

# Hope SPEAK

Dear Readers:

Steve and I recently returned from a conference in Nebraska where we were deeply moved by the Spirit of God and greatly encouraged. It was nice to be refreshed and fed by other godly leaders, as we so often pour ourselves out into the lives of those who contact The Hope of Survivors. I wish each of you could have been there to receive the blessing we received! While we thought we would have no commitments at this conference, as it turns out, there was homework almost every night and Steve preached a short sermon to the class on the last day. It reminds us to be instant in season and out of season! (2 Timothy 4:2)

There is much to share in this newsletter, so let me begin by praising God for what He's done in the life of Melisa. As a former worker in the sex industry, I am ashamed—though no longer surprised—to say she came in contact with several pastors and church leaders who availed themselves of her services. This caused great damage to her in the way she related to and viewed God. I think you will be inspired by her testimony, *Thy Faith Hath Made Thee Whole*.

Heather, another victim, shares her story of pain and healing in *Rebuilding and Rekindling*. I pray God will encourage you, as He has encouraged her.

January was a very difficult month for us, personally. You'll find out why as you read, *Of Weeping and Joy*. Steve also wrote *Gone But Not Forgotten*, which is posted at [www.3abn.org/devotional.cfm?ID=2148](http://www.3abn.org/devotional.cfm?ID=2148). We are thankful for God's comfort during our time of grief, and for His healing during our weeks of sickness immediately afterward.

In February, Shyleene returned to Puerto Rico for another round of conferences, counseling, radio and TV interviews on behalf of the Latino Division. God is surely opening doors, and her caseload is increasing as more awareness is raised. You can read of her experiences in her testimonial, *A New Opportunity*.

On March 1, we held our first ever Volunteer Appreciation Dinner. About 66 volunteers and directors were invited, and 24 were able to attend. It was a special time of thanking each of those who have played a part in making The Hope of Survivors what it is today. To God be the glory!

The Hope of Survivors recently launched a channel on YouTube. If you'd like to join this channel and view the latest videos as we add them, please sign up at

<http://www.youtube.com/HopeSurvivors>. We've also partnered with Charlton Commerce to provide you with embroidered or custom-printed apparel. The proceeds from orders will benefit The Hope of Survivors, and wearing the apparel will give you an opportunity to help stop pastoral sexual abuse. Just go to <http://thos.webstore.us.com> to place your order.

Finally, you may download our 2007 Annual Report at [www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/pdf\\_files/2007\\_Annual\\_Report.pdf](http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/pdf_files/2007_Annual_Report.pdf). It's nice to reflect on God's goodness over the past five years. Our thanks to K.D., who so graciously did the layout of this special five-year anniversary report.

As you can see, *"It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him."* (Lamentations 3:22-24)

May your hope be in God.  
Samantha Nelson

## Volume 5, Edition 2, April 2008

Letter from the Vice President.....	1
<i>Thy Faith Hath Made Thee Whole</i> .....	2-3
<i>Of Weeping and Joy</i> .....	4
Australia and Kenya Division Info.....	5
Testimonies.....	5
Creative Ways to Help.....	5
<i>A New Opportunity</i> —Latino Division Update... <i>Rebuilding and Rekindling</i> .....	6-7
Calendar & Project Needs.....	8-9
	10

The Hope of Survivors (Main Office)  
P.O. Box 16  
Thompsonville, IL 62890

Phone: (866) 260-8958

Email: [Help@TheHopeOfSurvivors.com](mailto:Help@TheHopeOfSurvivors.com)

Web site: [www.TheHopeOfSurvivors.com](http://www.TheHopeOfSurvivors.com)

The Hope of Survivors is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization funded by individuals who support the mission and goals of the organization; survivors of pastoral sexual abuse who desire to use their means to help others; and by grants from private foundations whose values are similar to those of The Hope of Survivors. All contributions are fully tax-deductible as allowable by law. Your support is greatly appreciated.

## ***“Thy Faith Hath Made Thee Whole”***

—Melisa Sopke (2/4/08)

My name is Missy, and I want to let whoever is reading or hearing this testimony know that there is hope! I am 39 years old. As a consequence of mental illness and extreme abuse, I have been hearing voices since I was 10 or 11 years old. I have been bound by mental illness for most of my life. Mental illness and abuse has been a generational pattern in my family for decades. I heard three different types of audible voices, and I saw things that, most of the time, were not real. Some of the things I saw, I now believe were demonic.

