

Cindi's Story: My Celebrate Recovery Testimony

Hi, my name is Cindi and my Higher Power is Jesus Christ. I struggle with codependency, food addiction and depression. I'm also a survivor of child molestation.

My childhood didn't seem bad to me. I never saw my mother or father drink or take drugs. I remember going to church fairly often. We didn't go every Sunday, but I did have some background in church.

My earliest memories of God were filled with fear. Certain things in my childhood taught me that I was bad and that what happened to me was my fault because of that. I don't remember having any words of encouragement to help me through my feelings. I was told that I was being silly, or stupid, or that I was making a mountain out of a molehill when I expressed any kind of emotion.

The one thing I do remember is when I was a child - was learning that the parents rule. When I questioned things, I wasn't encouraged to voice my own opinion and was actually hushed instead. When I'd ask, "Why?" The only reply I got was, "Because I said so." Because of that and other things, I learned that my feelings were not valuable and with that I learned how to *invalidate my own thoughts and feelings*. I couldn't figure out what was really expected of me so I became compliant. What 'you' thought was more important; became what I thought. And to further that, I commissioned to change me to what I *thought* you might want me to be.

In my 4th grade year, a man of the neighborhood molested me. He was believed of the town to be harmless because he had a mental disability. I remember he told me that my parents would send me away if I told them what he was doing. I believed him. I kept that secret until I was 27 years old when I first told my mother about it. That was in 1985. My father passed away in 1980, so he never knew. My mother was astonished when she heard that, but she did believe me. All of those years, I carried that secret with me and believed that it was my fault.

The next significant time period of my life was during the early 1970's. I was 13 years old when my parents divorced. We moved to Florida in 1969 as a result of my father getting a promotion. After the divorce, my mom returned to North Carolina and later I was sent up to live with her because I became depressed.

My father moved his girlfriend in with us. At some point my mother was coming down to visit and Sheryl (who later became my stepmother) had to move out. I had no clue why this was taking place. I guess I took it to mean that my parents were going to get back together. While my mom was there, I questioned her as to why Sheryl had to leave. I didn't know until the year 2006 that my mom had warned my dad about moving a woman in to live with us without being married. So, my asking the question caused the friction that would cause me to carry the blame of them not reuniting, because of what I told my mom.

My mom had taken me to take my friend Carol home from spending the night with me. This is when I asked that question. Well, when we returned to the house, my mom took my father to the bedroom and they argued. When they came out, they came out with my mom's belongings. Daddy immediately took her to the airport after saying our goodbyes. When he walked back in the door from taking my mom to the airport, he looked at me with hatred in his eyes and said, "I hope you're happy!" And he walked away into his room. From that moment, I knew that it was my fault they weren't getting back together.

Not long after that, Sheryl moved back into the house and with a vengeance. She hated us kids and especially me. She would take my dad in the bedroom and whine to him about things that would get us in trouble and he always believed her.

During this time, they kept all of my mom's cards and letters away from us. Daddy would come home from work at lunch and get the mail, but leave stuff in there for me to pick up when I came home from school. I had begun to hate my mom. We thought she didn't care about us. I just knew I had to protect my siblings from my stepmother somehow, because Mama didn't care anymore.

One day my mom called right when I got home from school. She asked, "Why haven't you written or called me?" I told her in anger, "Well, I might if you cared to stay in touch with us!" She proceeded to tell me that she had been writing and sending cards with money and calling when Daddy was home. My brother and I went to my dad's bedroom and found her letters and cards in a box in my dad's closet. So, they had been keeping them hid and leading us to believe that Mama didn't care.

I started hanging with a couple from the neighborhood. They were so nice to me. They made me feel loved. We played cards and watched TV. I was excited when they invited me to the movies one night with them. It turned out that the wife was sick the night we went to the drive-in theatre and she got into the back seat to sleep while her husband and I watched the movie. Her husband pulled me very close to him and I choose not to disclose any details. I was so afraid to move yet I was more afraid that his wife would wake up and be mad at me. I couldn't figure out how I could keep on doing such things. There must be something terribly wrong with me, because these things keep happening to me.

