



ANN'S STORY



The little girl stiffened with fear as she heard soft footsteps coming down the hall. Alone in her grandparents' darkened guest bedroom, she thought about slipping out of the bed and hiding beneath it. But hearing the doorknob slowly turn, she knew it was too late. So she pulled the covers over her head and burrowed to the bottom of the bed, hoping somehow he wouldn't find her.

She heard him step into the room.



Past Sexual Abuse

“Pumpkin, it’s me, Grandpa,” she heard him whisper. “Grandma is sound asleep, so we can have our secret visit now.” The little girl squeezed herself into a tight ball at the bottom of the bed, wishing she could make herself smaller, wishing she could even disappear. She didn’t like Grandpa’s “secret visits.” He touched her where she didn’t like being touched. But she couldn’t tell anyone about the touching because Grandpa said it was a secret. Besides, she didn’t want to tell anyone because she thought she would get in trouble for doing such a bad thing.

The little girl heard the bedroom door close. “Come on out, Pumpkin,” Grandpa whispered. She cringed as her grandfather’s hands patted the covers until he found the lump at the bottom.

“No secret visit, Grandpa,” she said as he began slowly peeling away the covers. “Please, Grandpa, no visit tonight.”

“But we must have our secret visit, Pumpkin,” he said in a syrupy tone. His hands were reaching between the sheets to find her.

She balled up as tightly as she could. “No, Grandpa, no. No, Grandpa, no. No, no—”

“Wake up, wake up.” Ann felt someone jostling her gently by the shoulder. “You’re having a nightmare, Annie. Wake up.” The whispering voice she heard was not her grandfather’s. It sounded like Heather’s voice.



Ann's Story

After another jostle, Ann snapped fully awake with a start. Heather was shaking her, and it was dark. Ann suddenly remembered she was in a sleeping bag in her bunk at summer church camp. Heather and four other girls from church were in the cabin with her. Their adult counselor, Jenny Shaw, was there too.

Ann released a sigh of relief. She was not six years old as she'd been in her terrible dream; she was fourteen now. And she was not with her grandfather; she was with her friends at camp. Yet the dream had left her heart beating rapidly, and she was drenched with sweat even in the cool, rustic mountain cabin.

"Ann, are you all right?" Heather whispered. "You were saying, 'No, Grandpa, no.' It sounded like you were in pain."

Ann could barely make out her friend's face in the darkness. "Yeah, I'm all right," she said, just above a whisper. "Like you said, it was just a bad dream. I'm fine now."

Heather continued in a hushed tone. "It sounded awful, like your grandfather was chasing you with an axe or something."

"I'm sorry I woke you up," Ann said, diverting attention from the dream. "I hope I didn't wake up the whole cabin."

"Don't worry," Heather assured her, "everybody else is still sawing logs."

//

Past Sexual Abuse

Ann Cassidy considered Heather Wells the best of all possible friends. Heather had been like a sister—always there for her, always concerned. Their friendship had begun in the fifth grade when Ann's mother had enrolled her in Faith Christian School. Ann had thought it odd when Mom put her in a Christian school, especially since the family did not attend church. But it worked out for the best.

In that first year at Faith, Ann met two people who became very special to her. First, she met Heather Wells in Mr. Trotter's fifth-grade class. Second, she met Jesus Christ through the worship and Bible teaching in the weekly chapel service. Ann trusted Christ in October of that first year and began attending church with Heather on Sundays. They had been like sisters ever since.

"So what were you dreaming about?" Heather pressed with sisterly nosiness.

Ann didn't want to answer her. She'd had the same dream many times before. It always left her feeling dirty and empty, because she knew it was more than a bad dream. It was also a bad memory.

"It was nothing, really" Ann said, aware that she was seriously stretching the truth. "We should go back to sleep."

"Are you having problems with your grandfather, Annie?" Heather bored in, still whispering. "Is there something you want me to pray about?"



