

## Amazing Grace

### *One Woman's Journey from Post-Abortive Devastation to Redemption*

Before I was old enough to speak, I knew that I was an accident. My parents, both just 17, were overwhelmed and struggling. I was the reason why. They divorced when I turned two and a long, ugly custody battle followed. I learned early on that the world was not a safe place and that love was conditional.

Eventually my father moved across the country to start a new family. And with all my little six year old heart, I knew that his "new" family did not include me.

From that point on it was just my mother and me and I decided that in order to survive I needed to do two things. First, I needed to swear allegiance to my mother at all costs, because she was all I had. Second, I must always be "good" and manageable, with no needs of my own.

For many years I played that charade fairly well. But by my early adolescence the empty places in my heart demanded to be filled. And oh, how I tried to fill them. At 15, I was hurting, angry, rebellious....and pregnant. At that time I considered abortion my only "real" option. I believed the rhetoric and the lies with which I had become so familiar: It wasn't really a baby. Abortion was my right. Besides, afterwards my life would return to normal. More significantly, however, I believed that I was somehow aborting myself - somehow undoing the damage I had done to my parents when I was born.

At 12 weeks pregnant, my mother brought me to her doctor, and while under general anesthesia, I had an abortion. I remember the long, lonely weeks that followed. One hot July night, I sat out on our porch and watched as the sun set behind the hills in the west. The sky was streaked with reds, gold and copper tones and I knew I should feel something - something wonderful, like awe or gratitude or even simple pleasure. But all I could feel was an aching, cavernous hole in the depths of my chest. How can emptiness be so heavy? I could barely breathe. Something was missing. Only I didn't know what. I couldn't be missing the baby. It wasn't even a baby in the first place. Besides the abortion solved the problem. Right?

Over the next couple of years the emptiness and darkness haunted me. Unable to face the past and associate those feelings with the abortion, I became fixated on the feelings themselves. Perhaps they were an omen, a premonition. Thoughts and fear of death tormented me as if there were a hawk with his talons in my back at every moment. The loneliness, the isolation, the prison to which I kept myself confined hurt the most. I believed that no one could possibly help me, no one would understand

One particularly bad day, during my junior year in high school I wished more than ever that I could tell someone. Then suddenly, as if a spontaneous wind was blowing at my back, I found myself walking across campus and into the office of one of my guidance counselors. Before I knew it, I was telling him about everything - the fear, the anxiety, the obsessive thoughts. Even as I did this, a part of me kept saying, "What are you doing? He's going to think you're crazy?" But like an infected

wound that had been cut open, everything gushed out. I finished by saying, "Well anyway, I know there's no answer."

My words hung on the air as I waited, expecting him to agree with me, chastise me or belittle me. But instead, he calmly looked me in the eye and said, "Well, yes there is an answer, and the answer is Jesus Christ." I sat there speechless as he proceeded to tell me about Jesus, about how He lived and died and rose again for me, so that I might be forgiven and have eternal life. He spoke boldly and with an authority my eyes had never seen. To this day I can remember feeling the presence of God in that room. I needed Jesus and I accepted Him into my heart.

For the first time in my life I felt hope. A light in the darkness. But something else was happening to me, something awful. The truth about the baby, the loss, the horror, demanded to be known. Because I thought Jesus would make me better, that He would erase my pain, I began to doubt my salvation. If I still hurt so much maybe I wasn't forgiven. Would God really forgive me anyway, after what I had done? I wanted the Lord's forgiveness but I feared his judgment and so I began to cling to God with one hand and the world with the other.

Around this time I began to experience an overwhelming craving. From the deepest places in my being I yearned for my baby. So at the age of 18, while still in college and living at home, I became pregnant. I was thrilled - I couldn't wait to have that baby! I told my parents right away.

Caught up in the excitement, I never anticipated their response. They were furious and, beyond my worst fears, they began insisting that I have an abortion. In that one moment the darkness I had fought against for so long returned. I felt sick, like I had swallowed a bowling ball. I gasped for air. I told my parents that I didn't think I could survive another abortion, but they refused to relent. They dismissed all other options, even adoption! The baby's father quickly followed my parent's lead and I found myself alone.

My parents hounded me daily, sometimes subtly, sometimes viscusly. Some days I felt I could barely move beneath the weight of their hatred. In the end, they made it clear that I had to choose. I had to choose between the baby or my parents. So the little girl in me, so afraid to lose her mother's love, stayed faithful to the vow of allegiance she took years before and I chose to sacrifice my baby to the false gods in my life.

During the nights before the abortion I would lie in bed and talk to my baby and tell her how sorry I was. Sorry that I wasn't brave enough. Sorry I was such a terrible mother.

The day came in late March. This time, while at a Planned Parenthood Clinic, while fully awake for the procedure, I lay there knowing that my baby, helpless and defenseless against the world, with no voice of her own, was being destroyed; and I, the one God purposed to protect her, I let the doctor take her life. I fully expected to die that day, believing that if God did not destroy me, as I deserved, the pain certainly would.

