



NO MORE HURTING

LIFE BEYOND
SEXUAL ABUSE



GWEN PURDIE

CHRISTIAN FOCUS





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‘O afflicted city,
lashed by storms and not comforted,
I will build you with stones of turquoise,
your foundations with sapphires.
I will make your battlements of rubies,
your gates of sparkling jewels,
and all your walls of precious stones’
Isaiah 54:11-12 (NIV).





FOREWORD

Through many years of counselling and praying with the most severely abused, Gwen McDowell Purdie has journeyed deep into the heart of God's love for the broken-hearted. She knows well not only our Lord's power to heal, but His yearning to 'give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit' [see Isa 61: 1-4 ESV]. To say it yet another way, she knows that our Lord delights in opening the prison doors of sexual abuse and calling forth His little ones into freedom.

To work alongside Gwen is to see why she succeeded so remarkably as a counsellor and a pioneer in training others in counselling. She has a unique capacity to first listen attentively as a person bares his grief and tells his story, and then to confidently lead the hurting one into the healing Presence of God. She knows how to ask the right questions - those that get to the very heart of the matter, no matter how painful. She possesses an uncanny Scot's commonsense and cannot easily be fooled; she will always settle for nothing less than the full truth. Yet, she possesses an extraordinary wit that ministers the medicine of good cheer and hope to weary souls.

We give thanks that *No More Hurting: Life Beyond Sexual Abuse* is now available to the people of Scotland, a folk she and her husband, Sandy, have so well served. We trust that those who desperately need the guidance and encouragement she holds out will be led unerringly to it.

Leanne Payne
President, Pastoral Care Ministries, Inc.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gwen Purdie (nee McDowell) was born and raised in Scotland. Becoming a Christian changed her life dramatically and led her into professional social work, desiring to see people made whole. After ten years as a specialist with adolescents and alcoholics, Gwen moved on to pioneer a work in Christian counselling in her homeland. Gwen was founder and director of Dove Christian Counselling, which still operates today. She has been a Christian counsellor for twenty years. Eight years ago Gwen married Sandy Purdie, and they have been working together as Christian counsellors. Gwen has a particular heart for reaching abused people with hope. While Gwen and Sandy are no longer actively counselling, they are involved in consultancy, training, teaching and lecturing. They are also extensively involved in praying with people at seminars and conferences. They both serve on the Pastoral Care Ministries prayer team worldwide (founded by Leanne Payne).

Gwen and Sandy are members of Selkirk Baptist Church in the Scottish Borders.

www.lethem-lodge.co.uk





PREFACE

Over the years I have met many hurting people, who will probably never find their way to a counsellor nor be able to share their pain with anyone who might help them. It is with them in mind that I have written this book, in the hope that they will be encouraged to grasp the fact that there can be life beyond sexual abuse and beyond all the implications and symptoms that so often accompany such an experience. It is also my hope that it will be useful to others who may be trying to understand the pain involved in sexual abuse and its consequences.

If someone has been sexually abused, he or she may find reading this book disturbing. Facing abuse and the emotions which go with it can be an overwhelming experience, but recovery from abuse usually occurs in small, steady steps. Reading this book could be very helpful. Subjects may be raised in the course of this book that the reader does not yet feel ready to face. There is a right time to face issues, and that timing is unique to every individual. Care should be taken to stay safe. It is wise to follow intuitive feelings which may rise to the surface. This book can be laid down and returned to at a later date, and that may be the wise thing to do if the reader feels unready to cope with the issues it is highlighting in his (or her) life.





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This book is unashamedly written from a Christian perspective, but this should not detract from its ability to help anyone who wants to recover from the effects of sexual abuse. Practical suggestions and sources of further help (in the form of either books, websites or telephone helplines) are scattered throughout the book, in the hope that some readers will be able to move forward in their journey towards healing.

Many people have helped me in the course of writing this book. A very deep debt of gratitude goes to those who have allowed me to share something of their experiences. All of these people appear under assumed names in this book to protect their identities.

I am also deeply grateful to:

- Many people who have contributed 'silently' to this book by sharing their stories and their hearts over the years. It must be evident that I owe a large debt to many abused people – I thank God for each of you. You have been my greatest teachers.
- The friend who typed the initial manuscript from handwritten notes.
- Jane Ferris for exceptional editorial help which was provided by Christian Focus Publications. Any remaining errors are my sole responsibility.
- Bruntsfield Evangelical Church, Edinburgh, my church for twenty–six years, for having the foresight to support me as a Christian counsellor. As a result, hundreds of abused people have been helped over the years.
- The large army of people who have prayed this book into being.
- My colleagues at Dove Christian Counselling. We walked and talked together; we cried and laughed together, and this book is a product of these precious years.





