

High school is supposed to be a time of growth and learning and that turned out to be especially true for me. In fact, I've written this article with the hope of sparing other teenagers the pain of what became my most important lesson. I've also written it so that parents and grandparents can help their children and grandchildren avoid the pain of rape.

SURVIVING RAPE

By Marie Oaks

GOD'S MERCY KNOWS NO BOUNDS

I was raised in a good Catholic home. As a Catholic, I was entirely devoted to remaining a virgin until marriage. Nevertheless, like too many teenagers, I got caught up in popular culture.

My senior year in high school seemed like the best year of my life. I was preparing for college and enjoying my friendships, but all that began to unravel when my heart was broken by a longtime boyfriend.

As the school year was coming to a close, there was a party almost every night. I was tired of these parties, but one night I needed a break from study when my friend Ashley called and convinced me to go to a party with her. As usual, the parents were away and people were everywhere. Once Ashley and I walked in, we split up.

Introduction to danger

My ex-boyfriend Robert was there with his older friend Matt. Still heartbroken, I thought I'd make Robert jealous by drinking beer with Matt, who put his arm around me. However, Matt had other intentions and I became increasingly more uneasy as he pressured me for sex—so as soon as I saw another friend I ran away from him.

Eventually, I went upstairs in search of a restroom. Matt was upstairs and he pushed me into a dark room. I couldn't see anything and the next thing I knew, he had thrown me to some surface like a couch or a bed—then he was on top

of me. I screamed at him and yelled for help, but the music was so loud that no one heard. I tried to fight him off, but he had just finished basic military training and easily held me down. I screamed again; then he hit me on the head and told me to stop—but I was so dazed from the blow that all I remember is pain and the faint awareness that I was losing consciousness.

I know the fear that comes with an unplanned pregnancy, but I more vividly know the pain of losing children—and I would beseech other women please do not suffer both.

Once I awoke all the pain returned. As I sat up, I noticed a rip in my shirt and bruises all over my stomach and chest. I looked at my arms and noticed hand-shaped bruises. It hurt just to sit because my body ached inside and out. I slowly stood up and walked downstairs to look for someone.

It was morning and a few people were passed out on couches and floors. I couldn't find Ashley, but I found my purse, pulled out my almost-dead cell phone and called her. She was at home asleep. I told her that I was still at the party and needed her to come get me right away. I didn't see anyone else awake, but I was terrified that Matt would walk around a corner or wake up from under a blanket. I went to the porch, sat on the swing and jumped at every noise until Ashley arrived.

When Ashley picked me up,

she asked why I looked so bad and I swore her to secrecy then told her what happened. Deep in a state of shock, I couldn't really think what to do next. I should've gone to the hospital emergency room, but I was afraid. I also felt ashamed and dirty—and that would haunt me for months. Instead asking for help, when we got to Ashley's house I called my

mom to say that I had fallen asleep there and wouldn't be home for the rest of the day. Hours later Ashley took me home where I decided not to tell my parents.

The aftermath

Before long I found out I was pregnant. Because I hadn't gone to the hospital or reported Matt to the police, I didn't know what to do. Of course I loved children and wanted to have a houseful once I got married, but I was not ready for this yet and didn't know how I'd get through it—except to say that abortion was out of the question because I believe that every child is infinitely valuable no matter how he is conceived.

Weeks later an ultrasound test revealed that I was having twins. I tried to sort out all the details regarding how I'd finish senior year and then go to college. I thought about adoption and realized this was probably the best idea, although I knew it would be almost impossible to give up my own babies.

At last I had to tell my parents

the news because I couldn't bear for them to hear it from someone else. In order to protect them from heartbreak, I didn't tell them that I had been raped. Consequently, they were terribly disappointed in me and I felt guilty for having brought them shame. In my sorrow for them, I became so upset that I was constantly sick—risking not only my life, but the life of my babies. It also denied my parents the opportunity to help me to the fullest extent.

Shock, mercy and justice

When the babies were five months along, Matt called me. Just the sound of his voice paralyzed me with fear and anger. He had found out I was pregnant and wanted me to have an abortion. I told him abortion was out of the question. He said he understood and wanted to meet and talk about what we would do. Since he was the father, I thought I should be fair so I agreed to meet him in an open public place.

We talked for a little while and

the conversation ended as he pretended to reach for the babies in my stomach, then drew back and punched me. I fell backwards. He kept hitting and kicking me. Again I screamed and tried to fight—but I was weak and disoriented—unable to defend myself. At some point he left me—and our babies—there to die.

After Matt left, I was able to call a friend who came and took me to the hospital. A doctor told me I had serious internal injuries that would take many months to heal with treatment. Then the doctor said my babies had no heartbeat and I just gave up. I had lost my twin girls.

Although I cannot remember much about this period, I do know that the constant prayers of my family and close friends got me through that time. In answer to those prayers, Matt was arrested for other crimes and he's in prison for a long, long time.

Now I have recovered physically, but still I suffer emotional pain. I fear I may carry it for the

rest of my life. Some nights I wonder what my little girls would've been like. Sometimes memories return with a rush of pain and sadness. Some moments I feel ashamed and dirty and violated, but during those moments I am able to thank God that I am still alive, healing and getting stronger.

My sorrow isn't so much about what happened to me, but because I lost my children. When I mourn, at least I can thank God for the hope of seeing my beautiful daughters in heaven. And while I still have a lot of anger towards Matt, I have forgiven him and hope that his years in prison will bring him to contrition for all the agony he caused.

Although I'd never have chosen to be violated and I don't want to suffer it again, I have come to realize that God bestows grace and blessings especially during the worst trials.

My heart goes out to every woman, man and child who has ever suffered the pain of sexual assault and I pray that no one will ever have to face it again. Nonetheless, perhaps this was permitted so I could tell you how God, in His infinite mercy, can bring peace to the most troubled souls.

From this I understand how teenage girls feel when they become pregnant. Please give every child a chance. I know the fear that comes with an unplanned pregnancy, but I more vividly know the pain of losing children—and I would beseech other women please do not suffer both. After all, every child is wanted by wonderful adoptive parents and of course, by God.

All names have been changed.

Spiritual energizer

It is the vocation of every Christian, not only of a few elect, to belong to God in love's free surrender and to serve Him. Whether man or woman, whether consecrated or not, each one is called to imitation of Christ. The further the individual continues on this path, the more Christ-like he will become. Christ embodies the ideal of human perfection: in Him all bias and defects are removed, and masculine and feminine virtues are united and their weaknesses redeemed; therefore, His true followers will be progressively exalted over their natural limitations. That is why we see in holy men a womanly tenderness and a truly maternal solicitude for the souls entrusted to them while in holy women there is a manly boldness, proficiency and determination.

—Collected Works of Edith Stein (Vol. 2)

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