

Spring 2012



AVA'S CALL

Advocacy for Victims of Abuse



Yvonne DeVaughn
AVA Director

AVA'S CALL is a quarterly publication of the Department of Women Ministries' program Advocacy for Victims of Abuse.

AVA's Goals are to:

- Provide resources to bring healing to victims of abuse
- Equip the church to minister to victims of abuse
- Promote preventative measures to combat abuse

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DONATE to AVA by clicking on the donate now button on the AVA Website:
covchurch.org/abuse

National Domestic Violence Hotline
800-799-Safe (7233)



Our spring edition of the AVA Newsletter shines a light on women who are, or have been pastors wives and are survivors of domestic violence, childhood sexual assault or both. These courageous women in leadership share their experiences and what impact their abuse has had on them and their Christian lives. There are many people who do know that there are women, men and children within our church communities who are victims and survivors of domestic violence while there are still many others who do not think that this has happened or is happening to members of our congregations. Unfortunately, it is a myth and these egregious acts happen to real people, who are sitting in our pews each week.

As you read these stories, I pray that your heart will be touched and your minds enlightened to some of the issues survivors encounter in their Christian walk. You will read how their abusers used power and control to keep them in a state of fear and helplessness. It was not until they did the hard work of breaking silence and seeking help that they were able to begin anew and start a journey of healing. Will you pray that the Lord will continue to call and send workers into the harvest to provide help and hope for those in need? For more information see: <http://www.covchurch.org/abuse/>.

Yvonne DeVaughn, AVA Director



STACY MURPHY

Recently I was invited to share information about AVA at our Women's Ministry event. My plan was not to give "TMI"... but to stay the course and provide

the data regarding the reality of abuse. As I began to prepare for this endeavor the Lord made it clear to me that He had another plan. I prayed that the Lord remove my fears, for transparency, and courage to deliver my testimony. I've never been so nervous. By the time I completed my opening prayer I could feel His presence and I began to share my story.

My birth mother was a teen when I was born so my grandparents raised me as their own. I was happy, loved and I never wanted that to change. At the age of 5 it did change. Too young to understand the details as to why I was ripped away from the only parents I knew to live in another country with my birth mother and stepfather. I was terrified of my stepfather. My first memory of sexual abuse, I've titled "The Pink Bathroom." Literally the walls, sink, tub, toilet and floor were pink.

My stepfather entered the bathroom and told me take off my clothes and to lie down on the floor. I remember shivering both with fear and chill due to the cold tile on the floor. For years I thought I had an "Out of Body Experience." Later in life I learned that my response to that experience is called "numbing." It's an emotional condition that results from overwhelming trauma. It involves shutting down all feelings so that instead of feeling pain, one simply feels nothing. In many cases numbing takes place at the time of the trauma. Abuse survivors especially those who experienced chronic or severe abuse, often describe dissociation or disconnection by recounting that during the abuse it felt they had left their body. I recall feeling something warm stream down the back of my neck. It turns out my skull was cracked and my head was bleeding uncontrollably all over the pink floor. In an attempt to stop the bleeding he submerged my head in a tub of running water. My stepfather appeared mortified, the scene was chaotic. He then wrapped my head with the pink hand towels and he ran for help. A neighbor drove me to the emergency room where I received several stitches. He told family and friends that I was trying to get a towel off the shower head and I fell down and hit my head on the tub fixture. The "Pink Bathroom" was

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just the beginning of more lies, years of physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

At the age of 12, I was reunited with my grandparents. We never spoke of the abuse. Over time I learned to forget and hide the awful truth. It was in my early 30's that my life started to spin out of control. My grandmother was dying of cancer and I was going through a divorce (more abuse...). Memories of my past began to surface and routinely haunt me. I couldn't rid myself of the shame and disgust. I felt unworthy, broken, and a victim all over again. Eventually I fell into a state of deep depression. I found myself hospitalized in the psychiatric ward after attempting to end my life by consuming an entire bottle of pain pills. I had hit rock bottom. I fell to my knees, I surrendered and prayed for help. (Psalm 50:15 "... call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.")

The Lord has changed my life in the most extraordinary and simplest of ways. Recently my husband gave me a necklace with a precious butterfly pendant. He told me the butterfly represents me fleeing my cocoon and spreading my wings for the glory of God. I don't think I'll ever take it off.

