

Prologue...Or, Why Am I Writing This Book?

Growing up I never thought all that much about bullies as a subset of humanity. Being the youngest of three and the only female, I experienced boys in general as persons to battle, bait, charm, resist, and sometimes rally around when something good was happening. I resigned myself to the fact that this was the normal social framework of life and I needed to learn to deal with it successfully.

Bullies were always boys...boys who pushed you down and then laughed when you cried. Or brothers who snuck up behind you when you weren't looking, or broke your mom's favorite vase and blamed it on you. Or the neighbor kid with funny glasses who lived for the day when he could booby trap the sidewalk so you'd flip off your bike coming around the corner and be hurled like a spent cartridge onto the driveway.

The day came when I realized my understanding of a bully was way too narrow, misleading to the point of pygmy thinking, and that it was so much more than my childhood characterizations. Much more!

It was the day when I looked over the wreckage of what I thought had been the construction of a pretty good life built by hard work, determination, and a belief that I could overcome whatever came my way and survive. Instead, I was struck by the suffocating reality that everything I valued and strived for was undergoing utter deconstruction and devastation. My marriage, my family, my reputation, my hopes and dreams for the future all were exploding like a disaster at a Chinese fireworks factory. The only thing missing were sirens and the TV cameras!

What had happened? Who had done this horrific thing to me? Who was responsible? What could I do about it? Huge questions with no answers, and nothing but an empty feeling in my soul as if it were shot through with a blast of double-aught buckshot leaving gaping holes for my identity and reputation to seep out.

I was raised to believe I knew God and that being included in my family's membership of the local Baptist Church gave me an early spiritual identity. I have a distinct memory of going to the altar as a ten-year old, giving my heart to Jesus, and asking to be baptized. I attended a Christian college and marrying someone I met there deepened this faith identity and because of our vocations, a pattern of teaching, coaching, serving, and living in other similar educational communities across the country continued to define our faith culture.

Then the music stopped! The day came that I had to quit lying to myself and admit that I'd lost touch with reality, that a marriage isn't a marriage if I never seemed to know where my husband was or what he was doing, or that my family really wasn't a family when its members were never all together at the same place at the same time and that no one seemed to care about it. I hit the wall so hard it literally incapacitated me. I was utterly devastated!

Crying to the edges of my eyes so that I wouldn't ruin my mascara became a learned art as I drove to school to engage with my students each morning. Having to face the empty darkness as I drove home in the evening created panic attacks that nearly immobilized me.

"Angst" has a definition but, just writing it and speaking it silently to myself even now fills me with a sense of nothingness.

I woke up one morning knowing that something was very wrong in my world. I was despondent and terribly sad, there was a pressure in my chest, my brain and my back that made it difficult to breathe, to get out of bed and instruct my legs to take me to work. I learned to cry tearlessly and silently as I processed shaming and shunning treatment. I put on a happy face to acknowledge a friend and pretend as if my life had some normalcy and meaning although feeling I was on the Titanic's course with an unseen but deadly iceberg in my path.

I was overwhelmed the day I realized that I was in a battle, a great and terrible battle for the preservation of my soul and the souls of my family. Who or what was in control of my life? I needed to know what was going on, exactly who my enemy was, what the rules of engagement were, and what could be done about it. I was quite certain that if I understood these things and the other people in my family got themselves straightened out that my situation would improve immensely!

One summer day a very good friend suggested to me that I join her and some other mutual friends for an evening with a woman whom God was using to minister to women in our area. It seemed a totally remote possibility to me, as they were all from the Seattle area and during the summer I was on Whidbey Island, fifty miles plus a ferry ride away. But, for some reason, I toggled the invitation into my memory bank.

The meeting day arrived and I wasn't able to find any excuse not to join them and so I loaded up my trusty faithful Skeeter, "human dog extraordinaire," and began the trek down island. Disembarking the ferry, I was so hot, tired, and thirsty I stopped by the local tavern at the landing for a beer before continuing on my way, just to settle my nerves, perhaps!

I arrived at our hostess' beautiful home in a lovely garden setting and, parking under an inviting maple tree, got my dog watered and settled before heading to the porch. Peering through the doorway past my hostess, I saw ten or twelve women looking as if they were straight out of a William Faulkner novel in their cool cotton dresses and summer sandals, sipping iced drinks while I tried to compress my 5' 8" frame into the wallpaper to conceal my attire of shorts, T-shirt, and flip flops. Quickly finding a seat on the sofa allowed me to curl my legs underneath myself to be less of a linear spectacle and to feel as though all my body parts were properly covered.

