

My Story

By Richard Seese



**“Though my father and mother
forsake me, the LORD will receive me.”
—Psalm 27:10**

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(The names of my family members have been changed for the sake of privacy.)

I was born in 1963. My parents didn't stay together in their marriage after my younger brother Tom and sister Kim were born. During that time dad was always out running and working. He worked on a bread truck and rarely came home. Mom struggled to feed us and keep us in diapers. Oftentimes we ran around in dirty diapers and dirty clothes.

When I was three years old, my father came home and took me and Tom away from mom. Kim stayed with my mother. Dad remarried. I'll call my stepmom Stacy. She wasn't too thrilled to raise someone else's children, so she became abusive. She would hit us with belts and put me in a closet behind locked doors. She would put my brother in the basement and lock the door. Before dad came home she would break things and blame it on us, and then dad would abuse us more. He often drank a lot and then became physically and verbally abusive.

Dad liked sprint cars and would race on weekends, so we had to stay with Stacy. She would kick me and punch me. Oftentimes she burned me with a cigarette, just to get a laugh, I guess. At night she'd tie me to the bed so I wouldn't mess up the blankets because she had to make the bed when I got up. She'd wake me in the morning by pulling me out of bed by my ankles till my head hit the floor.

I recall one night dad went to a race and I wasn't allowed to go. I threw a plate of spaghetti at Stacy because she said I didn't clean my room, which was a lie. I got beat really bad, till I was black and blue. I cried for hours.

When I was four years old, my father took me and Tom to live at a friend's house and never took us back. The couple was nice but they had some very strict rules, which sometimes I got grounded for breaking. My foster father, Mr. Styer, was nice and took time out for Tom and me if we needed him.

We used to get our food from a truck that brought us groceries. One afternoon we went on a picnic. I remember it was a warm, sunny day. Mr. Styer and I went to the car to get lawn

chairs. I had started back to give the chairs to Mrs. Styer. When I turned around to see where Mr. Styer was, he walked into a tree. He'd had a stroke. I remember how I felt. I was scared and afraid. No one would let me see him, but I knew it was really bad. When he came home from the hospital, he couldn't talk except to say one word, "sissy." He was paralyzed on his right side. I helped him with his weights while he exercised his hand.

After Mr. Styer's stroke, a Children and Youth Services counselor came by to check on things, and to see how Mrs. Styer was managing with three kids and a handicapped husband. Tom and I were outside playing on the swings with my foster mom's daughter Kathy. Mom said, "I'll call them in." She called, "Come, it's time to eat," but I just kept on swinging. The counselor asked, "Why didn't Richard come in?" Mom replied, "Watch." She yelled, "Hey you son of a bitch, get your ass in here!" I ran as fast as I could. The counselor looked surprised. Mom said that's how she got me to respond because that's all I'd listen to.

I would often get my foster father a beer when he was mowing the yard. Once, he asked me to go to the basement and get him a big bottle of beer. After a while, he came to look for me and I was sitting there drinking it. Boy, was he upset, but he laughed at me.

I remember watching Evel Kneivel on TV and afterwards was running my tricycle around the garage. I opened the doors to the house and the basement, which were across from each other. I rode by tricycle around really fast, then down the steps to the basement. I tumbled down the steps and laid there crying for my foster mom. She started to laugh and cry at the same time.

But like always when I thought I'd finally found loving parents, Children and Youth Services stepped in and told Mrs. Styer she couldn't very well take care of Tom and I by herself. When I was seven, she removed us to be put into an orphanage until they could find a couple to adopt us. What an awful feeling not to be wanted at such a young age. But there were a lot of kids in the same boat, so I kind of felt somewhat at ease.

Tom and I had a counselor who was so determined to separate us, but she had no idea how this made me feel. After all,

we'd always had each other. One day the counselor said, "I have parents for you." But they only wanted one child so she would have to separate us. I told her, "No way. You can't take my only brother from me." One day she pulled her big white car into the garage. I saw a can of red paint on a bench. I thought to myself, "Well, this will teach you to try and take my brother," and I painted her whole front end. I had to stand in front of all the other kids and take my punishment with a paddle. It kind of taught me a good lesson!

Then one day the counselor told us she had parents she wanted us to meet. I remember feeling so excited with joy. Tom couldn't stop crying, he was so happy. We met the couple and after a few visits we went to live with them. They treated us good. They brought us gifts and we had lots to eat. So they adopted us. I remember the judge asked me how we liked them, and if we would be happy to have them as parents. We accepted it.

In the beginning we did lots of things together, but in time that stopped. After the first year things started to get bad. The abuse started all over again—going to bed hungry, no TV in my room, just games and talking with my brother. They treated Tom better than me. I was the bad one.

