
Joyful Freedom!

Since childhood, I've had my share of fears. A few years ago, I decided to confront one of my biggest: public speaking. I hesitated to enroll in a speech class, but knew it might build my confidence.

My instructor assigned the topic, *The Greatest Lesson I Ever Learned*. I wanted to show how God had changed my life from one of fear, loneliness, and insecurity to one of feeling wanted and valued in my new Christian community. I knew what I would share, but it would be hard—an incident from my childhood that characterized so many experiences that once planted seeds of fear and insecurity deep within my spirit.

The night came to present my speech. I stood before my peers and tried to clear the lump from my throat. I began, "When I was five, my mom sent out invitations to a birthday party for me. It was the first and last time."

I recalled how I could hardly wait for all my aunts, uncles and cousins to come. But the picture that is now burned into my mind was very different from the one I had expected: I remember standing quietly beside my mom after she had grilled dozens of hot dogs. They were growing cold on a platter, waiting for my family who

never came. I remember hearing the sound of my father's car engine grow distant, leaving us totally alone. I guess I was not worth anyone's time.

As I began to describe my dad driving away to the class, I started to cry. I tried several times to control the flood of tears that began to shake my body. Even in the midst of my sobs, I was aware of the forty pairs of eyes focused on me.

"It's okay, Terri," my teacher gently prodded. "Go on." And with her help, I finished. I felt relieved, but even more so, shamed and embarrassed at the spectacle I had made of myself.

For a week, that shame came for return visits. Would I have the courage to face my class again? I struggled with God about how my hope to build confidence had degenerated to such horrific experience. I prayed while reading my Bible, and God met me with these words, "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe (Proverbs 29:25)" Yes, I would believe God's Word. I would go back.

I never dreamed what God had in store. I hoped to enter my classroom without being noticed. As I ducked in, the blare of party horns surrounded me. My classmates wore pointy party hats, and no one could miss a huge, thickly frosted birthday cake dotted with pink roses waiting on a table.

"Terri," they said, "now you can't say, 'I've never had a birthday party!'"

I cried again—this time for joy. I had expected rejection because of my weakness, but received acceptance and grace instead.

Once again, God used a painful experience to bring deep healing into my life.



Published by
THE CENTER FOR LIFE STORY WRITING:
ELECTRONIC GROUP
FALL 2007
Olathe, Kansas 66062

All rights reserved by the author. Copyright © 2007

<http://www.ccnlifestory.org>
Sharing life with your kids
one brief story at a time.