



SALEM Digest

Spring 2000 • News of interest to friends of Salem Christian Mental Health Association

One Day of My Life

by anonymous

I never thought that I had been sexually abused. Yet, about eight years after one incident took place, I began having difficulty living a *normal* life. For weeks and then months, I could not sleep, or when I did fall asleep I woke up every hour. Although I forced myself to eat, I had no appetite. I became extremely tired and depressed. Sometimes I would start crying and couldn't stop. I remember one time I went into the bathroom and locked the door and cried and cried. I didn't know what was wrong, I just felt black. I knew then what it felt like to be in a black pit. Even though I prayed to God, the blackness just wouldn't go away. It seemed as though the darkness was stronger than my prayers to God.

When my husband realized that I was so upset, he tried to comfort me by putting his arm around me. This only made the darkness in my head worse. The darkness blinded me. I couldn't see him, but I knew that he was touching me and I couldn't stand that. I panicked and pushed him away. Later, when I had calmed down, we talked about it. But I could only explain what had happened by trying to tell him about the blackness that seemed to take over.

This went on for several months. During those months, both my husband and I knew there was something wrong with me, but neither of us knew what it was. I knew that I needed help, that I was probably depressed, but I wasn't

ready to admit this by asking for help.

During this time, I was trying to help a child who was experiencing abuse in his home. I could only do so much, and I began to feel more and more guilty about this child going home every day and every weekend to that kind of abuse. After many sleepless nights and a lot of struggling, I finally called someone at Salem. I told the counsellor that I was having a hard time dealing with an abusive situation. I didn't mention that I knew that there was more that was bothering me, but I didn't know what.

I went to Salem and within one or two sessions the counsellor

asked if I had ever been abused. I said no, I didn't think I had been. He showed me literature on abuse, specifically, sexual abuse. For some reason, seeing a definition of date rape on paper made me see that what I had always thought of as an unpleasant incident was actually sexual assault. One of the reactions to date rape was *minimizing*. The counsellor explained that this meant that the victim would tell herself that it wasn't really that bad after all. In this way, it would be as though it was just an unpleasant incident. Even though no clothing was removed, I had been violated. Even then, when the counsellor told me that I was a victim, I felt very uncomfortable thinking of myself that way. Not only had I minimized what had happened, I had also told myself that it was my own fault. I thought that if only I hadn't got myself into that situation, nothing would have happened.

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Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's World*, 1948



Executive Corner

Rev. Al Dreise

Project Program

For over a year I have been involved in revitalizing Salem's project-program. In consultation with Salem's program committee I am pleased to be working with Rudy Hulst of *Homestead Residential and Support Services* in developing a plan for the expansion of *Homestead's* services to persons with a mental illness.

Partnership arrangements are developing with other agencies as well. Our view is to provide supportive services for those in residence and for those who move into their own apartment or residence.

Other project initiatives are still in the exploration stage. Discussions are ongoing with a committee representing a number of churches in the Barrie area. June Zwier, our program developer, and I are also seeking to work out a partnership arrangement with the *Regional Pastoral Care Association* in the Durham (Oshawa-Cobourg) region.

Salem's project support has enabled several local groups to be a neighbour to people with mental health problems. The first project under Salem's Project Development Program founded in 1989 was *Family Outreach*. It has developed into an independent organization with chapters in 15 Ontario communities. It sponsors an annual conference in the spring and an all day training conference for its teams in the fall. I am currently involved with *Family Outreach* in

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Rev. Al Dreise

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Editors:
Judy Cook
Marian den Boer

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is a publication of Salem Christian Mental Health Association, a non-profit, charitable organization.

1 Young St.
Suite 512
Hamilton,
ON L8N 1T8
Telephone:
(905)528-0353.
Fax:
(905)528-3562
Rev. Albert Dreise,
Executive Director

One Day of My Life

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What did happen? Years before, I had a crush on John. One night we, with a group of other teenagers, went to a restaurant where alcohol was also served. By the end of the evening, I had eaten very little and John had bought a very strong drink for me. He had been drinking all evening and had noticed that I was interested in him. He began to stand very close to me. A while later we were sitting beside each other. He put his arm around me. By this time, I was very tired because of the drink and the late hour. I didn't feel threatened by John because there were other people close by. I actually felt happy that John was showing an interest in me as well. Then he started to kiss me and at the same time, touched my breast. Then he took my hand and shoved it down on his privates. I pulled my hand away. But he pulled it back and also began to kiss me with his tongue. I did not like this at all, especially because his breath smelled strongly of alcohol. I pulled away from him and then it was over. He walked away and I went home.

That night in bed, all I could think of was that now he was my boyfriend. I hadn't been kissed like that before and I thought that because of what he did, he really liked me too, and wanted to have a relationship with me. After all, I wouldn't have let just anyone touch me like that, but if he was my boyfriend, then it would be okay. That's what I told myself.

The next morning I phoned him and went to talk to him. When I talked to him about what had taken place, he said that he barely remembered anything and that he wasn't ready for relationship with anyone at that time. I told him that I was mad at him for what he did but he insisted that he had had too much to drink and didn't know what he was doing. I told him that I was so mad at him that I wanted to slap him in the face (unfortunately, I never did). I went home and wrote a letter to him, knowing that I would never send it but I needed to let out everything I was feeling.