My biological father was an alcoholic, emotionally and physically absent most of the time, and extremely abusive when he was around. My mom remarried and that relationship was strained as well. Throughout my early childhood and into my teen years, there was a lot of sexual abuse by different

men who were supposed to be role models and father figures in my life. Because of things I was taught as a child, it led me to a life in the sex industry. Out of that came a lot of abuse, shame, despair, self-loathing and a desire to die.

God sought me out to bring me out of a life of shame, despair and constant condemnation. Even after answering the call of my Jesus to become His disciple (give my life to him), I still struggled with voices, and a deep depression that led me to cut myself, burn myself and even try to kill myself. After becoming a Christian, I was still hospitalized three or four times.

Little by little, God used people to help me through my times of darkness and lead me back to the Light. My long-time friends—Suzanne, Anne, Penny, Lisa, Lawanna and Kenneth—constantly prayed for me, as well as helped me with packing, moving, doctor’s appointments, food, etc. Then, by Divine Providence, I found The Hope of Survivors web site and sent them an email. It was over two years ago, in December (2005), when I met Samantha over the phone. Through the ongoing communications I had with her and her husband Steve, I learned to trust them, and then I started reading the web site. All this brought me a glimmer of hope. They stayed in touch, even when they didn’t agree with what I was doing. They were never critical of me. They stayed in constant contact and never left me. That really made an impression on me, as so many professed Christians turn their back on you when you don’t conform to what they want within a certain amount of time. Steve and Samantha

always pointed me back to God, even when I didn’t have hope, had walked away from God, and didn’t even want to hear about God. God has shown me how they, and other genuine Christians, were consistent and patient with me, and now He’s helping me to be patient in the same way with others.

It was also through The Hope of Survivors that I found out about Black Hills Health & Education Center where I received a tremendous amount of help and support from the loving staff, especially Dr. Olivier, and found a loving set of spiritual parents in Pastor Dan and Patsy Gabbert. From Black Hills, I attended a healing session at Hope’s House, where Rena and Brenda prayed for my voices and helped me with my healing. The Hope of Survivors gave me so much—of their time, counsel and assistance—and they never expected anything in return. They just continued to encourage me and walk with me along my life’s journey. For that, I am very grateful.

Jesus never gave up on me but, as I mentioned, at one point, I gave up on Him. He kept calling me back. I felt I couldn’t be good enough. I would hear things like *“you didn’t read your Bible enough; you didn’t pray enough; if you die today, you’re not forgiven; you will go to hell.”* So I gave up. I listened to the lies of the devil. I chose to believe Satan over God. Because of my past hurt and the abuses I had suffered, I felt I couldn’t trust God and didn’t even know how to try. Praise God He kept pursuing me!

As I mentioned, there were three types of voices from which I was delivered. The first was last year when I was anointed with oil and prayed over. The second type only went away with very strong psychotic meds that made me very ill, caused me to gain weight easily, and made me extremely lethargic. The third was what I call whispering voices. They never went away. I had given up hope and began to believe they would always be here with me.

About five weeks ago, I started journaling and asking God for forgiveness. I was prompted to do this because of my new friend Laurie who’d had a similar past and yet was now an instrument in God’s hands. I wanted to believe God would help me too. I started getting back in His Word and talking to Him daily. At first I had to

***“The Hope of Survivors gave me so much—of their time, counsel and assistance—and they never expected anything in return. They just continued to encourage me and walk with me along my life’s journey. For that, I am very grateful.”***

***“Daily I would speak out loud, ‘I believe in You, Jesus. I believe You’re here with me now. I believe You really love me just the way I am—imperfections and all. I believe I am forgiven.’”***

decided this year would be different. So I decided to make up my mind to change. No matter what it took, I would change. In my alone time with God, He quickly let me know I was not alone. And, I was not to do it alone, for in my strength, I was limited as to what I could do, but in His strength, all things were possible. In my weakness, He is made strong. So I started crying out to Him. I asked Him to help my unbelief. I asked Him to teach me to love Him and to be able to receive His love and the love from others. I started finding Scriptures to speak over myself daily. Daily I would speak out loud, *“I believe in You, Jesus. I believe You’re here with me now. I believe You really love me just the way I am—imperfections and all. I believe I am forgiven.”* One day I started crying out to God in my living room. I said if that woman in the Bible was made whole by pressing through the crowd and just touching Your gown (Matthew 9:20), then I too can be made whole. All I need is just one touch from You. Just one touch! You can even breath on me but please, just make me whole. Please make me clean.

