent him, often to hostile fire zones.

Not until after the birth of their third child did they decide to get married. My mother was the eighth child born into this happy family of fourteen children—seven boys and seven girls—along with several adopted children. Mother often remarked that the days of her youth were golden years.

My grandfather was the recipient of Holland's highest military decoration for valor, an honor that enabled him to retire at a relatively young age and receive a small pension. In 1920 Hein and Isah chose to settle down in the town Situbondo, where he was appointed chief of police until the outbreak of hostilities with Japan in World War II.

### EMMY

My dear mother, Emmy, was twenty-one when she became pregnant with me in November 1942. Only nineteen, my father was unprepared to take on the responsibilities of fatherhood. After much persuasion from an older sister, he decided not to marry my mother. Although I don't specifically recall Mother talking about her relationship with my father or her love for him, I know that his abandoning her broke her heart. I always sensed that somewhere deep inside, she harbored affection for him for all the remaining days of her life.

Several times during her pregnancy, Mother's older sister, Juliana (Aunt Julie), pressured Mother to get an abortion. Abortions during those days were not only rare and illegal; they were very risky. Unskilled local natives, lacking any form of medical knowledge or training, performed them in back alleys for a lucrative fee, using the most primitive methods imaginable. Mother steadfastly refused, and I was born on August 8, 1943. Ironically, Aunt Julie would later become a great influence in my life.

Immediately after my birth, my mother asked Uncle Roelof ("Ralph"), her second-oldest sibling, to report my birth to the local town office. Mother explicitly told him that my first name was to be "Guy." She should have written the name down because by the time he arrived at the office of vital statistics, he had forgotten it.



Without giving the matter much thought, Uncle Roelof decided to give me his name. At the time, all privately owned automobiles and motorcycles had been confiscated, and telephones were no longer in working order. Going home to tell Mother that he had forgotten my name, and then returning to the town office a second time seemed like too much effort for him.

He probably figured that Mother wouldn't object to my being named after him, but he was wrong. Mother was anything but happy when he returned home and told her that I was registered under the name Roel, a common Dutch name and abbreviated form of Roelof.

### **EARS**

While growing up, my name was Guy, but I never liked it. I also despised the name my uncle had given to me.

When I was an infant, Mother was unhappy with my ears. They seemed too large. According to her stories, they protruded awkwardly, almost perpendicularly to my little head. To remedy this problem, she taped both ears to my head with bandages each night before going to sleep. She hoped my ears would eventually grow at a normal angle and didn't realize that this procedure nearly flattened the upper edges of my ears, making them appear larger than normal size. Later, others often ridiculed me because of my ears.

### **THE FATHER MISTAKE**

Soon after the war, Mother decided to find a suitable father for me. Employed as a chauffeur for VIPs at a nearby military installation, she met many eligible bachelors. Mother assumed that the man who showed any affection for me would obviously make a wonderful father and a suitable husband. She dated several men, but only one demonstrated the desired affection.

On February 27, 1948, after a two-year courtship, Mother married Gerrit Jan Valk, a soldier in the Royal Dutch Army stationed in the Dutch East Indies. My friendly relations with this man soured almost immediately after they were married, and Mother's decision to marry him proved to be one of the most tragic mistakes of her life. During

this period, my stepfather relished teasing me and usually didn't know when to quit—only to become incensed when I began to cry. Mother's gentle attempts to intervene did little to alleviate the problem.

"We need to make a man out of him, not a sissy!" were his frequent replies. He demanded that I stop wailing. "Crying is for girls and little old ladies, not for boys!"

Realizing that I couldn't live up to my stepfather's expectations, I soon became afraid of him. Whenever possible, I kept my distance and avoided him at all costs.

One episode in particular stands out in my mind. On one long weekend, my parents rented a vacation home in the mountains near Bandung. While on this outing, my stepfather took me for a walk one afternoon on a deserted mountain trail. In an area surrounded by lush tropical vegetation, he ordered me to sit on a narrow ledge high above a deep pool of crystal clear water. My stepfather sternly told me not to move and to await his return.

I don't know how long I sat there, petrified and frozen in place. The slightest move, I realized, would cause me to fall into the water below. Because I was unable to swim, such an accident would have been the end of me. Eventually, my stepfather returned to pick me up and took me home.

Not until years later did I begin harboring strong suspicions that my stepfather may have tried to kill me that day and make it look like an accident. I believe that much of his harsh behavior toward me stemmed from the fact that he was a jealous man; he wanted all my mother's affection for himself.

My half sister, Hanna, was born in June 1948. During the winter of 1950, my family embarked on a twenty-one-day journey by ocean liner to the Netherlands, where I would live for the next twelve years. Indonesia had become an independent, sovereign nation, and most Dutch citizens were migrating back to their homeland.

