

ANITA'S STORY

I have always said that my life began 17 years ago – I am now 45 years of age. For the first 28 years, I walked on this earth as though I lived in a haze (I felt like I was looking at myself from heaven). It was not until I spoke to my brother that sexually abused me as a child that I finally began to live on this earth. He had acknowledge what I thought was a dream for all those years. That incident set the wheels in motion for recovery.

My life began on October 21, 1962 in Harrington, Quebec. I was the baby of a family of seven. My family was dysfunctional to say the least – which I always thought was “normal”. I remember some of my childhood – but not too much. Certain memories stick out more than others – I guess that is normal. My father I would say drank a lot – I don't know why – but he did. I remember there were lots of fights between my mother and father. I do remember once he was very upset and had returned home after drinking in the local bar. My father is French and was constantly picked on by his “friends”. This one day I remember helping to restrain him so he could not return – I had him by the leg, my brother had him in a head lock and my mother was also in there. If memory serves me right he did return to the bar. I remember also driving up those winding roads to the house after my father had spent many hours quenching his thirst at the Calumet House. God must really have been on our side as we made it home safely every time. Really looking back on these bonding outings – it would have been some of the only times spent with my father. He was never around much and when he was at home he retired early – often I think to avoid his family. I do have fond memories of him – taking me to visit his family who all spoke French when they visited together. I would sit and listen patiently – pretending to understand every word they said. My father did not take the time to teach his children his “mother tongue”.

When speaking of my parents I believe we had two sets of parents – by that I mean, it seemed early on in their marriage that the fights were frequent and that my father was the aggressor – however, as the years rolled on the roles changed – my mother became the aggressor. My father in my eyes became a “mouse” and listened to the borage of her put downs, etc. The older children perhaps witnessed more of the violent fights than the younger ones did. I do believe it was a love/hate relationship that endured for over 30 years until her death. My twin sister and I have spoken of this from time to time and she has often said that mother had a “sharp tongue”. Referring back to the sexual abuse by my brother I do believe it occurred from the ages of 7-13 years. Hearing that it actually did happen was a big relief – if that makes any sense. On this same note there was another brother involved—however, he does not acknowledge that it was abuse. He simply says that what happened was mutual. However, as I have gone through this journey I realize that he was older and perhaps had seen what had occurred from my older brother. I do not blame –I only wish to understand. I to come to realize how these acts have affected my life.

At the age of 15 ½ years old I met who I thought was my “Prince Charming” – Little did I know that I was in for 7 years of hell? This fellow was 28 years old and had been given a diagnosis of Schizophrenia at the age of 16. He had also been raised in a house with alcoholics – so he was one as well. Apparently, a wise doctor from home said that he did not need medications so suggested to his parents that he could be weaned – which they did. I experienced a lot while living with him – I never knew what to expect. At the age of 16 years I ran away to be with him. We – my twin sister and I – were gone for 10 days before the QQP would find us. We were picked up at my boyfriend’s uncle’s house. We spent most of the time drinking and hiding. We had felt that our parents were keeping us from the loves of our lives. I remember riding in the back of the police car being driven to the station just outside Lachute. I remember a Constable talking to me and warning me that if I did not “smarten up that I would find you along a ditch somewhere.” He warned me about my boyfriend being “very bad news”. Of course, being so wise at that age – I did not listen. My twin and I were placed in a temporary foster home after it was determined that my parents were perhaps not good parents. From that home we went to our permanent home just outside Lachute. My twin would spend the weekends occasionally at home – I on the other end – looking back was perhaps too ashamed. My weekends were spent with my boyfriend and his dysfunctional family. Nights were spent drinking – and often I was praised because I could drink most of them under the table. We had been asked to leave that foster home because a hash pipe had been found amongst my belongings. We were then moved to another home in Grenville, Quebec. Living with him was very unnerving. I remember when his brother was married we had rented a car. I was standing outside talking to a friend and my boyfriend decided perhaps that he would try to run me down. He got into the car and started driving towards me. My friend suggested that I get out of the way as it appeared that he was headed for me. I took her suggestion and moved. Given his illness he was very paranoid. We had rented a small apartment down in Pine Hill, Quebec. Looking back on this time I realize that I was becoming “sick”. As I mentioned before he was an alcoholic. Often when we were out I would often drink his beverage when he was gone to the washroom. The rational behind this was so that he would not get intoxicated—however, it often did not work. It just plain made him mad. This time was like living in shell – I had moved in with my “prince.” By this time contact with my family did not exist. One night he had arrived home and of course was fairly intoxicated. He often thought that people were after him for some reason. This one particular night – I just snapped. He had placed a chair against the front door so no one could get in and also had placed some knives beside the bed. I snapped!! He had drifted off to sleep—I placed a pillow over his face and started to apply pressure. Of course the whole thing did not work out as intended. He fought back!!! We had decided to move out west. Of course I thought things would be different but they were not. It seems we lived all over—I have worked on ranches, farms and hotels— and those experiences have provided for more stories.