I became very depressed and stayed in my room except to eat or do my chores. I figured I was safer there and wouldn't hurt anybody if I stayed alone in my room. My father called me out to the living room one night and stated that my isolation from the family was not suitable to the family and he was sending me to my mom's to live in North Carolina. I had no opinion. By that time, I was numb and just figured I deserved to be sent away.

I was 14 then and my mom and her male friend picked me up from the airport. She worked the night shift. So after I got settled in, she and her friend asked me to go to his house to sleep over with his kids because he had to get up early for work and I was to baby sit. I agreed to go. The first and only night I was there, he came to me in the night and I begged him to leave me alone. After awhile he did. I told my mom I didn't want to go back, but I didn't tell her why and she didn't make me. I don't know what he told her or what happened, because I've never discussed it with her since. But I was just happy to not have to go.

Within a short period, my brother, sister and I traveled to and from Orlando and Charlotte via airplanes whenever my mom got mad at my dad or visa versa. We kept the airwaves hot during that time.

At the age of 16, I ran away to Chicago, IL with a friend of mine. She knew the guys we went with but I didn't. Here is where I learned how to use sex and drugs to numb my pain. The guys turned out to be violent and really scared us. We went to find jobs so we could move out, but the violence escalated too quickly for us to accomplish that. Because of the fear we talked to a neighbor and he took us to the Salvation Army. They took care of us and talked us into contacting our parents and going back home.

When I got home, the courts took me away from Mama. They said she couldn't handle me. So, they put me with my grandmother (my dad's mom.) I lived there for a short period before I was whisked away and deposited on my aunt's front porch, which is my mom's sister. The reason that happened is due to a conversation my grandmother and I had concerning Sheryl living with us before she and my dad married. It was casual and not intended to hurt anyone, but my grandmother could not believe that her son would do such a thing. So much so, she called him at work and asked him. Of course, he denied it and it upset her. I was made to be the liar. She called her daughters and they politely picked me up and moved me to my mom's sister's house.

I lived with my mom's sister for a short time until the courts would allow my mom to take me back. She moved into the country closer to her job. This is where I met the father of my 1st child. Of course, we fell in love. Not long after that, my mom confronted me with the notion that I was pregnant. I denied it. Her landlady told her she had a premonition that I was pregnant. So, six weeks later my mom took me to the health department. The test was positive. I was going to have a child.

I came back and told the child's father. He seemed happy and we discussed marriage. But, before I knew what happened, he disappeared.

So, my mother talked to a lawyer. The lawyer set me up an appointment to have an abortion. Those days seemed to drag on forever. On the day of the appointment I was deeply grieved in my spirit and believed that I had no other choice. But, I approached my mother and asked her to please not make me do it. She was actually relieved that I took that step and made that choice to not abort.

This presented another dilemma...my mom didn't know what to do. She called my father. He said, "Tell the doctor to send the bill to me." Now what doctor in his right mind would send a bill from Lincolnton, North Carolina to Orlando, Florida and expect to get paid?

My mother and I decided that I would go to live with my father unannounced. My stepmother was furious when I called her from the airport to come and pick me up. Within a short time upon arriving at my father's house, I was approached with being taken to an unwed mother's home in Jacksonville, Florida. I agreed to go as I told my father; I knew I wasn't wanted there, but I would not agree to give away my child. He took me and dropped me off.

After some time there, he came to visit me one day. We had plans to go picnic on the beach and spend some time together. I was so excited. This was to be the first time I'd had any time alone with my father in a relaxed setting. While we were riding down the road, my father started talking about a proposal he was willing to offer me. He said he would buy me a car, help me finish high school, get me an apartment, send me to college, and help me get a job when I graduated from college. But, the stipulation was...I had to give my child up for adoption.

Well, I didn't even have to think about it. My answer was "NO." At that instance, he turned the car around at the next available turnaround and proceeded to take me back to the unwed mother's home. He pulled up in the circle out front, dropped me off, and drove away. He never came back to see me after that.