I decided to go back to church that Wednesday night. It had been six months since I had been. I was scared and really nervous because I often have panic attacks in public and at church. I was going to sit in the balcony, but on the way to church I heard *“no more shame, no more hiding.”*

When we got to church I told my friend we could sit in the main sanctuary. I had peace the whole time during the service. Not one attack. I entered into worship. I started weeping. I tried to stop crying but God said not to stop it. He was tearing down walls I had built up to protect myself from my many hurts. I shut my eyes, raised my hands to heaven, and thanked Jesus for all he had done for me—not knowing the best was yet to come!!!!

During worship, God spoke to me. He said, *“You’re forgiven; you’re forgiven. This is a new year, my daughter. You’re right; it’s a new year. This year you will walk out of your old grave clothes and into my righteousness. You’re forgiven; you’re forgiven. You have a made-up mind and I have a plan and a future for your new life. No more hiding, no more shame. Cast off shame, cast off shame. This is your year for spiritual, physical and emotional breakthrough. I see*

make myself do this. I would rather watch TV, talk on the phone or do anything but spend time with God. I

*your heart and I hear your cries. You are set free!!! This is a year to learn to walk it out. Keep sharing with others what I, your Lord God, am doing in and through your life. Keep speaking positive. Keep your face in my Word and your eyes forever turned toward Me. Keep doing what you know to be right. Stay sensitive to my Spirit. My Spirit will lead you and guide you. I am your Father. I love and care for you. Do not worry for nothing. I will supply all your needs. And, yes, even some of your wants, my daughter. I love you and I am proud of you. Keep looking to Me and always cast down vain imaginations. I love you, and remember you’re forgiven. No more shame. Cast it off and keep it off, you are now clean.”*

Later that night, on the way home, I realized for the first time since I was a child, I felt clean. For years I would wash my body with bleach—and even drink it—trying to be clean. I had been hospitalized many times. So when I felt the cleanness I was shocked, yet overwhelmed with joy and humbled by His love. Jesus had delivered me of uncleanness. I also felt no more shame! Praise God! Something I have carried with me since I was a small child of four or five years old. Then I realized the whispering voices were gone!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I wept with joy!! Never, not since I was 10 or 11, have I not heard these whispering voices. I am glad to report I am now on day five and voice free! I believe if you talk to me five years from now, I will still be voice free! God is not a man that He should lie (Numbers 23:19). If He said you can be set free, then you will be set free!! He who the Son sets free is free indeed (John 8:36)!!!

I want to leave you with two of my favorite Scriptures in the Bible:

***“I will praise the Lord at all times, I will constantly speak his praises. I will boast only in the Lord: let all who are helpless take heart. Come, let us tell of the Lord’s greatness: let us exalt his name together. I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears. Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy: no shadow of shame will darken their faces.”—Psalm 34:1-5***

***“Come now let us reason together, says the Lord, Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow, Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”—Isaiah 1:18***

## Of Weeping and Joy

—Samantha Nelson

January 4, 2008, was a sad day for us. It was the day we had to take our 16-year-old German Shepherd, Leesha, to the vet to be put to sleep. She had lived a long and full life, traveling with us almost everywhere we went, from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean and many places in between. In recent years, her health began to fail due to suffering several strokes. Her mind was gone due to canine cognitive dysfunction, basically a form of canine Alzheimer's. She had little quality of life, and was in a lot of pain due to having arthritis as well. After consulting with the vet, we made the difficult decision (after much prayer and confirmation from the Lord) that we would have to put her to sleep.

No matter how much we felt we had logically prepared ourselves for this terrible task, we were not prepared in any sense of the word for the deep grief and pain that surged over us after her death. Even her nanny—our friend Amee—who stayed with her when Leesha couldn't travel with us, went to the vet with us and felt the awful pain stab at her heart as well.