Thank God, He doesn't give us what we deserve. Even there, in my darkest hours, He never abandoned me. And while I was willing to let the pain consume me, He was not.

About ten years ago, my husband and I gave birth to our oldest daughter. Instead of experiencing the joy I had hoped for, I was terrified. Horrible thoughts swarmed around my mind: "What are you doing? You can't be a mother. You are a Baby Killer. That baby won't love you. You are worthless." I became depressed and ridden with anxiety to the point of panic. Just surviving each day seemed an enormous task.

Through a series of events only God could have designed, I found out about the Crisis Pregnancy Center in Unionville, CT, where they offer Post-Abortion Counseling. I remember feeling that going there would be a waste of time. After all, I had two abortions and I was a Christian when I had one of them. I believed I had stepped outside of God's grace. Maybe He would take me in but I would always remain on the outskirts of His love; I would never be a part of his family.

Amazingly, I went anyway. Like the day a mighty wind blew me to the place where I heard the gospel, so I found myself swept into the CPC office. I clearly remember the first day I met with Debbie. I sat in the rocking chair, talking and crying for well over an hour. When I had finished I looked up at her through blurry, tear-filled eyes. She just looked back at me and said gently, "Well, I believe we can help you." Next to the gospel, those were the sweetest words I had ever heard. Hope. A light in the darkness

In the next weeks and months that followed I met with Debbie every week in her office. Every week I watched and waited for the judgment I deserved. Only it never came. She was, to me, the arms and hands of God - gracious, compassionate and merciful.

Thus began a long process of healing. Above all I learned that I was not alone and that I was not crazy. I was experiencing Post Abortion Syndrome; something many post-abortive women experience, only because of our grief and shame, we suffer in silence. For the first time ever, someone validated my loss, my pain and the physical, psychological and spiritual trauma of the abortions. The CPC was a haven, a hospital, a safe place to talk.

Debbie helped me to understand that although accepting Christ did not erase the pain, He would help me bear the burden. I learned that God created, loved and wanted me and that I was not an accident. And I learned that the only one I ever need swear allegiance to is Jesus Christ, the Ultimate Sacrifice.

The hardest part of all has been truly accepting that my babies are real; because that also meant accepting their death and saying good-bye, for now. I wrote letters to each of them, telling them all I had longed to say and asking their forgiveness. Yet even now, so many years later, I still cry upon hearing certain songs: "If my heart had wings, I would fly to you and lay beside you as you dream. If my heart had wings."

Many times - as part of the healing process - Debbie had suggested that, when remembering the abortion experiences, I invite Jesus into the operating room with

me. This was very difficult and I avoided the thought for years. But then, one Sunday morning after listening to another woman's testimony about her post-abortion experience, God granted me this picture:

*I am lying on the table in the abortion room and I can see the faces of the doctors and nurses. I hear their voices and the groaning of the machines, and I feel them ripping my baby from my body. I am alone and afraid. Then suddenly, just over the doctor's shoulder I see Him. Jesus is walking toward me and in his arms He is holding my babies and smiling at them. Then He slowly looks up at me, and He smiles. And while I keep my eyes on his face, the noise of the machines and the doctors and the nurses and the pain and the fear all fade away. Until all I see is Him.*

I know that while all that is in this world tried to destroy the lives of my babies, Jesus has the victory! My babies are not missing or lost or even left for dead. They are safe, in his arms, in Heaven.

God is our healer, our redeemer and our hope. His mercy alone is more than I will ever deserve; He could have stopped there, but He did not. Instead, He pours Himself out on my life, His grace overflowing. Even now, He continues to redeem and restore the time I lost with my oldest daughter because of the depression and anxiety.

A number of years ago, God led me to own and direct a childcare center with 32 children. In his divine providence He delayed the employment of an infant caregiver, leaving me there to care for babies, four at a time, until I could tell apart their belongings by their scent. What He returned to me in that place I cannot measure.

Three years ago, after the birth of my youngest daughter, I had a feeling in my heart that I could not recognize. When I asked the Lord about it, He answered me with a vision of an old fashioned wax seal on my heart, and impressed upon it was the name Jesus. This was the first time in my life I experienced true joy.

Perhaps one of the most unexpected gifts was when a friend asked me to join her and her husband at the birth of their first child. She trusted me and wanted me there with her. God allowed me to join Him and this family as they welcomed new life into this world!

Can you imagine? Do you see how far He has brought me? Do you see how He has given to me even that which I would not allow myself to have? This is also the same God that has brought my mother, my stepfather, my husband and my oldest daughter to Christ. This is the God that I know: a God whose grace is sufficient, lavish and bold. You see my God didn't take me back as a hired hand, offering me leftovers and hand-me-downs. He took me back as His daughter. He ran to me and brought me His ring and His robe. He threw a celebration and is returning to me all the gifts he ever intended since before the beginning of time - restoring fully unto me the years that the locusts had eaten.