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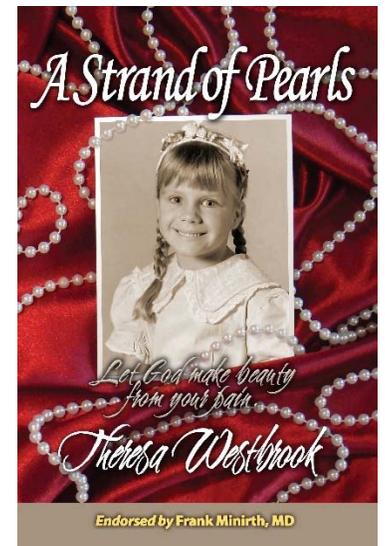
North East Texan

By Timna Rutledge

A Strand of Pearls - From Pain to Beauty

A Survivor of Child Sex Abuse Tells Her Story

After being victimized from age four to thirteen years old by her biological father, Theresa Westbrook, tells her story of how God can take something so ugly and painful, and transform it into something of beauty and value. In fact, that is the theme for her book, "A Strand of Pearls," endorsed by Dr. Frank Minirth of the highly acclaimed Minirth Meier Clinic.



"I felt led of the Lord to share my story and help others," said Theresa, "because I've been completely healed and restored from sexual abuse." She further explained, "The difference between healing and restoration is that when you heal, there can be scars. Truly, the Lord gave me restoration because I feel completely healed and feel joy and peace, as if the abuse never happened."

It was after her mother divorced her father that Theresa told her mother what had happened. Though the normal love of a daughter had been destroyed, Theresa was able to forgive her father. She admits that when she retells the story, she reconnects with old painful feelings, however Theresa is able to leave those behind and move forward with restoration, something she hopes her story will convey to others, suffering the after-effects of abuse.

Theresa noted that when there is sexual abuse, it's tragic for the parent and other family members, as well. When asked how she would advise a mother who finds out her child is being abused, Theresa said, "Reporting it is the first step. Then, make sure the child and the perpetrator are separated. Seek a medical professional to be sure the child is not physically harmed; and get counseling for the mom and child." Sometimes many years of counseling are needed. "The only One Who can bring complete restoration," she said, "is Jesus Christ."

There are many girls/women who find it easier to forgive their abuser than their mother, particularly those whose mothers allowed the perpetrators a second chance to live with the family, thinking that with repentance, there could be change. Remember, Theresa said, "All family members were victimized." She pointed out that when mothers first learn of the abuse, they're unprepared. "It's hard to process all the information. Mom goes through the whole internal battle, over all the issues including, how will she support this family." Theresa warns that while she believes abusers can change, they can never be trusted around children again. There must be a separation to protect the child.

She denoted different types of child sex abusers: Some may have mental conditions. A true pedophile is drawn to children. And then, there are those that fall into it as a matter of consequence such as, the boy who sees pornography and his sister happens to be convenient.

One of the changes Theresa would like to see is help for perpetrators. "As I've been out speaking and learning as I go, there are programs out there that could be used in our prisons, and aren't being used. They're just separating abusers from victims. So when they re-enter society, those issues have not been addressed."

Theresa Westbrook has recently authored a second book, "The Advocates - of the Abused and Silent," which is co-authored by Ben Wheeler resident, John Borgstedt, who wrote "I Love You, Mom - Please Don't Break My Heart." The Advocates and A Strand of Pearls can be found at Author House, Barnes and Noble, and Amazon.com