Coming home from the vet was worse. Where was our faithful companion, who, before her illness, used to run to the door to greet us, tail wagging, with a smile on her face? Where was our Leesha “Underfoot” Nelson—a loving endearment that described her exact location in relation to us at all times? To think there would be no more Leesha was more than we could bear, and we both broke down in heaving sobs, enduring a pain that seemed impossible to alleviate.

Why do I share this story with you? I share it because if you have experienced loss of any kind, or if you have experienced pastoral sexual abuse, you can relate to these feelings of grief and pain. As a victim of pastoral abuse, there seems to be no end to the suffering and shame you feel. No end to the mourning over the loss of the spiritual life you once had, the church family you knew and loved, the relationship with the Lord you desired. All seems to have been stripped away from you, suddenly, and without hope of ever being returned.

Leesha went through the pastoral abuse with us. She suffered through many nights right beside us, trying to comfort us as we cried, as we fought, as we prayed for help. The devil afflicted her in many ways through our suffering and through his evil influence all around us. It was not fair to her. How we wish we could have protected her from all of that!

You may feel as though you will never again enjoy the sweet fellowship of being with other Christians,

the beautiful harmony of hymns being sung in church, the heart-changing words of life that come from God's Word through His chosen representative, or the peace of mind and comfort that come through prayer and communion with the Lord. These are all things the enemy of our souls tries to steal from us through pastoral sexual abuse. It goes far beyond the physical—far beyond the loss of innocence and purity. The spiritual loss is the most devastating of all, for it seems like there is no hope of renewing it, as there is no trust in those spiritual leaders who are to feed us.



If you are experiencing these feelings now, or if you have already experienced them, I want to encourage you. In the midst of our grief over Leesha's death, the Lord gave Steve a promise for us to cling to. It is found in Revelation 21:4-5, “*And*

*God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, **Behold, I make all things new.** And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.*” Steve and I choose to believe Jesus will recreate Leesha one day and we will be reunited with her. Glorious thought!

However, there is an even greater promise that is for you right now. You do not have to wait until the earth made new for Jesus to recreate you. Just as Steve and I experienced His healing power and transformation in our lives after the pastoral abuse, you too can experience that healing touch from Jesus right now, as He recreates you and gives you new life.

You may be sad at this very moment, and you may be grieving some loss, or suffering deep anguish, but remember the promise found in Psalm 30:5, “*...weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*”

May God comfort and strengthen you, no matter what you are going through right now.

## International Division Contact Information

### Australia Division

P.O. Box 466  
Drayton North QLD 4350 Australia  
Phone: 0410 036 218 (in AU)  
or (866) 260-8958 extension 6 (from U.S.)  
Web: [www.TheHopeOfSurvivors.com](http://www.TheHopeOfSurvivors.com)  
Email: [Coralie@TheHopeOfSurvivors.org](mailto:Coralie@TheHopeOfSurvivors.org)

### Kenya (Africa) Division

P.O. Box 11544-00100  
Nairobi, Kenya  
Phone: 254-2-721-716-822 (in Kenya)  
Web: [www.TheHopeOfSurvivors.com](http://www.TheHopeOfSurvivors.com)  
Email: [Hephzibah@TheHopeOfSurvivors.com](mailto:Hephzibah@TheHopeOfSurvivors.com)

Please pray for Hephzibah, our representative in Nairobi, her client and others who are affected by the violence that continues there after disputes over recent elections.

## Testimonials

*"I just finished reading Steve's words in "Hope-Speak," [January 2008] and I wanted to share with you my overwhelming feelings when I read the last line, "God has used our experience to save more than just 'one'." I felt an upheaval in my heart and was so touched by the words that I felt like I was about to break down and cry uncontrollably. Tears came to my eyes and I was overpowered by the feeling to hold onto you both and have a good cry over what happened to you two. What a way to turn a bad situation into what your ministry is today! ... Steve's words touched me in a way I've never been touched before. You two have such a special ministry and I'm thrilled to read how far it has come since C. discovered your web site. That your ministry has expanded worldwide is amazing, and you both were such an integral part of his healing. My wishes for you this new year are that God sees fit to offer your ministry more open doors and for good health. I'm so happy to have met you both... You both hold a special place in my heart."—MA*

*"First off, I would love to thank you for taking the time out of your busy day for me... you don't even know me, yet you take the time out to read my story and reply even. You assume I am telling the truth and don't assume I am making this up. I have wanted to tell someone for the longest, but feared no one would believe me. ...You have helped me more than you will ever know..."—NY*

*continued on page 7...*

## Creative ways to help...

This is your opportunity to nominate The Hope of Survivors for a monthly drawing for \$10,000. Please visit <http://www.sharesome.org/nominate.asp> and enter your nomination now!