My mother drove from North Carolina to transport my child and myself back home with her on the day of our release from the hospital. I proceeded to live my life by getting involved in the welfare system. Three years later, I had another daughter.

I did the best I could with what I received from welfare, but I hated having to depend on that and struggle as much as I did. I decided when my girls both were in school that I would go to work and I did. I also made the first of four attempts at going to college. The fourth attempt I was able to complete and did graduate from Gaston College in Dallas, NC in 2003 with an Associate's Degree in Information Systems.

I'm purposely progressing to a particular time in my life that I believe God wants me to share my experience. This is my Texas Story and some events have not been avoided, but have been left out for time restraints in sharing.

In the mid 80's when I was still in my party mode, I met a man through some friends that I thought was my knight in shining armor. We lived together for about four months before I lost my job. Well, being unemployed with two children was scary so I had allowed myself to fall into a situation. I needed to feed my children. My boyfriend, Tony suggested that I write a check and he would get the money from his mom for me to deposit in my account. That didn't happen. I got scared and started writing more checks for cash to deposit and cover the ones previously written. Needless to say, it only took a very short time for it to get out of control. When this happened, I had totally lost sight of any sense of rightness. I was not hearing the "Voice of Truth."

What I was hearing was that I would be going to jail. And that scared me. So, instead of searching for a better way to handle my situation, I packed and ran. I took only the belongings that would fit in my little Mazda along with my two children, Tony and myself and headed out for God knows where.

We camped for about a week in a state park in South Carolina and then headed for Texas. Why Texas? Tony said he heard there was good work there. We ended up on the Bolivar Peninsula and camped there for a month. I worked on a fishing pier making \$2.75 per hour to buy food for us. I was given one free meal per day. So that made it a bit easier to feed my family.

For some reason, Tony was unwilling to work on the pier. They offered him \$3.00 per hour to help replace boards and make repairs on the pier. I couldn't understand why he wouldn't work, but I knew I had to feed my girls. To this day, my girls remember that summer as a fun summer. And I'm thankful for that.

One day while I was working, a few guys came on the pier drunk. They were getting obnoxious and starting arguments. There was three of them and one of Tony. Eventually, a confrontation took place out on the beach where they were harassing us. Tony asked them nicely to leave, but they refused. Tony had a gun in his pocket and took it out and shot it straight down in the ground. Well, the guys left.

Shortly, several law enforcement cars showed up and they ripped our tents apart and of course found the gun, which was stolen. They handcuffed Tony and took him away. A couple of weeks later, I moved my girls and myself into the Salvation Army in Galveston, Texas. We stayed there about two weeks until I found a job. It was a truly, humbling experience, but *my* choices took me down that road.

We moved into an apartment in Texas City, Texas and remained there until Tony was finally released after about 6 weeks. I don't know what happened to him while he was in jail, but he came out a different man. I finally called my family to let them know where I was and that I needed help. At this point, I couldn't let go of Tony and go home with my children. I had my brother come to Texas to pick them up and take them to my mom.

When they left and the car turned the corner, the last thing I saw was my children crying, waving good-bye. I had never been separated from them before. At that moment, my heart stopped... And to this day I have regretted not getting in that car with them, because what happened after that was a 'truly humiliating experience' for me.

I had met a family at the Salvation Army who had lost everything because the father Pete was hurt on his job and couldn't work. With nowhere to turn, the family lived on the streets of Galveston. They got enough help to rent a home that should have been condemned and that's where they lived.

In the meantime, Tony became violent and scared me. I had quit my job after my girls left because Tony wanted to head to Florida where he heard there was work. One night we got into an argument. If I had not ducked, my head would have been plastered on the concrete wall of the apartment. He hit it so hard that I thought he cracked his knuckles. This infuriated him. As he calmed down, I told him I would go in the morning to hunt another job.