Our hostess introduced the guest of the evening, a Christian speaker in our area significantly known for her ability to share about the spiritual gifts God has given to His followers. This was new territory for me and I watched in some fascination as she

brought out pretty little boxes all beautifully gift wrapped, explaining that spiritual gifts were more valuable than any gift we could ever receive from another human being.

She continued to relate that these gifts were God given to believers by the Holy Spirit and then proceeded to describe them: teaching, healing, faith, works, discerning of spirits, word of knowledge, spiritual language spoken and interpreted. She explained that her gift was that of the word of knowledge, known as a prophetic gift, and as she would pray over an individual the Holy Spirit would direct her to read specific verses in the Bible that revealed what He wanted that person to know about themselves and their situation.

If we so chose, we were invited to come up and sit by her, one at a time, and she would pray over us and share what the Holy Spirit was revealing. She had a small tape recorder and told us that this was so we would have a record of the things she shared because, in her words, “I will never remember afterwards anything that I spoke to you and you may want to refer back to this encounter.”

I sat tight while someone else went up to be prayed for and after seven or eight minutes returned to their seat. Another person went up and our speaker touched her hand and proceeded to pray, search Scripture, and speak a message of encouragement to her. By this time, I knew I was at this gathering for a reason and that I was to go next, bare legs and all!

She took my hand, clicked the Start button on the tape recorder, shuffled several pages in her Bible and spoke these life changing words to me: “The Lord gives me Proverbs 29:25. ‘For the fear of man is a snare but whoever puts their trust and confidence in the Lord will be safe.’”

I felt as if a healing spotlight had just been directed at my life. How did she know? How in the world could she know that I was so entrapped by fear and the consequences of humiliation and uncertainty in my life that sometimes I would have difficulty expressing myself? I would stumble through a response and talk in circles to avoid having to confess the trauma I was going through and to protect all the culprits involved, including myself!

She continued to speak God’s love and faithfulness and healing over my life, moving on to other passages in the Bible that confirmed these truths. At one point I recall her saying, “I don’t know who you are but, God is going to use you to speak to people...people who are caught up in addictions like yourself, and people who have positions in ministry and leadership. He is going to do this because He knows He can trust you, that you will not falter in doing what He tells you.”

When she concluded her time with me, she then prayed, again confirming and thanking God for all the places I would go and all the people I would minister to and help direct to Jesus because of what I was going through. I had never met this woman, had no knowledge of her ministry nor anything about her, but the Holy Spirit had revealed my

life to her as if it were an open book so that she could share the hope, love, and grace of God with me.

This was a life-changing moment for me. Through that interaction, God began to reveal Himself and became deeply real and personal to me like I had never conceived possible. He KNEW me...He knew how I felt, my fears and struggles, and He loved me anyway, enough to share with this woman of God things He wanted to make certain I would receive as being truly from Him. He wanted me to know that He was the God who loved me deeply and was looking out for me but, that it was imperative I also realize there was a Deceiver in this world who was doing everything possible to destroy my life, my family, and my trust in God.

It was a beautifully sobering moment!

Months later, on January 1, 1985, I was in my little red Toyota GTS with my lifetime friend Anne and two sets of cross-country skis heading up Interstate 90 towards Snoqualmie Pass on our way to a couple of days schussing around the countryside near a friend's cabin to escape the pressures of life. Snow-capped mountains loomed like frosty saw teeths in the distance as we neared the summit and I felt an increasing uneasiness inside that was becoming heavier and more daunting with each passing mileage marker. In a burst of confession I said to the Lord, "All right! My life is a total mess and I don't know why you'd want it but, if you have any use for it, it's yours!"

A sense of calm came over me immediately as I brushed tears from my eyes and looked at Anne, sure that she would be wondering who on earth I had been talking to just now and what the heck was going on. However, there was absolutely no reaction from her and she continued to look calmly out the window as we descended the Pass. Years later, as I began to write my story, I asked her about that day and she had absolutely no recollection of any unusual conversations or verbal interactions during our drive. What I thought was a blathering outburst of my confession and repentance to God had in truth been a quietly private moment before His throne and the front seat of my red Toyota GTS!

I knew that if I was going to walk in fellowship with Jesus, submitting to the care and direction of my Heavenly Father, I was going to have to learn how to do this. I was going to have to learn to walk in relationship with Him and surrender to His lordship and presence in my daily life, something I had never experienced before. In order to do this I needed to know what the Truth was. Knowing Truth became my objective and all I knew was that to reach it I was going to have to know what the Bible said and learn how to walk with Jesus in Truth every single day. I had no idea what I was in for!