

Abandoned, Adopted, and Healing

By: Doreen Anne Welser

The best place to start any story is the beginning. I was born Dec. 27, 1944, in Buffalo, N.Y. My given name was Doreen Anne Woodruff. I was one of six children from a marriage between Mary and Fred.

Mary gave birth to the first twins, Carol and Jerry, and next came my sister Maralee and me. Last came the youngest set of twins, Barry and Bill.

When work became scarce, Fred moved away, leaving us all behind. With my father gone, the responsibilities of raising six kids crossed a line for my mom—a line that would affect all my brothers and sister's lives tragically forever.

She started to visit a bar and fell in love with a man named Charlie. When she fell in love, her first family was no longer her first priority. She became pregnant again, and she and Charlie decided they would leave together for Michigan.

I'll never forget my sister's story of that departure—the way she told it after I became grown and married. She watched as my mom drove away. When she had asked where she was going, our mom's reply was... just a vacation.

But Maralee and the rest of us were abandoned. Maralee was four years old and I was just one. Mother never came back. Instead, she had four more kids.

At that point, my father came back into our lives and changed them dramatically. The eldest twins, Jerry and Carol, remained with him. Bill and Barry were put up for adoption. Maralee and I were placed in the Bradford Children's Home. My sister and I stayed there until I was seven, going on eight.

I don't remember feeling bad about being in a home. I saw my sister often even, though we were in different age groups. I knew she was my family. Actually, she was my whole sense of family.

My father had a job taking care of a lawn and other custodian type jobs. He would take us home once in a while for the weekend. When I was still pretty young, I ran all the way to the highway. My intent was to walk in the direction of our home. Luckily, I spilled the beans to another child who promptly told the authorities. I truly believe in my heart God protected me.

When I was seven, Maralee and I were told we were going to be adopted. We were so happy. We were going to have a home of our own. And what was even more exciting was that we would be together.

The family's name was Johnson. They lived in Lantz Corner's, Pa., a stone's throw from Mt. Jewett, Pa. But after a short stay there, a crushing blow came.

A couple from Mt. Jewett, the Hinses', obtained adoption papers for only one child and since the other family didn't have papers, I was soon to be adopted elsewhere. I was torn away from my sister, believing I was just taking a ride and would be brought home.

I was terrified, and all I wanted was to be reunited with my sister. I cried for weeks, but gradually I was persuaded to stay. But I never forgot Maralee.

I started elementary school at Mt. Jewett Grade School. I'd see my sister being transported by bus, going the opposite direction to Smethport, Pa. I missed her terribly.

Years later, when Maralee and I reunited as adults, she told me she'd walk by my house early in the a.m. just to see if she could find me.

Soon, I had a new brother Bill, who had been adopted as an infant. I learned early on he was favored in our adoptive parents eyes. As we got older, he became a bully. But, when the punishments came, I was always the one to blame.

Pressures at home from my adopted dad's verbal abuse became too much to bear. Repeatedly, I was told how ungrateful I was. After all, wasn't I lucky to have been given a family and regular home?

When I needed help with my homework my dad would be extremely cruel. He'd stand behind me, berating me and telling me how G. D. stupid I was and that I'd never learn anything. I shut down and believed that lie until I was well into my adult life.

These verbal lashings could have ruined any ability to learn. It was hard for me to concentrate because of these attacks, but I excelled in music. I loved playing my clarinet in band and also singing in the high school chorus.

My adoptive mom was a good and kind mom. She had been an elementary school teacher and gave up a career to adopt and raise me and my brother. She literally was my sanity, but she was ill-equipped to stand up to my father's attacks. We were all scared of him when he went off.

In my senior year of high school, 1963, I decided I needed to leave because I felt defenseless, hated, and certainly not loved, at least by my dad.

I had been cleaning houses for my spending money, and so I confided in the retired school teacher whose home I was cleaning. She said if I had to leave, I could live with her and her husband.

I loved being with Florence and Benney. They never had kids and treated me very well. I felt that a hundred pound load had been taken off my shoulders. I remained at the Swanson's for most of my senior year, and then I went on to live with Florence's sister who needed help with her house. There I was treated equally as well.

When it came time to graduate, I called my mom at the Hinses' house to ask if they could come to graduation. The answer was a polite, cold "No."

When I overcame that blow of disappointment, I formed a wall around my heart. It was at that point I started to trust in myself and the will to go it alone.

After graduation, I worked in Warren, Pa., for one year. I was totally self-supporting at eighteen. When I was nineteen, I married my husband, Dan Welser. We had been together since

eleventh grade. His temperament was gentle, quiet, calm, but most of all, he was a rational person. I truly felt blessed by him.

But when my dear mate for life carried me over the threshold into our first apartment, I didn't reach out to him warmly. I told him sternly and coldly I would never be trod on again.

Dan ignored my remark, and he has been a good husband. Our family has always been able to depend on him.

We had our first child Doug when we were young—just 22. Four years later, our daughter Debbie came along.

Being a family that would stay together, love and care for each other was all I needed or wanted. But things are never that simple, and life and reality have a way of catching up to you.

Things came to a head when I lost my adopted brother Bill in an accident on his way to work. Although we had fought as children, I had grown to understand and respect him. And now, I had felt abandoned once again, even though I had a family who loved me all around.

I was strong for months after losing him, but then while holding Dan's and my baby daughter, I kept looking at his military service picture and couldn't stop crying. I just held in pain until I couldn't anymore. I finally I entered grief counseling, and that unlocked all that loss brought on and then some.

The counselor asked me about my childhood, and I recounted my story—the children's home experience, the separation from my family and sister, everything.

This was the beginning of my healing. My counselor explained that kids brought up in an "institution" had little valuation of themselves.

She worked with me and literally unwove the trauma I had experienced. The hardest part for me during that time was trying to verbalize what had happened without crying uncontrollably.

My goal and priority in life was to be the best wife and mom I knew how to be. My family was the most important life-goal to me, as I felt it was one of my highest callings.

I felt God had protected me in a powerful way, and I knew He had an eternal plan for my life. I am now sixty-three. When I was thirty-one I gave my life to Christ.

I went from being chronically depressed to a set-free, happy and joyful person. My conversion was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

When I began to read the Bible, His spoken word, I felt the security and perfect love that only He can give. The bitterness I felt toward my biological mom left me and vanished when I forgave her. I also forgave my adopted dad and felt His grace and healing in my life.

I thought my learning ability was stifled because of the untruths I had come to believe. But my ability to learn has been greater than I once believed. My love of music led me to learn bass guitar at 55 years of age. I play every Sunday for church and I love to sing and play.

I have a deep love and compassion for kids. God gave me the extreme blessing to be part of a youth group for fourteen years. I can spot a hurting kid a mile away as I recognize the symptoms. I can and love everyone that God leads me to encourage.

I can testify what Satan had planned for evil in my life, God had planned for good. I hope this account of my life brings hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

In His love,
Doreen Anne Welser