We moved to Lancaster when I was in Junior High. My new parents sent me to counselors and psychiatrists. They thought something was wrong with me. One day I was playing in the sand box when my father came out and got mad at me. He threatened to break my arms. I yelled and told him, "It's your bill," so he got even madder and shoved me. My hand went through a window. I had to get stitches. He told me, "Now you have something to show your friends at school."

I ran away and then got caught stealing a pack of gum. The fine cost him \$36. Boy, was he mad. I spent the next few weeks in my room. Mom told me to stay there with no dinner. I got upset and she gave me a spanking and left me bruised from my legs to my back. I was purple and yellow. I couldn't sit or lay down. Mom tried to give me a bath and I screamed because of the pain.

We eventually moved again, to Millersville, Pa. I was in the 9th grade, and it was still going rough with the adoptive par-

ents. I would run around with my friends and get in trouble when I came in late. My father got mad at me one day and asked me about my brother's t-shirt, which had gone missing. I told him I didn't have it, which was the truth. He grew really mad, threw me into a corner, and began choking me. He opened the front door, punched me in the jaw, and told me never to come back. I walked to my girlfriend's house. I was so furious. I showed up at her house and explained what happened. Her mom called her husband, George, at work and he told me to stay there. He would talk to me that night. When he came home, he saw the fingerprints on my neck. The next day after school we went to my house to talk with my father. My clothes were in the front yard. We managed to open the front door. The place was empty. The landlord told me they'd moved to New York. George told me I could stay with them. I did for a while and went to school, then started getting into trouble. I was upset over all that had happened and my anger made me lash out.

I got put on probation and my probation officer said that if I stayed in school I wouldn't get in trouble, so I tried. But then I went down to the football stadium and smoked a cigarette on my way back to class. The principal met me at the door, and wow, was he mad. I had to go in front of the school board and got expelled. My probation officer found out so I ran off into the woods where they couldn't find me. But I got caught, like I knew I would.

Eventually, I had to stand before a judge and he gave me two days in Juvenile Hall. The judge told me I had "rabbit's feet" and if he put me in JV Hall he'd know where I was. After that I was sentenced to 10 months at a reformatory. The place had no bars or fences, so I ran away, but that only made my stay longer when they caught me.

When I got out I was put back in a foster home. After that I lived on the streets for some time. My probation officer didn't like that. He took me to Congressman Bob Walker's office. He listened to my story and offered to give me a hand. In five days I was on my way to Job Corps, where I learned the maintenance trade. They gave me a clothing allowance, and I met a girl named Penny. We left Job Corps together after graduation. I moved back to Lancaster where I started to work in fire and wa-

ter restoration.

In 1982 I met back up with my brother Tom. We decided to hitchhike to New York to a friend's house. It was an adventure on the way. We saw a truck driver alongside the road. We asked him for a ride, but his route took us far out of our way. We spent the night in a truck stop. Tom fell asleep on the floor and I slept on two chairs. The next morning we got a ride to Syracuse, New York, where we joined Tom's friends. They had a big pot of goulash and we ate till we were stuffed. I remember we were all playing with pellet guns when Tom's friend Bob pointed his 16-gauge shotgun at my stomach and pulled the trigger, making a loud noise. I thought he'd made a big hole in my belly, but it was just red. He'd taken the powder and shot out of the shell, but the cardboard caused the redness.

After six months in New York I met a girl named Barb. She was my life then. She let me and Tom live with her. I told her that one day I wanted to find my real family. She told me to call information. They had two Seeses listed, so we called and reached my Uncle Dale. He was so shocked. Shortly later, I met my grandfather, who would turn out to be my best friend.

My grandfather (we called him Pop) took us back to my uncle's house. We had dinner and sat around talking about all that had happened since we had been gone. We'd been apart for 17 years. Pop called our dad the next day. He was so glad to hear from us. After a few days, Pop drove us to Alabama to be with our dad. We had fun along the way laughing and talking. Pop told us we weren't missing much from our dad. He was right.

We stayed with dad, working in his body shop. My dad kept trying to convince me to drive a tractor-trailer, but that wasn't what I wanted to do. We drank a lot in those days. My father liked his Scotch and beer. He never really had time for me. I tried to get close to him but he just didn't want to be bothered. He was full of racism and tried to get Tom and I to join the Ku Klux Klan. We refused and that upset him. So we came back to Pennsylvania and I lived with the Mr. and Mrs. Styer once again, just as I had when I was younger.

In 1984 I left my girlfriend for good and went to see my mom in California for the first time. I took a 4-day bus trip. You sure meet some interesting people on a bus! I met mom at the bus

station. We cried and held each other, then we sat and talked and smoked together for a while. She told me my sister Kim was on her way over. Mom told her she had a surprise on the bed for her. I was hiding in the closet when she stepped into the bedroom. I stepped out and she screamed out loud and cried while holding me.