Ann's Story



That was one of the many things Ann appreciated about Heather. Her friend prayed about everything. “Grandpa Bennett died two years ago,” Ann answered.

“Oh, sorry. I just thought . . .” Her words trailed off.

“No problem,” Ann said. “Let’s get back to sleep. Are we still having morning devotions together?”

“Of course. Out by the archery range right after breakfast.”

“Okay, goodnight,” Ann whispered. “And thanks.”
“Goodnight.”



Ann was still awake when she heard deep, noisy breaths coming from the bunk next to hers. Heather had fallen back to sleep. *I didn't exactly tell you the truth, Heather,* Ann explained silently. I don't have any problems with Grandpa now, because he's dead. But I have never told anyone about what Grandpa did to me. Now I'm so ashamed about what happened that I'm afraid to tell anyone. And I can't seem to get these awful memories to go away. Maybe it is something I need you to pray with me about.

At breakfast, Jenny Shaw's cabin won the Camp Director's "Mr. Clean" award for the third straight day. Heather Wells led the raucous cheers—as usual—while Ann stayed in the background—as usual. People couldn't believe that she and Heather were friends.

Past Sexual Abuse

Heather was so outgoing and Ann was so quiet. Yet Heather never left Ann out of anything. It was another reason why Ann appreciated her best friend.

After breakfast, Ann and Heather went to their favorite log next to the archery range for devotions. Before they could open their Bibles, Ann brought up the topic that had been in the front of her brain since their brief, middle-of-the-night chat. "Before we read, I have to apologize to you."

Heather cocked her head with curiosity. "For what?"

Ann squirmed on the log, feeling very nervous about bringing up the subject. "Last night I told you that I didn't have any problems with my grandpa."

"Yes, because your grandfather died two years ago."

"Well, I didn't exactly tell you the truth about Grandpa."

"You mean about him being dead?"

"No, I mean about the problems."

"You had problems with your grandfather? That's what the dream was about last night?"



The fresh reminder about the dream sent an icy chill down Ann's spine. She stared at the ground, pushing pine needles around with the toe of her sandal. Finally she said, "I've never told anyone about this, Heather, not even my parents."



Ann's Story

Heather took Ann's hand. She seemed to sense how difficult it was for Ann to talk about it. "It's okay, Annie" she assured her. "You know I'm here for you. You can tell me if you want to."

"It all started when I was about four years old. My parents used to take me to stay with Grandma and Grandpa Bennett several weekends a year while they went away. When Grandma was asleep or at the store, my grandpa . . . did things to me ... that weren't right." Ann could not keep tears of shame from flooding her eyes. "He . . . touched me in my private areas. He made me ... touch him too. He said it was our secret. He said I should never tell anyone, so I never did. But I can't stop dreaming about it."



Resting her head on her friend's shoulder, Ann began to cry. She felt Heather's comforting arm around her and heard her sniffing too. "Annie, you poor thing," Heather said in a broken voice. "I didn't know you had such a big hurt in your past. I'm so sorry." The two of them sat and cried for another minute.

"How long did this go on?" Heather said as they wiped their eyes dry.

"About three years," Ann explained. "Then Grandpa got real sick. He was in a nursing home until he died two years ago.

"I didn't tell my parents" Ann continued, "because I thought I would get in trouble. I thought it was my fault."

Past Sexual Abuse

“Annie, you were only a little kid” Heather argued. “It wasn’t your fault. Your grandfather was wrong. Nobody should do those things to a little kid.”

“Then why do I feel so guilty about what happened?”

Heather thought for a moment. “I don’t know how to answer that, but maybe Jenny would.” Jenny Shaw was their counselor at camp this week. Jenny and her husband, Doug, were volunteer youth leaders at the church Ann and Heather attended. Both girls thought of Jenny as a spiritual big sister.


“I don’t know if I can tell Jenny about this,” Ann said, frowning at the thought.