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- My wonderful husband, Sandy, who supported me with endless enthusiasm.

Special thanks must go to the following for their support, encouragement and help in countless ways before and during the writing of this book: Houston and Jenny A, Vikki B, Kathy D, Pamela E, Findlay H, Jane F, David G, Allister J, Ruth J, Anne L, Ruth M, Douglas and Liz Mc, George McK, Leanne P, Elizabeth R, Grace R, Cathie W, Fiona W and many others.







CHAPTER 1

TRUTH SUBMERGED

I never dared tell anyone what I thought might have happened in my childhood. In my family I would have got a beating. I would never have been believed and it would have all been my fault anyway. I guess I didn't believe it myself, or at least, I didn't want to believe it. However, it is now obvious that I have all the emotional scars that match having been sexually abused. I struggle big-time to relate to people and I am just waiting for something else to go wrong in my life.

There are so many people today hurting because of sexual abuse. In the course of this book two people, whom I call Heather and Henry, share something of their journey towards healing from the effects of sexual abuse. Henry is a well-qualified and experienced person who works in a professional capacity. Heather is an interesting lady who until her later years had no memory of having been abused. Their stories tell how, in different ways, they were both abused, and some of the steps they have been through in order to find healing. Others have agreed to share incidents from their experience, and also





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appear under assumed names and identities. This has allowed them to share facts about their abuse and recovery without implicating other people. It may be that readers will be able to identify with some of these experiences, in which case I trust that their stories will give encouragement and offer hope that there really can be healing.

Facts and figures

Many people find it difficult to accept that sexual abuse is anything more than a relatively unusual phenomenon in our society. So when a high-profile case of sexual abuse hits the headlines, particularly when children are involved, there is a public outcry, and it is the exceptional and extraordinary nature of the offence that is emphasised. Most people, I imagine, would prefer not to acknowledge how common sexual abuse is, especially within families. It is far more comfortable to submerge this kind of knowledge under horrified outrage at the rare and exceptional incident. Tragically, however, sexual abuse is all too common in our society, although it is usually submerged beneath a surface of apparent normality, kept secret behind the closed doors of respectability. The reality is that sexual abuse is happening today, and many people are struggling to emerge from the pain and torn emotions that come from that abuse.

Sexual abuse in Britain is difficult to measure. Since it is thought that up to 80% of sexual assaults against children go unreported, official statistics are bound to fall far short of the real figures.¹ This suggests that figures we have are only the tip of the iceberg, but the following statistics give some idea as to how widespread the problem is. The Child Protection

1. *Myths and facts about child sexual abuse*. Rape Crisis Federation Wales and England, Unit 7, Provident Works, Newdigate Street, Nottingham, NG7 4FD. www.rapecrisis.co.uk.





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Registers for 2002 indicate that there were 2,800 children in England, 231 children in Northern Ireland, 253 children in Wales and 249 children in Scotland on these registers because they were identified as having been sexually abused. The recognised definition of child sexual abuse for the purposes of these registers is the use of an under sixteen-year-old child for an adult's sexual pleasure.² A Home Office report in 1998, commenting on the recorded offences of sexual abuse against children, said:

In terms of official statistics, the indecent assault of females under 16 is by far the most common offence involving children. In these cases an offender is formally dealt with: in 1995 this offence resulted in 2,116 cautions or convictions, representing about 50% of all sexual offences recorded against children.³

These were, of course, just the legally proved cases. A report by the Rape Crisis Federation in 2001 observed:

... child sexual abuse occurs within all areas of society and throughout the world. Children of all ages, races, religions and classes are abused. Children with a disability are particularly vulnerable – being nearly five times more likely to be abused than able-bodied children. 90% of disabled women are raped abused or assaulted at some time in their lives ... With 90% of their abusers being known to them.⁴ It is also true that the person who is abused knows the abuser in most cases of actual rape.⁵

2. Source material: The NSPCC Library and Information Service.

3. Police Research Series Paper 99, Sex offending against children: Understanding the risk, Don Grubin.

4. Margaret Kennedy, keynote address, Violence, Abuse and Women's Citizenship Conference, 10th November 1996.

5. The Scottish Rape Crisis Network provides help and support for victims of rape. They are contactable at PO Box 53, Glasgow, Scotland, G2 1YR, Tel. 0141 552 3200. For international contact details see appendix.