STACY MURPHY is happily married to Pastor Bryan Murphy of South Bay Community Church and together they are the proud parents of three children, Shalice, Eric, Darrion and one wonderful grandson, Braylon. In her spare time she loves to cook, interior design and travel. Her favorite scripture is Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not on your own understanding. In all ways submit to Him, and He shall direct your path." Stacy's professional career has been in the Financial Mortgage Industry for over 25 years. She is currently Vice President and Operations Manager for First American Title Insurance Corporation. Stacy has served in various ministries within the South Bay Community Church Family including Servant Leader for the Women's Ministry. For over 5 years she's hosted a Women's Bible Study Group in her home. Recently, Stacy began sharing her story about childhood sexual assault and how she has overcome this dark past. God has called Stacy to become a Certified Local Advocate for AVA.

"If you would like to be added to our Newsletter e-mail list, send your name and email address to devaughn3@gmail.com

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month In the US:

- Over 2.5 million reports of child maltreatment (involving 3.7 million children) were received and of those, nearly 1.6 million had an investigation or assessment.
- Approximately 763,000 children (duplicate confirmations for same child) and 702,000 (unique children) were confirmed cases of child abuse or neglect. Of the unique children:
 - 51.1% were girls, 48.2% were boys, 0.6% not reported
 - 44.0% were White, 22.3% were African-American, 20.7% were Hispanic, 7.5% were unknown, 3.2% were multiple race, 1.1% were American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.9% were Asian, and 0.2% were Pacific Islander
- 1,770 children died at the hand of their abusers.
- More than 79% of the children killed were under four years of age.
- Approximately 80% of all child abuse is perpetrated by parents.

*US Department of Health & Human Services
FFY2009 Child Maltreatment Report*

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month

**National Victims' Rights Week
April 22-28, 2012**



KAREN PALMBERG

My story begins in a small town in Nebraska, surrounded by a loving family where I felt safe and special. That perfect little world was shattered one day when a neighbor's teenage son used a new litter of kittens to entice me into his house where he sexually molested me. I was 5 years old.

Fourteen years of silence and hiding began that day. My abuser told me, when he finally let me go, that if I told anyone, he would kill my grandparents and my mom and dad. Because we were neighbors I felt I had to protect my family, so I kept the secret.

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As a sophomore at North Park University, at the age of 19, I finally broke the silence. My parents and grandparents had moved to California by then and I felt confident that there would be no retribution. The little girl inside, who had not felt safe and special for so long, began gaining a new self-worth, and it felt so good and I felt so free.

Four years later I married, and within a month, I began a life of secrecy again. Now the face of the abuser was my husband. The one person whom I, and my family, had trusted with my future safety and security, was now my abuser. While the abuse took a different form than the first, the physical, emotional and spiritual abuse were devastating, and like the first, I believed it had to be held in silence at all cost.

Hadn't I learned my lesson about how silence only gives power to the abuser and imprisons the abused? Why didn't I say anything? Wasn't there anyone I could have told?

Of course there was, and today, 30 years later and 2 years after breaking the silence, I cannot tell you how many have grieved over the fact that I didn't tell them. Their guilt, of course, is not appropriate. I didn't tell them because I couldn't. I was the pastor's wife and who could I tell? No one would believe me, and if they did, what would happen to us? What would happen to our ministry? What would we do? Where could we go? How would we live? How could I provide for my children if my husband lost his job? What would he do to me? I kept silent because I couldn't risk finding out the answers to those questions. I kept silent because I was ashamed and humiliated.

Since I have "come clean" and exposed the truth of our life together, I have discovered many things. First of all, there is love and support and care. There are people to step in and help the whole family, including the abuser. Reaching out and accepting help was painful, but it was entirely necessary for the children and me.

Today, I wake up every morning knowing that it will be a safe day. There are no "eggshells" to walk on or dance around. I wake up knowing that God sees me and He loves me and He cares for me and He has been with me, comforting and loving me and wrapping His arms around me the whole time. I wake up everyday knowing that my daughter and my son love the Lord and are serving Him. I wake up everyday and know with all my heart that my family and friends love me. I wake up everyday and I celebrate the goodness of God.

It has been an incredibly difficult journey so far. I am only two years into the healing process, and while I know that the journey is a continuous one, it is important to me that I tell my story and what I have learned about the abused.