“I’m glad you told me about your dreams and your grandfather, Annie,” Heather assured her. “I’m going to be with you and pray with you through this. But I think it would be good to ask Jenny’s advice about how to handle all this. We could talk to her together.”

Ann winced, but somehow she knew Heather was right. Jenny Shaw had been a great source of spiritual strength since she came into the youth group. “Maybe Jenny won’t have time to talk “ Ann argued weakly.

“You just tell me that you’re ready to talk to her” Heather said, “and I’ll do the rest.”

As difficult as it had been for her to tell Heather her dark secret, Ann already felt better for doing so.



Ann's Story

It was as if Heather had taken some of the burden just by listening to her and crying with her. If talking to Jenny could help her feel even better, Ann could do it. "Okay," she said, "I'd like to talk to Jenny—if you'll go with me."

Heather smiled an encouraging smile. "You got it. That's what friends are for."

Heather asked Jenny to meet with them during free time right after lunch, and she agreed. They met in the cabin while their four roommates were horseback riding.

With Heather holding her hand for encouragement, Ann told Jenny about her dreams and the dark events from her childhood that inspired them. Jenny asked her all the who, where, and when questions without pushing her to go into sordid details. Ann couldn't keep from crying as she talked, but Heather and Jenny were there for her. "It's okay to cry, Ann," Jenny encouraged, holding her. "Let it all out. We're here for you." The tears flowed freely for all three of them.

When the emotions subsided, Jenny said, "There is a term for what happened to you during those 'secret visits', with your grandfather. Do you know what it is, Ann?"

Ann knew what Jenny was getting at. But she hesitated because it sounded so dirty, so terrible. "Yes, I know," she admitted finally.



Past Sexual Abuse

“Then tell me what you’d call what your grandfather did to you during your secret visits,” Jenny pressed.

They seemed like forbidden words to Ann, just like swearing or using God’s name in vain. She didn’t want to say them. But with Jenny’s gentle prodding, she did, “Grandpa . . . sexually abused me.”

“That’s right, Ann,” Jenny affirmed. “It’s very important that you understand that. Parents and grandparents and other adults are supposed to care for you and protect you. No matter how loving he may have seemed at other times, your grandfather took something from you for his own pleasure, and that’s abuse. Sexual abuse is a crime, Ann. If your grandfather were still alive and abusing you like that today, I would insist that you go to the police or a child-protection agency. It’s that serious.”

“But it seemed partly my fault,” Ann interjected, fighting back tears again. “Grandpa used to say I was too cute to resist.”

Jenny slowly shook her head. “It was not your fault, Ann. No matter what he told you, no matter how guilty it made you feel, you are not to blame.”

Ann felt something very freeing in Jenny’s words, as if another large weight had been lifted from her shoulders. “It wasn’t my fault,” she repeated.

“That’s right,” Jenny said, smiling. “And I also want you to know that I am proud of you for the courage



Ann's Story

it takes to face all this. And I want to help you heal from the terrible inner wound you suffered."

"Heal?" Ann wondered aloud. "But it was such a long time ago."

"Let me explain," Jenny said. "Suppose you broke your arm but never told anybody about it and never went to the doctor to get it set. What would happen?"

"The arm would probably get better, but it might be crooked," Ann guessed. "Or it might not get better at all."

"You're right," Jenny said. "And something like that has happened to you. You were emotionally wounded as a child because of your grandfather's abuse. Your emotions may have healed a little with time. But now God can involve others who care about you to help mend the emotional part of you that has been hurting for so long."

It made sense to Ann. "I see," she said.

"So I want you to know that I'm going to be with you as the healing takes place. You can count on me, Ann."

"Me too," Heather chimed in.

Jenny glanced at her watch. "But it's time for team games down on the field right now. I would like to meet here again tomorrow if you two are willing. There are some other things about your abuse we need to talk about."