

Forgotten Summer

Morning came with all normalcy. I awoke to the soft cries of our infant son, beseeching me for a feeding. I lifted my little bundle out of the port-a-bed and nuzzled him to me breast. The sun was filtering in through the windows, basking the stark furnishings with warmth and light. My other children began tumbling out of their bunks and onto the cold hard floor of the one room cabin, eager to face the day.

"Mommy, what time is it?" My four year old son asked while pulling his clothes on. "Can I go out and play?"

"Yes, Mikie, but make sure you don't get too loud, some campers might not be awake yet."

"OK mommy," he answered half way out the door.

I heard his footsteps dashing to the cabin next door. I love this place, I thought. Family camp is always one of the highlights of our summer. The great worship, fellowship, and the meals cooked for us! For me, that's a true vacation!

My husband Mike rolled over rubbing his hand through his thick black hair. He looked at me with his deep brown eyes, but said nothing. The events of the prior evening hit me like a blow to the stomach.

"What's wrong?" I remember him asking me. "You never want to get close anymore."

"Nothing is wrong. It's just that I'm not comfortable right now with the kids sleeping across the room from us," I retorted.

"They won't wake up, they've been running all day. I just want to snuggle with you, not make love!" With that, he rolled over and fell silent.

The knot in my stomach tightened. I hate it when he does that, I thought. Then the tears came. I wasn't sure why. I hated myself for feeling this way. I hated it when Mike touched me and I recoiled, feeling dirty. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't help it. Hadn't we been married for nine great years, had our intimacy always been like this? I soon cried myself to sleep.

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Pondering the prior night's events, I readied my family for breakfast. Soon the camp bell tolled, beckoning us to the morning meal. I survived morning praise and worship, fighting back tears. I don't remember what the sermon was about. Retreating quickly back to our cabin, I declined offers of coffee and fellowship with some other ladies. What was the heaviness around me? I knew it was more than the encounter with my husband the night before. Lunch came all too soon, and with it a series of events that would change my life.

"Mom, mom! George asked us if we want to go on a boat ride with him and another life guard. Can I go? Please, please, please!" Our eight year old daughter Bethany begged, her tan face shining with anticipation.

"I suppose, but make sure you have a life jacket on," I answered, following her to the dock pushing baby Jesse in his stroller.

George, the camp life guard, stood on the dock, helping one of the young boys with his life jacket. George was a handsome young man and popular with the kids. He had been working at the camp for many years.

"I'll just take them around the lake a few times Mrs. Munos, I won't go too fast," George told me. "Your husband said it was ok."

"That's fine, George, just don't let them wear you out."

As they left the dock and trolled out onto the lake, fear gripped my heart. Did I really know this young man? Why was he always so nice to the kids? Was he doing anything inappropriate?

I sat on the shore watching as they circled the lake a couple of times then cruised back to the dock. I quickly got Bethany off the boat and pulled her aside.

"Bethany, I don't want you hanging out with George anymore, do you understand?" I commanded.

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“Yes mommy,” she answered startled, her dark eyes moistening. I stormed away vowing in my heart to keep an eye on this young man.

Soon the beach was open and swarming with heated campers. The day warmed quickly and the humidity rose, such is the case for August in northern Minnesota. I planted myself and my baby under a tree to watch my three other children in the water, and more importantly, to watch George. I was going to make sure he was not acting unseemly with anyone.

“Why don’t you go for a swim, I’ll watch the kids,” Mike’s voice came from behind me.

“I don’t feel much like swimming right now.”

“Are you OK? You’ve never turned down a chance to swim before?”

“I just don’t feel like it OK?” I snapped.

“Fine, do what you want,” he mumbled as he walked down to the sand. I watched him play with our children in the water. How did I ever deserve such a wonderful husband and father for my kids?

Swimming was uneventful and soon dinner time came. I wasn’t hungry, so I stayed in our cabin busying myself with baby Jesse. I didn’t feel like talking to anyone. That night, I tried to play volleyball, one of my passions at family camp. I couldn’t concentrate and focus. I missed many points and that brought question and good hearted teasing from other players. I left the court fighting the flood gate of tears that threatened to explode at any minute. I couldn’t make eye contact with anyone. As I was making my hasty retreat to our cabin, I saw George playing with a group of kids. He was bouncing them and flipping them. They were all laughing and having a great time. Across the playground I spotted Bethany sitting on a swing, pouting. I was glad she was obeying, but our other daughter, Lydia, was in the midst of all the commotion. I quickly marched over and pulled her away.