Don't have any money? You can still support The Hope of Survivors! We will receive a penny each time you search the Internet using **www.GoodSearch.com**. Money from advertisers will go to The Hope of Survivors without you spending a dime!

Do you shop online a lot? Then shop through **iGive.com** and earn money for The Hope of Survivors each time you order from nearly 700 popular merchants online!

Also, **Giveline.com** is an online store created for the community-minded shopper. Every purchase generates a donation to The Hope of Survivors. Check it out today!

You can also donate through **American Express Giving Express** by going to: <http://amex.justgive.org/nonprofits/donate.jsp?ein=65-1211701>.

Thank you for supporting The Hope of Survivors!

## A New Opportunity

—by Shyleene Rosado

Day by day God gives us an opportunity to go with Him, to see His love, wonder, grace and forgiveness. He never quits offering this opportunity to us.

The question is, Where is the opportunity? Maybe you don't understand or don't see it clearly. Perhaps you see suffering, anguish, sadness, confusion and a lot of work. Perhaps because of the distraction of the world, excess work, problems at home, and other duties, you don't see the new opportunity God gives you.

It's wonderful expressing the wonder God gives us. He gave me the privilege of having good parents, a home, an excellent husband and more. However, He gives me other reasons to express my gratitude as well.

In my experience with The Hope of Survivors, God has given me the opportunity to have a reunion with Him. He desired to heal my hurt (personal problems, faulty feelings and sin). Part of the ministry's mission is reaching the hurting—those who have been abused physically, emotionally and spiritually at the hands of a member of the clergy. The clergy never abused me, but the enemy of my soul had confused me. Satan made me feel miserable, guilty and sinful. But, praise the Lord, He reached me through The Hope of Survivors.

My experience is nothing compared with the victims who have been abused physically, emotionally and spiritually, but God gave me the opportunity to see how sinful I am and how much He desired to reach me, help me, and give me forgiveness. It's wonderful!

The new opportunity God gave me recently, on behalf of the Latino Division, was to visit Puerto Rico again in February.

The first activity I participated in was the Woman's Camp for the Adventist Association for West Puerto Rico. During this time, I had the opportunity to share about The Hope of Survivors and the hope, love and faith only God can give. There were about 350 women at this camp. It was a blessing to meet Raquel Quiñónez who gave me the opportunity to speak about pastoral sexual abuse at this camp. I shared the mission of The Hope of Survivors and why it is considered abuse when a pastor engages in a sexual relationship with a member of the congregation, and how important it is to recognize this fact, and to provide education and prevention in the church.

The response from the group was very positive. Many women, including pastor's wives and victims, shared their own experience of abuse or that of someone

they knew, and they were interested in offering this information to the church to help others who have been hurt. Thank you, Raquel and the group, for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the ministry.



Below are some of the responses I received:

*"This ministry is necessary and gives a thrust. There are many situations of abuse in the church and many victims do not receive the necessary help or even know where to go for assistance. This ministry clearly explains how the relationship between the pastor and congregant is never one of mutual consent. It also teaches us what the church needs to do after this type of abuse has occurred."*—Haydee Luciano, Survivor, PR

*"This was the first time I heard about the existence of abuse between a pastor and a member of the congregation in church. No one speaks about this but, sadly, it occurs. This ministry offers help, safety and trust for the church and the members. It is a resource for helping others in a painful and difficult situation."*—Gladys Rios, PR

I also had the opportunity to conduct an abuse prevention sermon in the Limón Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mayagüez. This was the last church my husband and I attended before moving to Illinois. The members there received the information with much encouragement and gratitude. Here are some of their responses:

*"How do I see this? Is it abuse or not? After hearing the sermon for abuse prevention in the church, I see the other way. I understood the dynamic between the pastor and congregation and why it is abuse. How do you see it? It's an interesting topic for this time, helping victims, leaders, pastors and church members. It is a beautiful ministry moving forward."*—Manuel Cruz Malave, First Elder, PR

On Saturday afternoon, February 16, I presented a *Trust & Truth* conference in the chapel of Antillian Adventist University in Mayagüez. The audience consisted of professors, doctors, ministerial students, pastors and members of the community. Their reaction:

*“The presentation had excellent content, and was very relevant to the audience. I believe it was a theme extremely necessary for the actual pastor and there was a good transmission of the contents. I recommend this conference to other educational institutions and churches.”*—Pr. Obed Jiménez, Professor for UAA Department of Theology and President for the Society of Adventist Theological Chapter of Puerto Rico.

