

Dirty Little Secrets

by J. Lee Grady

Men who were sexually abused as boys often find it difficult to talk about their pain. But God has provided a path to healing.

Like most 9-year-olds, Alan Chambers didn't know much about sex, and he didn't think about it too often. Always busy playing with his Star Wars action figures, watching TV or doing math homework, he had no idea that his boyhood innocence was about to be snatched from him by an intruder.

The unexpected invasion occurred on a warm spring day in 1981, when several relatives were visiting the Chambers' spacious ranch-style home in Winter Park, Florida. The adults were conversing in the kitchen, and most of the visiting cousins were playing in the backyard when Alan went to his bedroom. Suddenly his 14-year-old cousin entered and closed the door.

"Take off your clothes. I want to try something," the older boy ordered.

Alan had always admired his cousin. He was tall, broad-shouldered and athletic. He was everything Alan wished he could be when he grew up. Sensing just a tinge of fear, but not knowing why, Alan decided not to resist because he wanted his cousin to like him.

The next few minutes were a painful blur. Alan bent over his small twin bed, looking at the blue quilted spread covered with images of Chewbacca, Han Solo and Star Wars robots. He gazed at the stuffed dog that always sat on his pillow. Alan couldn't comprehend what was happening. His heart was racing, his palms were sweating, but he didn't know if what his cousin was doing to him was good or bad. It felt uncomfortable, but he liked the fact that someone he loved was paying attention to him. His innocent mind was filled with a million questions--but he couldn't access any answers from his limited understanding of sexuality.

This is weird, he thought. Does this mean I'm a girl? Will I get pregnant? Will I get sick?

When the incident was over, Alan's cousin warned him sternly: "Don't say anything to anybody. They won't believe you, and you would get in trouble."

Alan agreed to keep quiet--even though he was screaming for help on the inside. He didn't realize he had been raped and that his personality had just been violently disfigured. He didn't know that his own gender identity--his sense of maleness--had been uprooted. And he didn't realize that this seemingly harmless episode on a sunny Florida afternoon would completely alter his destiny.

Permanently Scarred?

Alan's story of boyhood sex abuse isn't unique, but his has a much happier ending than most. Although the incident in his bedroom 16 years ago soon led him into a homosexual lifestyle, he found emotional healing and eventual transformation in 1991 after receiving counseling from a Christian ministry in Orlando. Today he's 25, he's engaged to a woman in his church and he's considering entering full-time ministry with Exodus International, the nation's largest Christian outreach to people who struggle with homosexuality.

"I'm healed today," Alan says. "But it didn't happen overnight. I had to get gut-level honest about my past, and then I had to find a group of Christians who would love me no matter what I had done."

Through his work with Exodus, Alan has learned firsthand how rampant sexual abuse is in America. He says the majority of the men who come for counseling at the Orlando office were molested by a family member or friend. Exodus International's executive director, Bob Davies, says a 1990 survey of ex-gay men revealed that 51 percent of them were molested before age 18. (Another national organization, Childcare U.S.A., says 20 percent of all men in the United States have been sexually abused, compared with 38 percent of women.)

"We see the fallout and the agony of sex abuse every day," Davies says. "And the most tragic thing is that it takes years for some of these people to overcome the effects of abuse."

Why does sex abuse cause a boy to develop homosexual leanings? Exodus counselors believe that when boys are violated in this way by another male--especially by an adult--their sense of gender is altered.

"A boy who has been raped by a man may develop a belief that he is somehow feminine, because a male was so powerfully attracted to him," says David Kyle Foster, a counselor based in Nashville, Tennessee, and author of the book *Sexual Healing*. "The boy may grow up with the incident of abuse obsessively fixed in his mind. Somehow the mind of a child can become scrambled, and he thinks that he is somehow meant for the sexual satisfaction of his own gender." Shawn Corkery, a former homosexual who works at the Exodus headquarters in Seattle, says that's what happened when a man molested him when he was only 4 years old. He tried to repress the painful memories of the incident, and he unconsciously rejected male power so he could protect himself.

"Because of the abuse, masculinity represented a force that could hurt me," Shawn explains. "I pushed it away, but in doing so I hindered a key place in my development." **Because every normal boy needs fathering and a positive male**

presence in his life, Shawn began to crave masculine attention--and the craving developed into an erotic attraction to men.

Not all men who are sexually abused as boys become homosexuals, and some men who never experience abuse develop homosexual feelings anyway. Most Christian counselors believe lack of affectionate affirmation from a father or male role model is the primary reason boys develop same-sex attraction. If a boy who is already starved for his father's love is then abused by another male, he will most likely become gay.

Although Alan Chambers was certainly traumatized by his cousin's act of abuse in 1981, today he says that one incident wasn't the only factor that contributed to his homosexuality. He believes he was already "primed" to become a homosexual because he craved male affection--and didn't get it from his workaholic father. He also felt deficient in his masculinity because he wasn't athletic.