Because of my stepfather's repeated and excessive angry outbursts at me during this voyage, I became convinced that Mother had married a monster. The trip marked the beginning of many years of emotional trauma that caused deep wounds in my soul and scars on my heart. I

feel the pain to this day and lick the wounds even as I write these words on paper.

### SKATING MISADVENTURE

We temporarily lived with my stepfather's parents in Deventer until a permanent home became available in Ede, where he was stationed as a professional soldier.

Transitioning from a hot, tropical climate to cold, harsh winter conditions wasn't easy. The winter of 1950 was exceptionally cold, and I preferred to stay indoors where it was cozy and warm. My stepfather, however, angrily insisted that I play outside despite the frigid temperatures. Like all good Dutch boys, I needed to grow up and be tough, he said. Playing outside in freezing temperatures for hours was part of the toughening process.

Every boy and girl in Holland learns to ice skate, and I was no exception. Without asking if I was even interested, my stepfather took me out on the ice one day and tried to teach me how to skate. The experience was nothing short of disastrous. By today's standards, the skates were old-fashioned. Except for the steel blades, they were fabricated out of wood and fastened to shoes with ordinary shoe strings.

By the time we reached the frozen waters, my fingers were so painfully cold and stiff that I could hardly bend them, let alone tie skates to my shoes. Mittens or gloves didn't keep my little fingers warm. Under my stepfather's critical, watchful eye, I strapped the skates to my shoes with great difficulty.

"Watch the other children," he ordered, "and keep your balance before lifting your foot off the ice!"

"But I'm too cold," I lamented. "I can't move."

"Stop your whining! Get out there and skate like the others!" he snarled.

As expected, I failed miserably at my first and subsequent attempts to gracefully move on ice. My legs and feet moved in one direction, but my skates in another. I slipped, and my face smacked on the hard, frozen ice—much to my stepfather's chagrin.

“Can’t you ever do anything right?” he repeatedly shouted. His verbal abuse amused nearby children, many of whom had already mastered the sport.

I was embarrassed, my cheeks flaming red. Though I loved the beauty of the winter scenery, I dreaded being outside in bone-chilling temperatures for hours. Despite my tearful objections, he was determined to see me skate flawlessly on the ice “like every good Dutch boy.” As a result of his anger and impatience, coupled with my clumsiness, all my efforts resulted in a painful, intimidating experience. Much to my delight, he became exasperated and eventually gave up hope of ever seeing me become an accomplished skater.

### THE BICYCLE DISASTER

The following summer, my stepfather must have had an exceptionally good day because he surprised me with a bicycle. I encountered one slight problem, however; my feet couldn’t reach the pedals even when he adjusted the seat to its lowest position. Children’s bicycles were simply not manufactured in Holland after the war.

To solve this height problem, my stepfather built two wooden blocks and bolted one to each pedal so my feet could reach. Though this idea may sound clever, pedaling this single-gear bicycle with this modification wasn’t easy. With my outstretched toes I could barely touch one block at its lowest point, while the other block at its highest point tended to spin and slip out from under my foot whenever I applied pressure to create momentum. I found myself concentrating more on keeping my feet planted on the improvised pedals than on steering the bicycle in a straight direction.

As a result, I often landed on the cobblestone pavement and frequently hit many unseen obstacles. My stepfather jogged behind me, working up a sweat, and shouting instructions along with expletives not fit for publication. To many onlookers this scene must have been an amusing spectacle. Though I suffered no serious injuries, I disliked riding the bike because it was simply another exercise in public humiliation.

## THE BUTCHER OF EDE

During the summer of 1951, we settled in a permanent dwelling, a two-story, brick row house at Lombok Lane 22 in Ede. Not long after this move, our family physician introduced me to the “Butcher of Ede,” an ear, nose, and throat specialist, because I needed to have a nasal polyp removed.

I soon learned why this man had received his nickname. His medieval methods of performing routine medical procedures were classic acts of sheer torture. Notorious for his short-fused temper, the doctor considered the use of locally administered anesthesia for the removal of a nasal polyp a waste.

I was very nervous when my mother accompanied me to the hospital that morning. After the doctor tightly strapped my waist and ankles to a chair, a muscular nurse pulled my head back as if in a headlock and held it firmly in place. Then, while this woman held one arm and another nurse tightly held the other, the “Butcher” slowly but firmly chipped away deep into my nasal cavity with what seemed like a hammer and chisel.

When he burned my nostril with a heated surgical tool to widen my nasal passage’s opening, I began to cry. In response he became angry with me.

“Stop your crying!” he ordered. “And stop acting like a baby!”