When the morning came, I took nothing but the clothes on my back and left. I did not go back there until after he had moved on. I lived with Pete and Cookie until I could get help to go home. This became my ultimate goal. I turned to local churches and was denied any help. I did run into a Father of a local church and he offered to help me. I trusted him because after all, he's a man of God.

Little did I know what his ulterior motives were. I'll spare the details, but he gave me a hundred dollars. I held onto that money until I received the food stamps I had applied for to feed my children. When they came, I called my family and offered them in return for a plane ticket home.

I used the money to get me from Galveston on a bus to Houston and to the airport for my flight home. All I wanted was to go home. I was terrified of what I was facing when I went home because of the bad checks I had left. Until I was walking off the airplane and saw 'only' my brother and his wife standing there, I was terrified that I would be taken straight to jail. I was so relieved that it was only them. I was relieved to be home again.

I soon got my old job back and hired a lawyer to handle my case. I did make restitution and paid the required fines. But, God saw fit even in my darkest hours and isolation from Him to stand by me. This was my first experience in talking with a therapist. I remember crying for about a solid month. I cried at work, on the way to work and everywhere I went for at least a month. My depression was like living in a pitch-dark tunnel and trying to find a way out. I had felt so much pain that I became an introvert.

I wasn't interested in meeting people or doing anything, I just cried every day and every minute. I walked in daze because I had cried so much. I can't tell you how deep that depression was. I don't have words to describe it. But, I can tell you that I survived it and worked my way through it.

For the next nine years I was a professional truck driver. I took my training in 1990 at Southern College in Gastonia. My first position as a truck driver is where I met my project, David. The first two years of our relationship was awesome. I had never been treated with such respect and received so much love from any one than I did from David and his entire family. He was so kind, and he actually offered to do things for me without any expectations. So that is how I became addicted to him. I soon learned of a few flaws in his personality that I just knew I could fix. I believed that God had given him to me to fix and that if I was good enough he would change. But little did I know.

One particular trip, I had to cut short because my daughter had been in a near fatal accident. My company flew me home to be with her and had me leave the truck with my co-driver in Sacramento, CA. Upon arriving home and preparing to go to the hospital, I had my first experience with David's addiction to women. A lady called and asked for him. He was in the shower and she asked if I was his wife. I said I was and she told me to just say thanks for helping her when her car broke down on the side of the road. I said I would and she hung up. Within one minute, the phone rang again. The lady on the other end started rattling off that she wasn't going to be as nice as her sister and that in fact her sister and David had been seeing each other.

This is the time that I just could not absorb what was coming at me. I was focused on the life of my child who was in intensive care at CMC. She had broken her neck at the base of her skull and her C-1 at the top of the spine. It separated by 2 inches. She had both lungs collapsed and had the death rattle, but was revived at the scene. This was on April 18th of 1995. She was transported to Gaston Memorial Hospital where they removed her spleen and repaired her colon before transporting her to CMC to the trauma team.

I was told that she probably wouldn't make it through the night as the doctor had only seen four of these types of breaks in his 35 years of practice and only one lived 24 hours. Tinki had already defiled that statistic. This was how she spent her 19th birthday. When I walked into the Intensive Care Unit, I just about passed out. I felt like I was choking when I saw the tubes in her throat and nose. Well, her doctors designed a metal piece to put in her neck to hold her spine and head together. She was classified as a quadriplegic and I was told she would never walk or move anything from her neck down again.

I watched this 19 year old learn to sit up again just as an infant would. It was like watching an infant in an adult's body learn to do basic human functions again. She had to learn to feed herself and learn to walk again.

I brought her home on the 23rd of June. Her welcome home party also became the place her husband proposed to her. She now has two beautiful children. She currently works for a nursing home where she lives in Sylva, NC with her family. She drives anywhere she wants to go.

So, with everything that was going through my head and heart, I was unable to process the fact that David had betrayed me. It was later that year that it happened again only I caught him this time. By that time I was very weak emotionally and especially spiritually. I set out to fight for him. I was truly sick because my addiction to him caused me to even sleep in the same house where they were. And the details of that are not important, just the fact that I was where I was at that point in time.