"I felt rejected by my dad, my older brother and my peers at school," says Alan. On the playground, his playmates taunted him with names like "queer" and "faggot." His longing for positive affirmation from males began to control him; he eventually began to fantasize about having sex with young men who resembled the cousin who raped him.

When Alan became a Christian, he joined a church in Orlando that had experience ministering to homosexuals. He also joined an Exodus support group, where he was able to talk openly about his problems without being condemned. And a heterosexual man from his church offered to "re-father" him by offering nonsexual affection and loads of prayer and encouragement.

Today, Alan is offering that same type of ministry to other men who struggle with homosexuality and the dirty secrets associated with it.

"Looking back, I'm actually glad this happened to me," Alan says. "It was because of my sexual brokenness that I had to come to Jesus and discover His love."

Steps to Freedom

Christian men who were abused as boys are often too embarrassed to talk about their pain--either because churches don't understand sexual dysfunction or because they are downright judgmental and condemning toward those who struggle with homosexuality. As a result, many men suffer in silence.

They should be encouraged to know that a growing number of ministries have been established in North America in recent years to extend Christian compassion to the sexually broken. One of those is First Stone Ministries in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. One of the leaders is assistant director Stephen Black, whose own struggle with homosexuality began when he was abused by a family friend at age 6 and continued until he was frequenting gay bars and cavorting with several male lovers.

Today Black is healed, and he has a wife and three children. New Man asked him to share with our readers what steps they should take to find healing from sexual abuse.

1. Face your pain and forgive. It is imperative that you be honest about what happened in your past, Black says. If possible, try to contact the person who abused you and then confront them.

"When you were abused, you lost control," Black explains. "It's important to confront the abuser so you can get your security back."

Before you speak with the person, however, you must forgive them from your heart and seek to have Christ's compassion for them. Don't approach them if you still have anger or bitterness in your heart.

Shawn Corkery realized he was seething with rage about his abuse. "God forced me to realize I wanted revenge," he says. "He made it clear through His Word that I could no longer judge my abuser. When Jesus died on the cross, He not only died for my sins but for all the sins that were done against me."

2. Get in a situation that provides spiritual accountability. An important key to sexual healing, Black says, is affirmation from other Christian men, particularly "ever-straight" men--those who have never struggled with gay feelings. When heterosexual men offer fatherly affection, prayer and encouragement to men who suffer from gender confusion, their love has a healing power.

When Alan Chambers joined an accountability group, his heterosexual friend Kirk offered counsel, prayer and nonsexual hugs. The affection, which caused Alan to weep for five hours straight on one occasion, helped him regain his sexual identity. Kirk's hugs, in a sense, filled the void left by Alan's unaffectionate dad.

"All men need a dad in their lives," Black explains. "You can find those healthy, heterosexual role models in the church."

3. Receive healing prayer. Men often bury loads of pain and guilt associated with abuse. Black says this pain can only be healed through prayer.

"You need to get in touch with the pain that the abuse caused, along with the shame and the guilt. You have to take the pain to the cross of Jesus, and realize that He died to take it away," Black explains.

There's no one formula to follow in healing prayer, and many times men who were abused will also need deliverance from demonic powers. But sensitive prayer counselors will not offer a quick fix. "Some churches think you can just cast out a spirit of homosexuality, and then expect instant results," Black notes. "But that's not going to happen. You have to draw near to God and let Him heal your broken heart."

Shawn Corkery says his healing process took time, and he was often tempted to return to homosexual pornography to feed the void he felt for maleness. But one Sunday morning he sensed God was speaking to his heart as he held a communion wafer in his hands.

"The Lord said, 'Look what's in your hands. You want another man to complete you? Then why don't you eat My flesh and drink My blood, because I am the only One who will make you complete.'" Shawn began weeping as he realized that Christ had offered him full redemption from his past. It was one of many healing moments he experienced over a several-year period.

Today, many men who have never had the courage to face the pain of abuse are seeking help from Christian

counselors. One of them is Jim Bakker, the former televangelist, who admitted last year in his best-selling book, *I Was Wrong*, that he was sexually abused at age 11 by a young man in his church. Bakker told *Charisma* magazine that it wasn't until he went to prison that he came to terms with the abuse and talked about it with a prison chaplain. "I spent my lifetime thinking [the abuse] was my fault," Bakker said. "The first time I shared my story at a men's meeting in a Florida church, I was shocked by the number of men who came up to me and told me they too had been molested as children."

Hopefully more men like Jim Bakker will discover that sexual abuse doesn't have to remain a dirty little secret. And hopefully more Christian ministries will extend compassion--and not condemnation--when hurting men bring those secrets into the open. NM

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