Terrified, I broke out in a cold sweat. The pain was intense, and I was bleeding and choking while the nurses still held me in their viselike grip. It was like a frightening, nightmarish scene from a Hollywood horror movie.

Fear turned to panic, and my wailing escalated to loud screaming. The doctor retaliated by cursing with loud, profane language, trying either to scare me or to quiet me. But this tactic didn’t work either. I don’t know how long this horrible ordeal lasted, but it seemed to go on for a lifetime.

## LIFE AT LOMBOK LANE 22

Though my stepfather didn’t inflict physical pain to the Butcher of Ede’s level, life at Lombok Lane 22 became increasingly intolerable as

a result of his continued emotional abuse. For reasons that baffle me to this day, he threatened to place me in a children's home or orphanage where I would never see my mother again. Those were his exact words! I never figured out what I had said or done to merit such a drastic reaction, but I believed every word he said. Being taken away from my mother was the most terrifying threat imaginable. To me, death would have been more tolerable.

While I grew up under these difficult circumstances, my mother kept me going from one day to the next. She was my rock, my refuge, my joy, and the only person I could go to for comfort. Being taken away from my mother and never seeing her again would have been a punishment I couldn't bear—and my stepfather knew it.

For many years I desperately tried not to say or do anything to irritate or anger my stepfather for fear that he would act on his threats. I lived in constant fear, and despite my best efforts to gain his approval, they were never good enough. He frequently reminded me of how stupid I was. He told me that I was “no good,” “would never amount to anything,” and would “always be a miserable failure!” It didn't take me long to believe those words, and my grades in school proved it.

Almost all these painful ordeals took place when Mother was absent. I never shared my anguish with her, nor did I tell her what her husband was doing to me. Instead, I learned to suffer alone in silence. My mean-spirited stepfather, a strict disciplinarian, was apparently oblivious to the long-term irreparable, emotional damage he was causing. I stayed silent because I figured my mother had her own pain to deal with. I wanted to protect her the best I could and didn't wish to add more to her plate.

## NO COWARD

Two more siblings were born to this marriage: Martin was born not long after we moved into our new home in October 1951, and Rita was born in December 1955. No one escaped the emotional injuries inflicted by my stepfather. Being the oldest child, however, I believe I received the brunt of his outrage.

Mother was a master at hiding her feelings. I suspect that under different circumstances she would have divorced this man; however,

while I was growing up in Holland, dissolving a marriage simply wasn't an option. Divorce was virtually nonexistent and in some circles shameful even to mention. It meant potentially becoming a social outcast. I don't believe Mother was prepared to pay such a heavy price.

And being married *did* have its advantages. A hard worker, my stepfather paid the bills on time and kept food on the table. He was, in fact, a good provider. As far as society was concerned, that was all that mattered.

Though Mother was good at hiding her feelings, she was no coward. She wasn't afraid to stand up to my stepfather when she thought he had overstepped the bounds of his parental authority. She did so at least once when she saw my stepfather slap me across the face for no good reason.

She stopped what she was doing and approached him without hesitation, pointing her finger between his eyes. Angrily but calmly, she said, "If I ever see you do that again, I will pack my suitcase, take the children, move out, and never come back!"

Mother meant what she said. Surprisingly, without further confrontation, he turned and walked away.

## MAKING EXCUSES

My stepfather had spent most of his wartime years as a prisoner of war in Japanese prison camps. Shipwrecked off the coast of Burma, he had spent several days in shark-infested waters, only to be rescued by a Japanese freighter. He and many other survivors had been taken prisoner and transported to Japanese slave labor camps. There he had been instrumental in building the now-infamous railroad through the treacherous, dense, and mountainous jungles of Burma.

He seldom spoke of his life as a prisoner of war, but I learned enough in school to know that allied nation soldiers working on the railroad had been exposed to insufferable tropical diseases, hunger, cruelty beyond imagination, and death at the hands of their Japanese captors. As a child, I always made excuses and rationalized my stepfather's abusive conduct because of his wartime experiences.

In all my years living with this man, I cannot recall a single instance of warmth, friendship, or affection. Though I know others loved and

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cared for me, my stepfather's ominous presence overshadowed all else. His insidious hostility toward me left a black mark on my life. In a few short years, I had changed from a happy toddler with my mother, safe and secure in my grandparents' loving home, to a boy with a shameful, humiliated life.

I hated my world! Humiliation, shame, and hatred were deeply entrenched in my heart and remained carefully hidden there. Sometimes I even thought of killing myself. Then I believed the answer to my problem was to leave home at my earliest convenience. In fact, that goal became the driving force of my young life.

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.

—Genesis 50:20

It wasn't until many years later that I learned the truth of this Bible passage.

Your friend,  
John