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A Lifetime of God-Moments

By Christina King

When I tell people about my past, I often hear “How did you turn out so well?”

My mother was a German immigrant whose parents fled to the United States to escape the Nazi Regime. Her paternal grandfather was heavily tied to the Nazi Party, but her father would have nothing of it. My mother was taught simple prayers by her mother and occasionally attended Mass on Christmas and Easter.

My father was raised with no faith to speak of, though I heard that my paternal grandmother was raised Catholic. When my father was drafted in the Vietnam War, my parents, who were dating, decided to elope. Neither of their families supported the marriage. I was born just after my father returned from the war.

My mother had me baptized (against my father’s wishes) at a beautiful cathedral in San Jose, California. My godfather was a drug dealer, and my godmother was the woman who talked my mom into leaving my father.

My parents separated when I was just three months old. After their divorce I stayed with my mom. We moved in and out of people’s homes, many of whom used drugs on a regular basis and several of whom abused me. My earliest memory is the sexual abuse that began when I was only three.

We moved around a lot. We lived in California, Nevada, and even Germany before we finally moved to Wisconsin to live with my new stepfather. He started the verbal and physical abuse right away. The sexual abuse started later, when I was in the fourth grade. As I was growing up, we only went to church on Christmas Eve for midnight Mass and sometimes on Easter.

I began to hate my home life so much I would pretend to miss the bus at the end of the school day just to avoid going home. When the opportunity presented itself to provide a viable excuse to stay after school, I jumped on it.

Light Penetrates My Darkness

One day I overheard one of the band students talking about “CCD.” This was religious education for the public-school kids who did not attend the local Catholic school. Every Wednesday after school they walked to the Catholic school for religion classes. I went home determined to convince my mother to sign me up. Now I had no interest in religion or in God or learning my faith; I just wanted an excuse to stay away from my stepfather and the home life which I dreaded. (I also enjoyed stopping at the dime store to buy candy, which was on the way to the church.)

Because I had never made my first Communion or received the sacrament of penance, I had to join the first-grade students even though I was a fourth grader. Though I don’t recall any wounded pride at being the oldest student, I do remember not fitting into the desks.

In CCD I encountered a nun for the first time. I asked her “How long is forever in heaven?” And she said, “Take the longest and largest shoreline you have ever seen. Now

imagine you can count every grain of sand. Take that number and multiply it by the biggest number you can think of. Forever in heaven is longer than that.”

That was my first “God moment”: a moment in life when we realize that there is something that exists that is far more profound than we are. We all have them, though some of us choose to call them luck or coincidence. I call them *God-moments* because they are the moments in my life that define who I am. It is moments like these in my past that I reflect upon and realize that God was not just present but always reaching out to me.

I believe that after my first confession, I received a powerful gift of faith. I told all my secrets to the priest. I told him all of the things I had done and all of the horrible things that had been done to me. When I finished, he consoled me and gave me absolution. When I walked out of that church and opened the doors to go outside, I almost fell over from the awesomeness of the sunlight and the colors on the trees.

It was as if the colors danced on the leaves instead of just being colors. The light felt like it was penetrating my very core. The only way I can describe the magnificence of my experience is to compare it to suddenly being able to see without glasses. You see the same thing, but with a clarity and the vividness that you previously took for granted. I did not take what I saw for granted that day. To me, a miracle had occurred—my second God-moment.

What I did not realize is that my pupils had dilated because I had been in a dark place. When I stepped outside, the dilated pupil allowed the light to flood in. It was as if a shroud of darkness was lifted from my eyes as well as my soul. I was certain that something amazing had just happened. I felt renewed.

Even so, over the next several years the ongoing physical, sexual and emotional abuse reached a crescendo. Finally, I told the right people about the abuse, which resulted in my stepfather’s arrest and sentencing. I was temporarily placed in a foster home. My father, who lived in California, came to Wisconsin immediately, which was a pretty profound statement to me. He packed up my things and took me to California.

We had never spent any significant amount of time together, however, so it was a difficult transition.

Desperate for Love

I learned to be a social chameleon, a survival skill I picked up from moving around my whole life. Enrolled in the local school, I started to establish myself. I dyed my hair blonde, wore all the latest styles, got contacts, made the varsity cheerleading squad, and dated a star football and baseball player from a famous family.

He began to pressure me to become physically intimate. I went to a school counselor, who told me, “You will know when you are ready, but let’s get you on the pill, in case you decide you are!” I was not told that I was a person of value and that I had more to offer someone than pleasure. Desperate for love, I allowed myself to be used as an object in an attempt to find it.

I became pregnant within two weeks of graduation. My boyfriend and I tried to make it work. We married and then divorced. I stopped going to church. I fell into a life of sin and even questioned the existence of God. I lived this way for the next couple of years. The next God-moment happened the day of my boyfriend’s (later my husband’s) college graduation. His best friend from high school, a devout Catholic, came for the ceremony

with his girlfriend, also a devout Catholic. We hit it off right away. I noticed a medal around her neck, and she explained to me the Miraculous Medal. I was immediately interested in the details. (At that time I was wearing an art sculpture of a fertility goddess because I loved the story attached to it, which I would tell to anyone who asked.) Several weeks later I received a package in the mail. It included two blessed Miraculous Medals. I began to wear one regularly, and I soon found myself talking to God for the first time in years. I felt him embracing me and knew he was right there. This was a huge God-moment because I was not afraid of God but drawn to him.

Moments of Grace

The next few years were like a carnival ride as I began to change interiorly. I hungered for more knowledge about the Blessed Mother and my Catholic faith. I read the Fatima story and was struck by the devotion of these simple children. I saw my faith as something beautiful. I also began to feel ashamed of my own selfishness and weakness of faith. To rectify this I began reading books by the dozen. I attended lectures on the faith. I started praying the Rosary regularly. I went back to confession for the first time in years and let all the horrible sin spill out. I felt so free and refreshed having experienced a renewed gift from my childhood. This was just another God-moment in a line of many more over the next 10 years.

I have often thought how God and our faith are much like a mechanic and his toolbox. In the sacraments, we have tangible means to experience Christ. The sacraments are the tools to experience God not just on a spiritual level, but also through the five senses of the human body. He realized we would need the outward signs as well as the interior grace that the sacraments provide.

Many things led to my re-conversion. Our Blessed Mother had a major part in it. I had never known a healthy male relationship; God sent his Mother to me to ensure that the way to him would not be lost. He took me as I was, realizing my faults and my weaknesses, using his tools to make me right.

I have been married for 13 years. My husband came into the Church in 1997, and our marriage was blessed that same year. We have seven children.

Christina King is a speaker for Catholic Answers. She talks to teens about modesty, dating, chastity, and abstinence, as well as to parents about their role as the primary educators of their children. She is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point with a degree in Psychology and Counseling with graduate studies in Family Counseling.