I receive a blessing from God through the opportunity He offers me, day by day, to have a personal relationship with Him. What new opportunities is God offering you? Perhaps it's the opportunity for material things, a new house, a new job, or new friendships. God is giving you an opportunity to share your testimony with others to encourage and bless them. He is giving you an opportunity to come to Him, enjoy a deeper relationship with Him, and allow Him to cleanse your sin. Even if you are sick and suffering much, you have a new opportunity for salvation. Will you accept the opportunity God offers you today? *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”* (Revelation 3:20)



Shyleene Rosado recording programs with Annie Baez of Radio Paraiso

### Contact the Latino Division:

La Esperanza de los Sobrevivientes  
P.O. Box 16  
Thompsonville, IL 62890  
Phone: (866) 260-8958 extension 2  
Ayuda@LaEsperanzaDeLosSobrevivientes.com  
Web: LaEsperanzaDeLosSobrevivientes.com

## Testimonials (con't from page 5)

*“Today, when I came back from school, I found your newsletter and believe me that I didn't eat and I didn't even change my clothes before I finished reading it. I didn't know what The Hope Of Survivors means, now I understand. I appreciated you and Steve, your whole work, when we met in Norway and now I have a lot of reasons to appreciate you more. You have a lot of power, and a great heart to help others. I was really impressed by what I read. I want you to know that I pray for you and the other people who work for THOS. God bless you all.”*—Romania

*“I have great admiration and appreciation for the ministry the two of you have undertaken, especially knowing a bit about the background that led to the very positive work you are doing to help so many hurting people around the world. You will be in our prayers. Pray for us, as we resume pastoral ministry in the Peoria-Sun City Adventist Church in northwest Phoenix. Though no longer serving on your board, you retain our love, respect, and high esteem as friends. Call on us if we can assist in any practical way.”*—Ralph Robertson, (former) Ministerial Director, Northern California Conference

*“The time spent with you and your husband was very beneficial for the both of us. We had a wonderful time visiting. Being able to tell our story to a couple who was understanding and supportive was an amazing outlet for me. You both were so kind and compassionate to the both of us and it was so uplifting to be able to know that I (we) am not alone in this and that others have dealt with situations like mine successfully. I've read through the pamphlets and they are all SO good. I am getting ready to place an order so I can share them. ...Thank you so much for listening to God's direction in your life and helping people like me. I'll say it again—you saved my life.”*—IL

*“Wonderful job! The newsletter [October 2007] was the best ever! You are great. Hope it gets out the need for The Hope of Survivors to continue and how much it is needed. Great paper.”*—WA

*“The ministry of THOS is so very important to helping those little sheep that Satan has scattered and it breaks my heart to know that many, many churches do not understand what pastoral abuse is and what it isn't. I see very well—more than ever—a need for all the seminars and conferences you do.”*—WV

## Rebuilding and Rekindling

—by Heather Huffman

I am writing about a subject that put me through years of pain and torment, and almost caused me to end my life. Pastoral sexual abuse is a subject that is extremely serious and, unfortunately, happens more than any of us want to realize. It is very difficult to comprehend the thought that a ‘man of God’—someone we go to for protection, counsel and guidance—could be a predator. I am a victim of pastoral sexual abuse. I was manipulated and abused for three years in the Church of God. I have been through more pain and anguish than any individual should have to face. Thankfully, God has spared my life by giving me the strength and courage to reveal unimaginable evil and attempt, with His power and strength, to pick up the many broken pieces of my life that were destroyed by one man.

Unfortunately, this was not the first time I’ve suffered from abuse. I was sexually abused as a young child in another Church of God congregation. This past abuse, unfortunately, made me more susceptible to being a ‘repeat’ victim.