Well, it took me about four months to use all of the manipulation tactics I could muster up between myself and his mother to destroy their relationship. He of course was torn between the two of us and was having a hard time choosing. He even told me one time that he would have the perfect woman if he could have what he liked in me and what he like in her. So, my project that was given to me by God (or so I thought)

was requiring me to do things that I felt was wrong, however, I tried harder and accepted the role of martyr in the situation. I truly believed that I was doing the right thing. I denied my feelings.

After I won the prize and she was out of the picture, I began to wonder, "What was I thinking?" Things just kept getting worse and I began to lose sight of my project. I began to pray and ask God what He wanted from me in this situation. I fell into a deep depression. I became so depressed that I didn't want to live, but the thing that kept from taking my life was the fact that I couldn't hurt my children.

I started seeing a therapist. She introduced me to Al-Anon. She told me about codependency, but it really didn't make any sense to me then. I went to Al-Anon and to my surprise; it helped me to take the focus off of David and I began to come out of my depression.

My therapist encouraged me to go to Codependents Anonymous, but my work schedule didn't allow for that for a good while. Eventually it changed and I was able to join a group in Gastonia, NC. Through that group and my therapist, I began to learn about taking care of me and letting others take care of themselves, although 'I still thought' they couldn't do that without my help. The good thing is that I did agree that it was time to take care of me. I took the affirmations sheet my therapist gave me and taped it to my bathroom mirror. She instructed me to take one of them and recite it in my head throughout the day. To my amazement I began to believe them. Little by little I was taking back me.

I learned of a 12-Step study that would last 32 weeks and would take me through the steps in the midst of other people who shared my crazies. I honestly thought I was the only one in the world that was thinking the way I was thinking.

Coming into these groups and hearing the sharing, I wondered how they knew what I was thinking. As time passed, I began to learn that I had lost touch with Cindi. I had no clue as to who I was. I felt empty and isolated inside. And I just believed that it was my destiny.

Those 32 weeks took me on a journey of self-discovery. Through that, I learned to trust God again. I was actually relieved to learn that He didn't give that project to me as I thought He did. I began to learn how to mind my own business and allow other people to take care of their own business without my help.

There ended up being other women in David's life and with one he fathered a child. That was the final straw that I could not accept. I prayed and asked God to move him out of my life, because I was not strong enough to do it myself. God answered that prayer and moved him to Ohio with his job. So God does answer prayers. This allowed me to finally focus totally on myself.

At this point I began to heal. I had to get out of my situation before I could deal with it. It has been a painful but rewarding experience. I'm grateful that God never left my side. I know now that He allowed me to experience the things I experienced because I made certain choices that had consequences.

In Genesis, God talks about creating man and desiring man to *choose* to fellowship with Him. But because He gave me my own will to choose, I caused a lot of the painful experiences I've endured in my life as a result of those choices.

I'm not one of those who can get instant deliverance of my habits, hurts and hang-ups. I have to work on them. In recovery, I have tools that I can use to help me live One Day at a Time and take one problem at a time. I've learned that I don't have to change everything right now. In God's perfect time, I learn His will for me and He gives me the power to carry that out.

It never ceases to amaze me how I can experience a peaceful mind now where before, my mind raced constantly. Sleep was not something I experienced in a healthy way. As soon as I would lie down at night, my eyes flew open and my mind felt like it was on the Charlotte Motor Speedway. Thoughts were like the racecars and it took forever to end the race.

My recovery has brought me to a place where I now have the power to put on the brakes. It doesn't mean that my mind never tries to race anymore, it just means that I can now sort through and find the root of the problem and deal with it. I'm now able to feel my feelings and move through them instead of avoiding them and trying to go around them.

I was introduced to Celebrate Recovery in March of 2005. God has placed me at Christ Church with some wonderful new friends and people whom I consider family. My life today is not always peaceful, but I have tools now and people I can call and talk to who do not judge me. I've learned to trust God again.