The face of the abused is all around us. It is the school teacher, the pastor's wife, the AWANA leader, the housekeeper, the farmer's wife, the person next to you in church or at work. People don't know about us because it means we have to give up control of our secret of being abused, and that means trusting people with the most personal and painful information an individual can give away. It means taking a huge personal risk.

Why then, do I allow my story to be told and my picture to be shown? It is because I choose the risk. I choose to reach out to others who may resonate with my life's story. I choose to put a name and a face to this reality of life. I choose to tell the story, not as a victim, but as a woman who chooses to stand and testify with all my heart, to God's faithfulness and His care for me. I choose to not be afraid anymore, and I choose the freedom that comes from truth-telling.

KAREN PALMBERG is the proud mother of two children and grandmother of one granddaughter. She currently serves as the Director of Church Relations for three Covenant Retirement Communities: West Covenant Village of Turlock, Mt Miguel Covenant Village and The Samarkand.



TERESA HILLIS

As a child I suffered from neglect, physical and verbal abuse. I can't remember ever feeling safe at home. My father was a military guy whose power and authority

was obvious at his job and his house, and if he felt his reasoning was being challenged, he would fix it. I remember one time my father arrived late from work, asked my pregnant mother if the older kids had finished their homework. When she answered that they were still working on it, but she was lying down because she was exhausted, he started slapping her face and punching her head. My mother started going backward, covering her face with her hands, and went rolling down the stairs. I was about 5 years old, and hid under my bed. My dad went to his bedroom to watch the news.

As my father became my mother's abuser, my mother became mine. Any object within hand's reach would become her tool: wooden spoons, sticks, broom, shoes, hands, whatever! I would ask myself, what did I do wrong? Was I not behaving like a typical kid? Yet the physical abuse was not the worst. The worst was the emotional abuse: undermining my worth, name-calling,

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mind games, the insults and humiliation in public, making fun of my appearance, and the bullying from an older sibling, in spite of my crying. Maybe what they are saying is true? I began to think that maybe I am truly what they call me? I chose to become invisible; I thought being neglected would be better. I had no voice. I could not give my opinion. I could only listen, and accept punishment whether they had a reason or not.

Whatever their reason was to act like that, I don't know. But like every child, I craved for my parents acceptance and love. At age 16 I moved to the USA and even then, at such a large distance, I was still trying to please them. I'd like to say Jesus saved me when I was 19, yet He had kept me safe my whole life. I had been lied to by my family my whole life! God says I am His princess, I am made new, I have been justified, I am accepted just as I am. He protects me, gently leads me, he prepares a table for me in the presence of my enemies, he comforts me and anoints my head with oil. I held on tightly to his Word.

It wasn't until I was in my late 30s that I met Yvonne DeV Vaughn and learned about AVA. I learned what it means to be a survivor of domestic violence. Never before had I considered that my childhood was a traumatic experience, affecting my life even today. I did experience abuse. The childhood I had was not the norm. I was a victim, but now I am a survivor. Getting healing for my soul was going to have to take priority. I did not want to make the same mistakes my mother did with my child.

Recovering is hard. It is an ongoing process and I have hard days. Certain things trigger me and I feel like I'm spiraling down. However, as I continue to allow God to use me with my experience, I am able to pick myself up and recuperate faster every time.

I didn't have to keep the shame, I just had to break the silence. That's when my healing journey began!

TERESA HILLIS was born and raised in Peru and came to know Christ at the age of 19, and started her journey towards healing and forgiveness.

She is married to David Hillis, pastor of Grace Covenant Church in Tucson, Arizona. She is the mother of Isaac Hillis, 9 years old and is an advocate for victims of abuse and for those who have no voice, including those who are victims of human trafficking.

WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE BREAKS SILENCE (for women and men)

Do believe her

her description of the violence is only the tip of the iceberg

Do reassure her

- this is not her fault
- she doesn't deserve this treatment
- it is not God's will for her

Do give her referral information:

- Local battered women's services or shelters, and
- **National Hotline**
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
1-800-787-3224 (TDD)

Do encourage her to think about a safety plan:

- set aside money, important papers, change of clothes hidden or in care of a friend
- plan how to exit the house the next time the abuser is violent
- plan what to do about the children if they are at school, if they are asleep, etc.

Do protect her confidentially

Do not give information about her or her whereabouts to the abuser, or to others who might pass information on to the abuser

Do help her with religious concerns. **If she is a Christian, give her a copy of *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse***

Do assure her of God's love and presence, of your commitment to walk with her through this difficult time