

## Behind Closed Doors

It has been said that love is unconditional especially when concerning one's children. What's more precious than our children? So innocent and carefree, what is there not to love about children? A part of me may have believed that as a child, but as time went on, the unconditional love that my parents were supposed to have for me and my siblings, soon escaped me and led me to believe that my life was hopeless. I very seldom allow myself to look back to where I came from or spend time wondering how I got to the point that I am today. However, looking back now, into the dark corner of my mind, I can plainly see a great multitude of dysfunctional behaviors that leaves me wondering how my siblings and I got as far as we have. Although the statistics are astounding, regarding the outcome of victimized children, I for one, realized the misconduct of the abuser, and focused on me and how I could make my life better. However, the road to my victory of overcoming the victim of circumstance was not without failure. Life's course took me through the phases of: being the victim, avenging the victim, and reprogramming my own life to put a halt to the vicious cycle that would have undoubtedly taken place.

My earliest memory draws me back to when I was a mere five years of age. The incident occurred on a Sunday morning when I was unable to find my "going-to-church shoes." My father was big on church and was never late for the morning sermon. I was ready, as were my mom, and four other siblings, but I could not find my shoes. I sought out my shoes as if they were an important mission sent out by God himself, but to no avail. My father took notice of my unfortunate distress and chased me from behind as if to somehow frighten me, even more than I already was, into finding the elusive shoes that much quicker. After a short period of time, his tenacious limitations soon fell short and I could hear the rattle of his mighty belt being loosened from his straps. I remember as if it was yesterday. I wished that I could magically shrink in size and hide within the cracks of our marble tiled floor. However, but my childish imagination would again be beaten down by the monster I feared more than the *boogeyman* himself. He was whipping me now; all over my body. There was nothing I could do but "take it like a man", as my father would often say. I was scared and wanted my mom but she and everyone else was in the car ready for the short trip to church. My mother would not have intervened, out of fear, but her presence would have comforted me just the same. After the beating ended, I crawled into my sister's bedroom to seek shelter and low and behold, my "going-to-church shoes." They lay there beneath her dresser; they seemed to be glaring at me as if they were screaming my name, "Jason, we're in here, we're in here." At age eight, I attempted suicide but the belt was loosened from around my neck. The beatings went on till I was twelve years old. My father then went to prison which meant that I was finally in charge of my own life and everything else for that matter. I was now a God. I was God, and retribution would soon be mine.

After my father went to prison for molesting two of my sisters, I became uncontrollable without the discipline I once knew, and was sent away to a group home. From there, I went to more group homes and foster homes; twelve different homes and twelve different schools in all. I had the liberty of going to one school for only two weeks, before being sent to another home. After my father got released from prison I was sent back to live with him. The monster I feared for so long was now being forced into my life once again. The man that repeatedly raped my two sisters for nine years and beat me for what seemed like an eternity was now back in my life. I repeatedly asked myself, "Why me? What have I done to deserve this?" However, my father seemed different now. He was more at peace with himself and the relationship between us seemed important to him for the first time in my life. He apologized for his atrocities and from there we moved on. He remarried when he was released and seemed to have a good start and a new lease on life. My stepmother was quite a bit younger than my father and I saw her as being more on my level. We enjoyed a lot of the same things in life. Music, the foods we ate and liking the same friends that I had, were all things that brought us even closer together. After a period of about a year and a half, our relationship intensified and her title as "stepmother" soon diminished. Our affair lasted only a few short months before it became apparent to my father what was happening. That terminated the relationship between my father and me for quite some time. Looking back, I can clearly see that the one within had a vindictive side. My inner child seemed to have taken control of me and was avenging my father. As much

as I hate using a crutch, I can truly say that I did not see the relationship coming. I was perhaps, blinded by the past.

Though, uncertain of the possible reasons, I was alone once again, but this time it was my own creation. After two more attempts of taking my own life, I got treatment at a hospital. I thought long and hard about what I did and decided that that life was not for me. I would choose a new path and would prove to everyone, including myself, that even wild animals may be tamed with both tenacity that my father lacked and courage that my mother failed to present. I would take charge of my life and conquer the enemy within me. It would not get the best of me again. Now that I was in control of my life, I decided to get a job and begin a new life. I enjoyed my job at the polystyrene plant and being promoted was as easy as changing my socks it seemed. Now I was not only happy, but was making good money as well. After about a year at the polystyrene plant, I met my future wife Amy and fell in love. We wed September 13, 1997, and from there had a beautiful baby boy. My life now was as good as it could be. I had my own family now and the kind of love that stories are made of. I knew the true meaning of unconditional love. The love I never felt or thought existed as a child. I kept my job at the polystyrene plant for almost ten years and decided to sacrifice the financial freedom we've become accustomed to, by getting an education. I always dreamt of going to college, but who would've guessed that a drop-out like me would ever amount to anything. Not me and certainly not my parents for that matter. On another note, my mom, sisters and brother have since started to come back into my life after fifteen years of separation, leaving me to believe that life couldn't be better.

In a matter of speaking, I guess I can safely say that I have been on both sides of the fence. I've lived with a coke dealer, spent nights on a cold sidewalk, been the drop out and a college student, been both hated and loved by my mother and father, have been a loving son, and now the loving father. Through it all, I am able to now lift my head high and know that when times got tough and nobody was there, I pulled through it with both the tenacity and the courage that my parents did not have and will eagerly continue to be the good parent, role model and friend to my son and a loyal and loving husband to my wife. Most importantly though, I will think of myself as someone who not only survived a bad childhood, but beat the odds and broke the cycle. Victory is mine.

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