We all went back to her place and I met her children, so cute and young. I met my mom's brother and his wife, my Aunt Nancy. My uncle gave me a job pumping gas, which I did for a while. Then his friend Bill, who owned a scrap truck, asked my uncle if he could hire me. He said yes, so I worked for Bill until I went back to Pennsylvania. He gave me words of wisdom, telling me to stop wandering or I'd be a wanderer for the rest of my life, like my father.

While in California, I tried getting close to my mom. I thought back to my childhood and wondered why dad gave us away. If I had not found my parents again, how would things have turned out? I'd find out as I got older.

Back in Pennsylvania, I didn't have a job, so my grandfather helped me out by letting me work for him. I learned the auto body repair trade. We often worked on cars and we put down sound proofing so noise wouldn't travel upstairs.

We spent a week together in the mountains. Pops told me how, when I was younger, he taught me my colors and numbers. We cleaned up the Seese family's reunion getaway, mowed weeds, and cut and split wood. At night we cooked over a fire.

Meanwhile, my dad had opened a body shop in his small town and gave Tom a job. Pop and I went to see if he'd let me work for him, but he told me no. So we left and Pop and I went back to the reunion spot. Pop said dad would be out of business in six months, and sure enough he was.

During the time I spent with Pop he taught me life lessons, a trade, responsibilities, and the importance of giving your best. I got married for the first time, and we had a daughter who we named Kay. I was thankful that Pop got to see her.

My family moved to Alabama in 1993. I lived only a couple of blocks from Tom and my dad, but I waited two weeks before I knocked on his door. Two years prior to this, my sister had come from California to visit. We wanted to find out who had

signed our adoption papers, because both mom and dad denied having signed them. I got the run-around, so I went to the last place I could think of—Children and Youth Services. A lady came out with a folder and told me should could only let me see what was allowed. I asked what she meant and she said, "They are sealed and only a judge can read them to you."

I said, "Okay, then tell me who signed the adoption papers." She told us that our father did. I remember feeling so upset. He had told us he didn't sign any papers.

So when I got to Alabama it took me a while to get up the courage to knock on his door. When I finally got up the nerve to go see him, I knocked on the door and looked him in the eye and said, "Why did you lie to me and sign me away?" His response was that his beer was more important than I was. I guess he figured he could either pay for his beer or pay to feed me, and he chose his beer. I started to well up inside and wanted to hit him so hard, but instead I told him how hurt I was.

My first wife and dad didn't get along very well. We fought a lot, and in time she moved back to Pennsylvania for a while. When I got our income tax return I had to send her gas money so she could come down and sign her half. Then she went right back to Pennsylvania.

After I cleaned up the house and gave the dogs away I went back too. We talked for some time but the old problems started back up. I attended a group that taught how to file for divorce. I filled out the forms and had her papers served. After a short time it was finalized. I took some time to concentrate on my career, working in heating and cooling.

After a while I married a nice, sweet lady named Judy. We lived in Conestoga, Pennsylvania. In 1998 we had a son named Dylan. She had a son from a previous relationship named Wayne that I called my son. I took care of them the best I could. In 1999 our landlord evicted us. I'd been waiting for an income tax refund to pay my rent, but he was impatient. So we moved into a trailer. Work was on and off.

In 2003 a very tragic thing happened. My stepson was on an ice-covered driveway when he was killed. A speeding driver didn't see him. After everything we had been through, I couldn't understand how God could take a young life. He was just 12. I

remember hearing that every hair on our heads is numbered by God. Sadly, you're never too young to die.

In 2008 I had a heart attack. After that I lost my job and things just got worse. My wife told me she wasn't in love with me anymore. My whole world changed. I moved out to my friend George's place. I stayed with him for a year until I found a small efficiency apartment in Pequea. I liked it there. My wife filed for divorce and it was the end of the marriage. I never wanted it to end, but I had to honor her decision.

In 2010 I went to Idaho to see my mother and sister. I still wanted to get close to them, so I planned on staying with them for two weeks. The visit started out good, with lots of laughing and talking. Then mom changed. She spent more time in her room and stopped talking to me, just like when I visited her in California. I talked to her about some things that bothered me, but she changed the subject and didn't want to hear about it. I left her after about a week. Later, my mom and sister moved to Texas to be near her daughter and grandkids. So once again I took a trip to see them. The same thing happened all over again. My sister wanted me to stay but I couldn't do it. My mom just couldn't ever open up to me—just like my dad. I'll never understand why they couldn't relate to me and try to be good parents to me, but the more I tried, the more they closed the door.