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“Come on young lady, it’s time for bed,” I ordered.

Lydia, being six and strong willed did not comply as readily as her sister. “Aw, mom! It’s not even late. This is camp, we’re supposed to stay up late!” She whined.

“Lydia, you get moving or you’ll face the consequences.”

As she stormed up the path to our cabin, I turned and glared at George who stood watching with an amused look on his face. His smile soon faded as he turned away. Feeling smug I followed my daughter’s thinking, I’ll show you who’s in control.

“What was that all about?” Mike asked as he came into the cabin.

“Shh, the boys are sleeping!” I scolded. “I just want them in bed, they need their rest. I don’t want them getting too wore out, they’ll get sick.”

“OK, if you say so,” he said, studying me. His voice softened. “What’s up with you today? You’ve been acting weird all day.”

“I’m fine. Nothing is wrong.” I lied.

“I can stay here until they are asleep if you want to get back to the volleyball game.”

“No, that’s OK. I think I’ll read for a while and go to bed.”

“OK, I’ll go to bed early too, it’ll feel good to get a full night’s sleep. Be back in a few, I’m gonna shower.”

As soon as he left the cabin, the strong heaviness fell upon me again. I wanted to run away. I wanted to scream and yell, to escape, but I didn’t know what from. By the time Mike returned from the shower house, the girls had fallen off to sleep and I was on my knees shaking with sobs.

“Oh honey, are you OK? What’s going on? Do you want me to pray with you or do you need to be alone?”

My first reaction was to tell him to leave, but my heart told me to ask him to pray.

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"I think George is acting inappropriately with the kids at camp. He may be molesting some of them!" I blurted out.

"Oh Julie, that's a pretty strong accusation. Do you have any proof?"

"No, I just feel like he is."

"Jules, you can't come against someone with such a serious matter because of a feeling. We have known him for years, he's great with the kids. I don't sense anything out of place with him. It's not like he takes any of the kids out alone or anything. I think we better pray about this and if you feel the same in the morning, we can talk to Pastor Denny, OK?"

As he started to pray my mind whirled with memories that I had buried. Scenes raced in my mind like a horror movie. The old garage, the cold cement floor, sticks from bushes pushing into my back, a young man's face hovering over me. I wanted to vomit at the thought of it. My whole world was churning, and the sobs were coming faster now. I could hardly breathe.

I started to tell Mike everything. How this young man had enticed me with money, treats, and "friendship." After several weeks, he announced to the neighborhood kids I was his "girlfriend." This flattered me a great deal because I was only 5 or 6 and he was in junior high. Soon he began to touch me, and when I protested he threatened to "break up" with me, and told me no one would like me. As time passed, he coerced me into taking off pieces of clothing so he could sketch me. He convinced me it was for art class. Soon he would have me laying nude on the floor of an old abandoned garage. Although I felt bad about it, I didn't want to lose his attention, and at this point he threatened to tell on me. The last incident I remember was in his basement. He had me take my pants down and laid me on a table. He tried to penetrate me but his dad had come down the steps questioning him about having me inside the house. I pulled my pants up and quickly ran out the door and down the alley

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to my house. I stayed in for several days and avoided him at all costs. Nothing was ever brought up about it and soon I buried that entire summer in the back of my memory.

When I finished my story I felt release, the heaviness had lifted. Mike was holding me, stroking my hair and weeping. He prayed for healing for me and for our relationship. There had always been this barrier between us, and I felt it melting away at that moment. We slept in each other's arms that night. I had never felt so safe and protected. I knew God was healing me. The scripture that came to my mind was "therefore if any one be in Christ, he is a new; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." 2 Corinthians 5:17 New American Standard Bible.

The next morning, as I was in prayer, I knew George was innocent. I repented of my hostility toward him. Looking back, I was having some kind of transference experience with George, he reminded me of my offender so I thought he was doing the same things to the kids at camp as my offender had done to me. I told my girls it was ok to hangout with him if they promised not to make pests out of themselves.

I wish I could say our intimacy was instantly healed. It took quite a bit of time and a great deal of patience on Mike's part. I am astonished at the compassion he has for me. This has made our relationship stronger and sweeter. Sometimes I think about it and the old feelings try to creep back. I quickly pray for God's help. I know I am not a victim anymore, I know I am set free, a new creation. The old garage is gone now, it was demolished to make way for a new animal hospital. As for the young man in my past, I have not seen him since they moved, shortly after the abuse happened. I have prayed for him and think about running into him. I would love to share my faith with him and tell him I forgive him.