

~~Rid of My Disgrace~~

Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault

Justin S. Holcomb & Lindsey A. Holcomb

Foreword by Mark Driscoll

Allen's Story

My name is Allen. It wasn't until my midthirties that I finally discovered something that had happened to me, something I had suspected but kept denying. I'd been molested as a little boy.

When I was eight years old I had what I thought was a recurring nightmare—a large dark figure coming into my room in the middle of the night. I remember it happening several times—screaming for help and crying in fear, with no one ever coming to help. The rest I had blanked out. These “nightmares” stopped when I moved into a different bedroom a year or so later.

Over the next twenty years life went on; I experienced the typical joys and challenges of adolescence and young adulthood. I got married at twenty-one, and my wife and I started a family of our own. Four daughters came along within six years—I felt so blessed, so fortunate.

During all those years there had been recurring signs that I had been molested as a child. I was hypervigilant, had bouts of insomnia, depression, and an obsession with appearing strong and tough (lifting weights like crazy) and, something rather embarrassing, the absolute inability to have a rectal exam.

When I was eighteen I underwent a physical as part of applying for an ROTC scholarship, and when it came time for the rectal exam I started shaking and crying uncontrollably. I was humiliated and embarrassed, and the doctor ended up not doing it. The exact same thing happened about ten years later when I underwent a routine physical exam. Another similar incident occurred when I was on a cruise with my wife after we had been married for years. I got food poisoning, and after a horrendous night I went to the infirmary on board for a shot to stop the nausea. When I pulled my pants down to receive the shot, I started shaking and crying again, just as I had years earlier at my ROTC physical. My wife and I eventually had our fifth child, a son who joined

his four sisters. Once he started getting older, I began having massive anxiety attacks and bouts of depression, which felt like they had come out of left field. At times I found myself literally shaking in my office at work for no reason. I had no idea what was happening or why.

Finally in my midthirties I started seeing a Christian counselor, and he helped me put the pieces together to something I had been denying for over twenty years, being molested as a little boy. The perpetrator was my grandfather. He had come to visit us at the exact time of my recurring “nightmares.” I later learned he had also molested my two sisters. When it all came together, I just shook and sobbed in the counselor’s office. But at least now it all made sense, and the truth of what I had been denying all those years finally came out. After all those years of suspecting that something had happened to me but denying it, it all became clear. It hurt so badly. It still does sometimes. After all, how could a grown man do that to a trusting, helpless little boy, especially his own grandson?

All the years of denial solved nothing. Time did not heal those wounds. Facing the reality of what actually happened was the beginning of the healing process, a process that continues and will not be complete until we are in heaven. What has given me comfort is the fact that the truth is now clear, and while the truth hurts, it also sets us free (John 8:32). I know God wept when I was molested, and I know that he cared for me as an eight-year-old kid, and he still cares for me. I know that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ there is forgiveness available for all of us, including me, and including my grandfather. My grandfather died years before everything became clear, but I have forgiven him; Scripture is clear that we need to forgive others as God forgives us (Matt. 6:14–15; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). There are still traces of lingering hurt and anger in my heart—I won’t deny that—but the anxiety attacks and the bouts of depression have stopped. I still have insomnia sometimes, with the accompanying hypervigilance, but markedly less than before. I still lift weights regularly, but as a way to relieve stress and stay in shape, not out of a compulsion to appear strong and tough.

One benefit of all this is that it has made me extra careful and protective of my own kids—in a healthy and not controlling way—so that hopefully they will not experience what I did. As an ordained minister, it has also given me a deeper sense of compassion for those in our

church who have been traumatized by sexual assault or in other ways. And while I am gradually experiencing the healing power of the grace of God as related to this, I look forward with hope to the day when the healing will be complete. In the meantime, I am grateful that the denial has stopped and that God cares for me.