I moved to a new area for what I believed was ‘truth’ and to start a new life. I had no idea the pastor was already abusing women in the church before I got there. I had no idea I would become his next victim. Later, my abuser would tell me he “wanted me when he first saw me.” This confirms my belief that my abuse was premeditated. This evil man preyed on several of the women in the congregation, seeing who was weak and vulnerable, and who he would be able to take advantage of. The women he was able to abuse were all abuse victims from childhood, and he knew this.

When I moved to this area, I fell in love with a man named Brad. The pastor did everything he could to tear our relationship apart and made it completely impossible for us to be together. Hours of yelling and name-calling in counseling sessions, and excessive and unnecessary monitoring of our communication with one another, caused both of us tremendous grief, stress,

confusion and depression. Brad left the Church of God because he was no longer able to stand the pressure and im-



possible conditions the pastor had placed on him. During this time, I was under much grief and sorrow—which was the perfect opportunity for the pastor to make his move. He attempted to convince me Brad was an abusive person and I should be afraid for my safety. (Of course, none of these allegations were true.) He even convinced me to carry a small handgun in my car to protect myself. The pastor began the process of manipulation by ‘comforting’ me in my sorrow from being separated from Brad. He also began ‘protecting’ me. He said he felt the need to protect me from Brad because my father would not.

My abuse from the pastor did not happen overnight. It began with a long process of manipulation. My abuser talked of his dysfunctional marriage and his discontentedness in being a pastor. He stated he had no one to talk to and that being a pastor caused him to be unable to get ‘close’ to anyone. Throughout the abuse he would consistently degrade his wife and family, whom he planned

*“I desperately wanted out of this abusive relationship, but felt no hope. For too long, I was concerned about the reputation of the church and how it might be damaged if I came forward with my story.”*

on leaving after his retirement from the ministry. He told me countless disturbing stories of his fellow-ministers and their conduct (which very well could be lies), and consistently talked negatively about the members of his congregation and members abroad. He stated on various occasions that he questioned whether the Church of God was the source of ‘truth.’

The pastor destroyed my perception of the Church of God. His ungodly mind and heart, full of lust and distorted sexual cravings, destroyed much of my innocence and caused me unforgettable grief and heartache. His addictions caused him to regularly view pornography, visit the adult sex stores and use me (and others) to perform his disturbing sexual fantasies. He would beg of me to leave my family and friends and runaway with him to start a new life.

The whole process of the abuse began taking a tremendous toll on my mind, soul and body. I was no longer able to function as a ‘normal’ human being. I began losing weight, vomiting consistently, and spent countless hours alone and in tears. Attending church services and listening to his sermons three times a week was a grievous experience, and has left numbness in my soul that I must re-salvage. Ironically, many of his messages were focused on the subject of abuse.

I desperately wanted out of this abusive relationship, but felt no hope. For too long, I was concerned about the

reputation of the church and how it might be damaged if I came forward with my story. I could have simply stopped attending church, but that would have caused negative repercussions on my family life. I was also concerned about the toll all this would take on the pastor's family. Finally, all the reasons not to come forward with my story didn't matter anymore. I could no longer function under the abuse.

Many times I would cry and yell at the pastor because he had hurt me so tremendously. He would get angry with me in my emotional distress and cuss at me, and hang the phone up on me. He even recently threatened to hurt me. He would tell me that I needed to 'grow up' and accept responsibility for what I had done. The truth of the matter is I had done nothing but get taken advantage of by an evil individual who sought to destroy any life that he could in order to appease his own selfish satisfaction.

I finally began contacting Brad again because I was so distraught and needed help. Brad already had suspicions of abuse in the congregation. He had confronted me with that, as well as my own abuse. I denied it all—to protect the abuser. I saw no hope for my future. My soul had been destroyed. I did not know where to turn. I felt lost and alone and I was suicidal, so I started searching the Internet. The Hope of Survivors is what saved my life. After reading through the web site, I finally realized and accepted the fact that I was being abused by my pastor.

On December 11, 2007, I told the pastor I was done. I was no longer going to be involved with him. He got angry—which was a blessing in disguise. He hung up on me and went on his way. I told Brad that night what had been happening to me. When the pastor was confronted with this, he simply laughed and showed no remorse. My family and the church members finally started finding out the truth about this pastor. Others began coming forward with stories of abuse, inappropriate conduct and conversation, manipulation and control.