I did not tell my parents or my closest friend. I felt as if they would think it was my fault and that I was a slut because I let that happen. At times I even felt as though God held me responsible. When I thought about what happened, I felt sick and couldn't eat. I lost weight. I couldn't sleep. If I saw John, I ignored him and refused to talk to him. I told my friends that I wasn't ever going to get married. I didn't trust men. I wore loose and baggy clothing so I wouldn't draw their attention to myself. When I met Don, who is now my husband, I made sure that there was a spoken commitment before anything physical happened. When we embraced, I always made sure that I kept some space between us. After we knew each other for about a year, I told him how John had treated me, and that if he wanted to stop seeing me because of that I would understand. I felt like I was *used goods*, and not good enough for Don. I knew why I felt this way, yet I never

considered myself to be the victim, instead, deep down, I always thought that it was my own fault.

I continued to go for counselling. At first, it seemed as though it got worse. For the first time in eight years, I had flashbacks of what had happened that night with John. I was afraid of being intimate with my husband, because of those vivid flashbacks. This time, with the help of my counsellor, I did not push away thoughts and feelings of what happened but instead I tried to deal with them. I began to understand that it wasn't my fault. Looking back, I don't think that I

would have been able to deal with what had happened on my own. The Christian counselling I received taught me to look at what had happened in a more accurate and truthful way. Although feelings of guilt or doubt still come up, I now am able to remind myself that I don't have to feel guilty.

My life has turned back to normal. I no longer feel like I'm in a black pit. I can sleep again. I no longer feel depressed. I was amazed that one hurtful incident could have such horrible consequences, but it did. Thankfully, getting help worked.

Book Review

Sex is Not a Four-Letter Word!

by Patricia Martens Miller
The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1995.
Reviewed by Betty J.B. Brouwer, Child Psycho-therapist

Sex and sexuality are topics that are not easily discussed within our families. Rather it is often a topic that makes both the parent and child feel ill at ease. Yet we are all created as sexual beings. In her book, *Sex Is Not a Four-Letter Word*, Patricia Marten Miller, a religious educator and certified sex educator for over 30 years, points out the important role parents have in teaching their children how to respect and treasure this God-given gift.

Miller notes that if we avoid discussing sex within the context of our families we give the message that sex is something undesirable we should not talk about. We also then imply that someday our children will miraculously know all about sex

and have a mature and satisfying sexual relationship. However, the reality is if children do not learn from their parents they will learn from the world. Miller notes that then, "it may not be within a framework of spirituality, values, morals, and loving relationships found within truly faith-filled families."

In her book Miller offers a balanced, common sense, and Christian-based approach to parenting children of all ages in this important area of family life. She addresses commonly held myths/beliefs about sexuality and encourages parents to make sexuality a topic that their children will feel free to discuss. She suggests utilizing everyday, ongoing casual conversations that give the children the information as they ask for it. Miller gives a brief overview of

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Salem Christian Counselling Services



Salem recognizes that Christians sometimes struggle with depression, family trauma, abuse, addictions, or other brokenness.

Christ brings hope for healing.

**Judy Cook
Betty Brouwer
Al Dreise**

*Qualified Christian Professional
Therapists*

For appointment:
Call (905)528-0353
for individual, couple, family,
or child therapy.

Project Development

with a mental health focus

*for information contact
Rev. Al Dreise (905)528-0353 or
June Zwier (905)623-9901*

Salem Fellowship Fund



*Some people can't
afford to pay
fully for their counselling.*

*Please help by donating to the
Salem Fellowship Fund.*

Mental Illness:

A Needs Assessment Survey

Have you or a family member been diagnosed with mental illness?

Has the church been supportive?

We are conducting a **Needs Assessment Survey** to determine both the areas where supports are needed and those areas where supports are already in place.

We are interested in hearing from people who have been diagnosed with a mental illness, their families, and their church community (pastors, deacons, etc.).

We welcome your input. Please call (905) 528-0353 to receive a questionnaire.

All inquiries and responses are confidential.



Personal, Confidential Counselling

- Making or updating Wills or Powers of Attorney
- Retirement and Estate Planning
- Charitable Gift Annuities, Endowments and other special gifts to charity.

Educational Seminars

Tel: (905)947-9262 Fax: (905)947-9263
Henry Eygenraam, Executive Director

Services are provided at no cost or obligation
Funded and directed by 35 Canadian charities

Book Review

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the ages and stages of psychosexual development. She then proceeds to discuss how to invite morality, and how to love a gay or lesbian child. She also discusses topics of sexual abuse,

date rape, and sexually transmitted diseases. Her book helps parents teach their children that sexuality needs to be God-centred rather than self-centred.

Executive Corner

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leading interventions and regularly attending the *Family Outreach* board as an advisor.

Counselling Services

Salem is also a partner with six area churches in providing a counselling service in Brampton known as *Peel, Halton and District Counselling Services (PHD)*. The therapist, Tom Horlings, provides service approximately one and a half days per week. Tom comes to the Salem office for monthly consultations.

At its March meeting the program committee decided to review Salem's affiliation protocol. We are exploring opportunities for therapists and counselling agencies to become affiliated with Salem for mutual consultation, referral, and sharing of services.

The Hamilton Counselling Centre is the most comprehensive and ongoing Salem project. Our staff, Judy Cook, (clinical director) Betty Brouwer, and Al Dreise offer individual (adult, child and adolescent) couple, and family therapy. Nienke Van Dyke provides office support services.

Seminars, Consultations and Referrals

Our staff continually provides workshops and public presentations on various mental health subjects, especially abuse awareness and mental illness.

Our new program developer, June Zwier, is concentrating her efforts east of Toronto.

June is available for speaking engagements as well as personal and phone consultations to pastors, caregivers, and to individuals and families. She can be reached at (905)623-9901.

Please call the Salem office to arrange for a staff member to speak at a church function, a support group, or community event.



Salem

Seminars and
Workshops
on
Abuse Issues

Depression

**Mental
Illness**

**Family
Relationships**

**Addiction
Intervention**