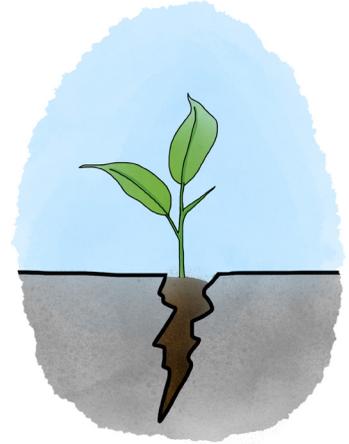


Chapter one: Abuse is Not My Story

I have wanted to write my story for years. In the depth of my heart I longed to write a story that would allow survivors to feel hope. But that was not my experience. My experience was dark. It felt like it had no end. At times, there was no hope, but instead, a daily fight to survive.



I still haven't found the end of my story, but I did find the beginning. And, when I found the beginning, I found light. I found hope. I finally found out that I could be alive, and not just survive.

Let's start directly with where it began. I found hope when I finally understood these three truths:

1. Abuse is not "my story."
2. "My story" is created by the decisions I make.
3. I did not make the decision to be abused.

Yes, these concepts may seem basic. But if allowed to sink in, they will change your life. I am going to break each of them down. I want to challenge you. I want to encourage you to believe them.

But I have to be honest. I don't have a magic wand. I didn't believe these statements the first time I heard them. It is possible I didn't believe them the 100th time I heard them. But one day I did; today I still do. The journey is long, and healing forces you to face hurt that might overwhelm you. But you do have hope. You do have a future. You can be saved. Life can begin.

A few days after this three-line revelation hit me, an analogy sank deep in my soul. This analogy is a picture of what happened to me, and I'd love to share it with you. I had been living my life hidden below a concrete



foundation of a house. Dirt and decay surrounded me, pressing in on my body from all sides. Above me was a concrete slab. Above the concrete slab I believed people lived life. I could hear footsteps of real life. Sometimes people were running because they were busy. Sometimes they were dancing because they were happy. And sometimes they were

stomping in anger. But, they were living. I was not.

At times I would attempt to push away the dirt engulfing me. I wanted to move like the people above me did. But the dirt made no footsteps noises. Other times I would lie down and give up completely. I would accept that decay was inevitable. I would bury myself in dirt, inviting the decay to come sooner.

Finally, after the concrete slab grew old, the smallest crack formed. And now my belief that life occurred on top of the slab was confirmed. I couldn't understand it from my small view through the crack, but I knew it was happening. I needed a bigger crack. I fought for years and years to make the crack bigger. Finally, someone noticed I existed below the crack. They tried to help me out but couldn't. So they became a cheerleader. I had to destroy the concrete slab myself.

Cheerleaders came. At first it was one, then two, then ten, then more. And, another type of person came too – an investor. The investors dropped seeds in the crack. They said the seeds could grow and cause the crack to expand. The seeds gave me hope. The seeds healed parts of my decaying soul. Sometimes I quit fighting. The job was too big. Other times I fought hard. I accepted as many seeds as I could. The journey was long; the concrete was restricting and heavy. And the light I saw through the crack was almost invisible. But, over time, the concrete began to

crack in more and more places. I began to see the life that existed above the dirt. I wanted it, and it terrified me at the same time. But, I kept fighting. Finally, a power drill came to attack the concrete. It was time for me to have the choice to leave the dirt. The power drill came because I finally understood. The drill was powered by a revelation deep in my soul – a revelation that I did not choose to be born in the dirt, and that my choices were my story. It was a revelation that if I wanted to live my story above the concrete slab, I could.

I had invested in good choices for years. I had fought to break the concrete. The cracks were because I knew I was worth more than dirt and decay. I had accepted the healing seeds. I had made cracks that gave them light to grow. My story was created by the decisions I made. I did not make the decision that forced me to fight the concrete. And with a deep breath and a loud yell, I released from deep inside of me a power that erupted through the cracks, fueled the power drill, and destroyed the concrete slab.

For the first time light appeared. It was beautiful, and it felt so amazing in my soul. As I moved, dirt fell off of me. It was no longer attached. It was no longer painfully pressed into me. I shook it off with a furry. The dirt was not my decision. I had a new life and my life, my story, was created by the decisions I made. Then, as I walked on, I realized I still did not hear footsteps. I wasn't walking on a concrete slab, but something better. I was walking through sprouts. Sprouts of trees. Sprouts of flowers. Sprouts of grass. All of the seeds I had planted were also experiencing the freedom to become what they were meant to be. What once had been only dirt and a concrete slab was now beauty; it was new life, and new beginnings...it was hope. This was my life; this was the beauty of the decisions I had made. This was my starting point. This was the day my life became my dream.



I saved some pieces of concrete. But I didn't save them because they were part of my story. They aren't. My story is created by the decisions I make. I did not pour the concrete. But I broke it! I saved a few concrete pieces because they remind me I can defeat anything. Their brokenness reminds others that they can win too. And, the concrete pieces remind me of the importance of seeds, of cheerleaders, of investors, and of belief.

Throughout this book, I want to share with you the three truths by which I now live. Each of them has amazing power. And each of them has massive importance.

ABUSE IS NOT MY STORY.
MY STORY IS CREATED BY THE DECISIONS I MAKE.
I DID NOT MAKE THE DECISION TO BE ABUSED.

Sometimes I will show you pieces of the broken concrete. But the concrete is not my story. I share broken pieces to encourage you that you are not alone. I share broken pieces to tell you that concrete breaks. You are not trapped. I share broken pieces so that you can touch them – so that you can feel them. So that you can see that the pieces don't have the power I once perceived they had. Maybe you still perceive the dirt is too full of decay. Maybe you believe the concrete will never break. I am here to remind you that it will break, and that you can shake off the dirt. And when light hits you – when you are drenched in it and when it takes over your soul – you will know that your story was worth fighting for. You are worth fighting for. So, let's fight.



Guided Journaling Activity:

Turn to pages 23-24 and Reflect on Concepts 1, 2 and 3