Apparently, the pastor has since made a confession and has been 'forgiven' for his sins. That is between him and God. However, I have a very difficult time believing he will ever be saved and right in his mind. Even until his last days in this area, he was lying to the community, all under the name of God. He was stating that he was 'retiring' and moving elsewhere with his family. This could not be further from the truth. He was told not to return to his position as the pastor at the Church of God. He was told he must leave town immediately. In my opinion, he cannot be trusted. I know this man all too well. He has destroyed countless lives... the list is too lengthy to even begin. This man is a predator and most predators do not stop abusing. Authorities and

communities in various locations do know about this man, his history and his affiliations.

I have begun rebuilding my life once more. My relationship with Brad has been rekindled and we are looking forward to a wonderful life together. We are both active in a new church and are very happy and moving forward with our lives, despite the hurtful past. God is continuing to prove Himself strong through this horrible ordeal. He is my strength from day to day. He has blessed me with a tremendous amount of support from Brad, The Hope of Survivors and others, despite those who have turned their backs on me. His love and care amazes me. I will recover in time, and each day, Lord willing, I will become more whole.

You may read my story and dismiss it, or perhaps you may disagree or even disbelieve. My hope is you will believe the truth I have told. My hope is you will be aware of the dangers that could come to any one of us. We must be careful and mindful of our friends, our families and ourselves. Whatever you choose to accept and believe, I can honestly say I have done what I can to protect you from the same devastation as I have suffered, and educate you on this painful subject.

*“For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, Whether it be good or evil.”*

—Ecclesiastes 12:14

Samantha and Steve Nelson are Co-Founders of The Hope of Survivors. They strive to facilitate healing in the lives of those who have been wounded by a spiritual leader.

The ministry is founded on the commission in God's Word, which calls us to *“...comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”*

—2 Corinthians 1:4



## Calendar of Events

### May 27

Grants Pass, OR

TV Interviews on KBLN

Steve and Samantha Nelson will participate in five interviews with hosts Carolyn Sutton and Patti Sandefer on the program *Time Out*.

### June 27-28

Minnesota

*Hope & Healing* Conference

Based on availability of funds. More details to come. Please check the calendar for the latest updates.

### August 4-5

Minneapolis, MN

Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Steve and Samantha Nelson will present a *Faith & Fidelity* seminar to pastors on the prevention of pastoral sexual abuse and misconduct, and how the church/organization should respond.

### August 6-9

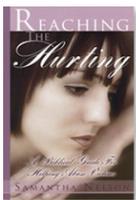
Tampa, FL

ASI International Convention

The Hope of Survivors plans to exhibit Wednesday-Saturday.

Please note that the conference and counseling sessions planned for Romania in April 2008 have been postponed due to scheduling conflicts. We will post the new dates as soon as possible. We are aiming for June 2008, providing funding is available.

## Helpful resource...



*Reaching the Hurting—A Biblical Guide for Helping Abuse Victims* is a powerful tool for individual growth, small group Bible studies, and women's ministries. It covers a range of topics, and is not specific to pastoral sexual abuse.

Order your copy today at <http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/products.asp>. Only \$7.95 plus shipping!

## Current Project Needs

- Monthly operating expenses (postage, office supplies, utilities, printing, etc.), staff, educational materials and victim assistance.
- Immediate need for funds for outreach projects/victim conferences. To conduct the proposed victim's conference in Minnesota in June, the cost is approximately \$2,100. If funds are available by the beginning of May, the conference will be confirmed. Otherwise, it will be rescheduled when funds are available.
- Funds for travel expenses, registration and exhibitor fees to conduct conferences and raise awareness through exhibits at conventions. The annual ASI Convention will cost approximately \$3,000, and the exhibit space fees for the General Conference (GC) Session in 2010 are \$1,600. The GC Session is already 1/3 booked, so we need to make reservations (paid in advance) soon. These events are important ways to raise awareness of the ministry so more victims can find the help they need, when they need it.

Donations are the primary source of funds that make it possible for The Hope of Survivors to maintain its ministry. Since The Hope of Survivors receives no denominational subsidies, your gifts are vitally important. Thank you for considering a tax-deductible donation to further the work of this ministry and bring hope and healing to wounded hearts.

THE  
**Hope**  
of Survivors

P.O. Box 16 Thompsonville, IL 62890

April 2008

If you'd like to be removed from our mailing list, just let us know and we'll take care of it.