In 2011 Tom took me with them down to Alabama to see dad. He wasn't good. His health was deteriorating rapidly. We saw him at the hospital. The doctors said he didn't have much time left so we took him home and made him as comfortable as possible. Everyone took turns going into his room and talking to him. My 90-year-old grandma was there. She talked to her son for a while, then it was my turn. I got down on one knee and held his hand. He looked at me, quickly turned his head, and yanked his hand out of mine. I sat there confused. My dad couldn't even look at me. All I could think was, "What was that all about?" But I knew he was on his way to see God and he had to answer for that. I remember crying my eyes out. I never understood why my parents did what they did to me, or why dad disliked me so much. We all left after they took dad to the morgue and I returned to Pennsylvania and my cabin.

In 2012 I went to Pittsburgh to meet a lady friend. While I

was there I began having chest pains and went to the hospital. They told me the artery leading to my heart was 95% blocked. I had to have double bypass surgery. The lady I was staying with asked me to leave after I got out of the hospital. I'm not sure why. So my daughter Kim came to get me.

With so much that has happened to me I am grateful the good Lord has me here today. My life has changed so much and I owe it all to Jesus Christ our Lord for coming into my heart and saving me. My walk has been a real challenge to say the least. I was in counseling with life management for 10 years after my stepson's passing. Then there were my heart issues. I'm on Social Security disability, but I'm here and alive.

When I first came to Grace Church I wasn't sure what to expect, but when I walked through those front doors my life changed. After talking with Pastor John, I went to the "40 Days of Purpose" dinner. After a few more months, I met Dave Perry at a Healing Service and we talked and he became my mentor.

I went to dinner with the Keperlings and they invited me to the Walk to Emmaus, a three-day faith-building retreat, and told me what to expect. I can't say much about the event because we were told not to talk about the program so attendees can experience it all for themselves, but I can say that it was a very life-changing experience. While there I had a dream. God burned up my past. My past was in a box with my name on it. I carried this box up a hill and as I went a light followed me. Then a shadow touched my box and it burst into flames. I knew this meant I didn't need to carry my past around with me anymore. When I woke up, I remember wanting to run down the hall and shout for joy. The weight of all my past baggage was gone along with all the hurt my parents had caused me. Thank you Lord Jesus!

I have also been in the ALPHA program twice. If you ever get the chance to attend I highly recommend it. It teaches the basics of the Christian faith. Mike and Linda Wilson run a very nice program. I'll never forget the testimonies on the last night. They are truly inspiring.

I want to thank everyone at Millersville Community Church who has touched my life. Dave Perry has been a true blessing. We've gone fishing and to the shooting range. We talk from time to time and he's helped me through some of life's troubles.

I also owe a lot to the monthly Healing Service and all the prayers they've lifted up for me. Thanks as well to my friend Larry D. for being there with me at just the right time.

I really look forward now to my Wednesday evenings, when I get to see my brothers in Christ at Brad Phelan's men's Bible study. Brad and the others have been a true blessing and have inspired me to reach out to others. We sing songs then study the word together. I'm learning that God directs our steps.

When I was growing up I wanted friends like these to hang with and to talk with about the pain and rage inside me. It helped me when friends would do things that would get my mind off those hurts. Even today I want that true friend to I can call up and say, "hi," and to hold me accountable for the things I do or don't do. Some days I feel all alone, and then on Sunday I get to see my church family. Thank you for loving me.

Well, now I've told you my story. I pray this reaches just one person in a way that touches and inspires you to quiet your heart and fall to your knees in repentance. Reach out to those who truly love you. Never, never give up. Reach out also to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is only a prayer away. He took away all my baggage and blessed me with a new heart and mind.

Parents, love and respect your children. Teach them all you know. Help them grow with the Lord. Be there when they need you. Take time to listen to them. It shows that you care enough to be there and to be a friend, not just a body at home. Never take correction over the line. Never correct out of anger.

I thank the good Lord that he got hold of me and showed me what the Christian life is all about. Most non-believers don't understand that life is a battlefield. We struggle with sin but when you truly repent and ask God, he will speak to you.

Thank you for reading. I hope this opens your heart to what the Lord Jesus can do in your life. God bless you.

*From your friend in Christ,
Richard M. Seese*



To the Reader: Our life's journey is seldom a straight and level path. More often, it's a road marked by pot-holes, unexpected detours, and slippery slopes. Even under the best circumstances, it's easy to make some wrong turns and get sidetracked. But when those we rely on let us down, and guideposts that might help point us in the right direction are nowhere to be found, navigating our way through the twists and turns of life can be more than just a challenge. Yet some manage to find the way.

Richard Seese is one who has, and this is his story. I'm pleased that he has asked me to help him share it by publishing this booklet. It's Richard's desire to offer hope and encouragement to those whose journey through life leads them into obstacles and pitfalls similar to those he has struggled with himself, and ultimately to point them towards the same discovery and the same relationship that has given Richard the strength to go on. It's my hope that you be blessed by his story.

—Bruce Heydt

Millersville Community Church
Millersville, PA 17551 717-872-4571
www.gracemillersville.org