

## **DARE TO BE REAL--TOUCH LIVES WITH YOUR STORY**

I had no idea when I was young, that God would use my testimony, to change the lives of thousands of others. I vividly recall being spat on, picked on, abused, bullied and made fun of by other kids, and I felt as if my heart would break. I would run to my room crying, wondering why others saw me as nothing more than an object of contempt and ridicule when I had hopes, dreams, and plans for the future just like everyone else. I tried, calmly and rationally, to change the various things that provoked the ridicule--my hair, my clothes, the way I walked or spoke. But even then they always found something to criticize. I carefully observed "normal cool kids" and tried to figure out how they were unlike me so that I could recreate myself in their image. I continually tried on different masks, hoping that someday I could hide behind the right one, pass myself off as one of them, and finally fit in. But no matter how much I tried to change I was always an outsider, and my attempts to conform only seemed to feed the mindless rage of the taunting masses.

It was at a Full Gospel Businessmen's meeting where I shared my entire testimony for the very first time. I had previously shared about the illness and near death encounters that so deeply affected my childhood, but I had never mentioned being bullied, teased and humiliated as a child. To be honest I was always ashamed to share that part of my story, afraid that if people knew that I had been a loser that they would see me that way too. But I had to let go of those fears and be transparent so that God could use my testimony and my shame in order to change the lives of others.

At that meeting, I shared my experiences and I watched God begin to move; tears ran down people's cheeks, and to my surprise, they were weeping for me instead of laughing at me. I was immediately invited to another Full Gospel meeting and another after that. One young girl, who was probably only fifteen, came up to me after a meeting in Pittsburgh to say, "I relate so much to what you said because I am a diabetic who is picked on, hated and despised."

When I wrapped my arms around her to comfort her, I didn't just feel sympathy, but a deep empathy for her because I knew exactly how she felt. As humbling as it was to be honest God used my transparency to encourage her and ultimately change her life, and I give Him all the glory for that. I wasn't just another do-gooder spewing the same old stuff she had tuned out before. Rather I was someone who had been where she was and had come through to the other side. My story gave her hope that she could endure and emerge victorious as well. She marveled that I could go through everything she was

suffering and still love God and hold onto the hope that He could turn it all into something beautiful. Beauty for ashes!

It was then that I realized that I had to share my testimony everywhere I went, whenever I was given the opportunity. My story opened the door to speak on my radio program called “Invading the Darkness” and then books came out. I was asked to speak at many different events around the country. Little did I know when I began to share, that my testimony would actually go around the world. I was invited on TBN several times to share my story on a local program. This led to a national teen TV program called Two Worlds, which was only the beginning of what God was going to do. It all started with choosing to be transparent and getting over my feelings of shame when I realized that others might benefit from my story if I would just give it to God.

I want to encourage you to step out, too, casting away your fear and embarrassment, to dare to be transparent. You may not believe this, but that may be your very purpose in living—your destiny—to touch lives with your story. Perhaps you’ve gone through terrible suffering but feel

that you could never expose those awful, secret things to anyone. Well, I’m here to tell you that if you choose to risk it and give it to God as a sacrifice of praise, He will use it to touch and transform lives, ministering encouragement and hope to those on the verge of giving up. And in the process you will be filled up to overflowing knowing that your suffering was not only, not in vain, but turned out to be a blessing that might just change the world.

To watch my story on video or info on my testimony book "Crocodile Meat"

<http://www.findrefuge.tv/our-story/>

(A teen version is also available)

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