

Home At Last

I can tell you about growing up in a home with an alcoholic father, who beat my mother. Or I can tell you what life was like when my parents divorced, and I couldn't see my brother or sister because I lived with my dad. I can give the details of being raped at 15, or tell you what life was like being in an abusive relationship with my boyfriend for four years. I can share with you the pain of carrying a child for three months and then losing her. But I'd rather tell you about how those experiences have made me a stronger person; I want to tell you about the person I have become. I grew up not knowing love. Perhaps it was a product of the Guyanese culture I grew up in. I was never told that I was loved, not even by my parents. It was just something that they didn't grow up knowing, and so I didn't know it either. I felt like the outsider -- and I was often called the "skinny, ugly kid." I thought it was because I was not the only boy in my family, or because I wasn't the youngest. I just couldn't figure it out.

As the oldest, there were very high expectations for me. But as a child, I didn't understand them. I saw the way women were treated in my family -- they were almost not human, but more like machines going about their duties and never quite doing them well enough. So I did what I thought was right. I was a straight-A, honour-role student for most of high-school, and graduated from college with double honours. But it wasn't enough. That alone didn't seem to please my parents.

I had grown up going to church, but it was just one more duty that I had to perform. Most people in my family were "Sunday morning Christians," and I had promised myself that as soon as I was able to say "No," I wasn't going to go back. As soon as I left home, I didn't.

My life became full of friends I didn't need and the expectations I grew up knowing no longer existed. But it's wasn't what I wanted.

What changed my life wasn't something out of the ordinary, but it was unexpected. It was a two simple comments one from my younger sister and then another one from my brother. It's been almost four years since I've heard those words from them, but they still remain in my heart.

My sister said, "You're looking for love in all the wrong places." My brother said, "I don't know what you do on Friday and Saturday nights, but I'd like for you to come to church with us on Sunday."

I couldn't stop thinking about those words. I knew my sister's words were true and I knew I had to go to church, if only because my brother asked me to. I could now see something different in my brother and sister's lives, something I longed for. They had peace.

I learned that this peace came from their relationship with a Heavenly Father who did not hurt or hit, a God who knew everything about them every wound they had ever suffered, every secret joy. God loved them completely and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, just so that He could have a relationship with them. I learned that God loved me, too.

That year I went back to church with new vision. It wasn't about duty or obligation. It was

a time of choosing to commit my life to God. I prayed a prayer something like this:

Lord Jesus, I want to know you personally. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life to you and ask you to come in as my Saviour and Lord. Take control of my life. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Make me the kind of woman you want me to be.

Now I know that I am created in His image, perfect in His eyes. He is the father and mother that I come home to. He listens to me, He laughs with me, He sheds tears with me, and He holds me and comforts me when no one else can.

Looking back at the person I was, and seeing how God has changed my life over the last four years, I am thankful. It's hard to believe that I was ever quiet and closed-up, with no drive or motivation! My heart was full of love -- it always has been -- but I was never able to share it until I gave all of my hardships to God.

I am learning to see people as God sees them, love them and forgive. Now I am able to rebuild some of the broken relationships in my life. The one that I longed for most was the relationship with my mother, and God has restored that. I will always cherish her as one of the most precious gifts that God has given me. I respect her strength and character, and I can now appreciate the woman she has become.

I don't often walk around without a smile on my face anymore, because I know that He loves me, and all I need I have found in Him.

Credit – Ann Mangroo