I remember nights laying awake wondering how he would be when he returned home. He would often go out and drink and return very upset- he thought that I was often cheating on him. He would come into the bedroom and take his frustrations out on me. He would throw me out of bed and sit on top of me and

call me names such as “ You c**T”, “ You whore” and other rather degrading names which was often accompanied by a few swats to the head. I remember wondering when it would all end. One night he came earlier than expected and I was still up. He proceeded to grab me and throw me to the floor where he proceeded to rip my clothes off me and rape me. I remember fighting him and asking him to stop – but he did not. After he was finished he went to the bathroom. I remember grabbing my clothes and getting dressed as fast as I could. I ran to the door and down the hall (we lived in an apartment building) – he was standing in the doorway yelling at me “ Get back here you bitch.” I ran down the street and hid in the brush – my heart was beating so fast—it seemed like it was in my mouth. I sat in the brush wondering when it would be safe to leave—this seemed like an eternity. I left and then went back to the apartment building and spent the night on the lower floor trying to rest because I had to work early that morning. I returned to the apartment in the morning. Of course he apologized for the most part of being intoxicated—the other was never mentioned. That morning he decided that treatment would be the way to go. So, I phoned my boss and told him I would be late – he was aware to a certain extent of the troubles in the relationship. We drove to Renfrew in Calgary. At the time I drove I did not have a license – I was responsible for driving the truck back home. Needless to say treatment did not last long and he was back home. He would often stop drinking and then begin again. On one occasion during our relationship he decided to use 2 objects on me in a sexual way. I remember afterwards hiding in the walk-in closet in a fetal position wishing that my mother would come and save me. Each time I thought that there might be a small glimpse of hope. I really don't know what the catalyst would be that made me want to get rid of him. I know my sponsor (through Alanon) and her husband actually purchased him a ticket to go home. I thought that maybe that would be the end of it—but it was not. Perhaps a few months afterwards his mother called and said that he was on his way back out west. I remember being so worried because he had not arrived when he should have. Days after he showed up with a cab waiting downstairs. He had no money to pay for it. He had been downtown in Calgary with a fellow who had lived back home – but now was living on the streets because he was an alcoholic. I remember at one point reaching out for help and calling my parents—I felt so alone. I simply had called to hear my mother's voice and talk to her about how things were going. My mother responded by saying “you made your bed you lie in it.” Which was her typical response. There is quite a bit more to this story—of things endured. Life with him could take up another 3 pages. I can say that after years he finally has his life back on track. He now resides in a group home in Hull Quebec where he is on medications and is doing well. For the longest time I was paranoid of black cowboy hats—he wore one constantly. I did receive a call from him many years later and he wanted to meet my children. The pure sound of his voice terrified me. I did tell him under no uncertain terms would I be willing to see him or allow my children to meet him.

After that relationship ended I decided that maybe a fresh start would be wise. I moved in with my sister's family in Leduc. I secured employment at the

International Airport in Edmonton. This is where I would meet my future husband. Almost instantly there were warning signs – but of course I did not realize so until I was out of the relationship. There was so much confusion with this fellow. At the beginning I knew he was older—I thought 16 years. I would have been approximately 22 (so from one relationship to another) and he would have been 38 years of age—so I thought. Another, issue I guess is that at the beginning he was living with someone else—he did not bother to inform me until after she kicked him out. I received a call very early in the morning from him asking if it would be okay if he moved in. Yes, was my immediate response. Apparently, she had found out about us. During, our five-year marriage he was not physical – however, there were other types of abuse—financial and emotional. As I stated before there was so much confusion. During one visit back home his family would ask about certain people. He often would say, “they are my nieces or they are my children.” It was so much so that I did not know what to believe. When it came to his age I do recall that it must have been just 1 month prior to getting married that he finally said that he was 48 years old. For me it did not matter I was in love—however, I think it really concerned him. As he was very jealous. He often would accuse me of having affairs and I often would have to go through “body checks”—I would stand in the nude as he “inspected” my body to see if there were any marks of any sort that might indicate what I had been up to. I remember being at his brother’s house and telling him of the upcoming nuptials and his brother’s response to me “what are you crazy.” I really did not pay much attention to him – because we did marry. My husband had been married previously and also had lived common law with another lady. All together at that time he had seven children. Before being married (we were married back home) we had seen a minister in Quebec, at that time they required that all couples go through marriage counseling, so we opted out of that and were married in Ontario. My husband had very bad credit and was unable to get any credit cards and even a loan. With my husband he would often go away for the weekend and leave me at home with no money etc. There was no marriage. Really looking back like I said about the age difference sometimes he made it feel more like a father/daughter relationship. I often felt like I had to ask for time to go out with friends—I did not have many. If I was late – there was always questions—accusations. Of course, I must have been having an affair. I had difficulty in conceiving and had gone to the University of Alberta to do so. Even during the birth of his daughter he did not want to stay. My daughter was about 11 months old when I became pregnant again. The doctor had told us because of the difficulty with my first pregnancy that I should take it easy – not lift anything heavy etc. Anyway, my husband was not much help. I miscarried my child soon after. I remember becoming pregnant with my son and it must of have been 2 weeks into the pregnancy before I actually told him. He was always suspicious and always accusing. Of course, he did deny that he was the father and told me that some else was the father. When it came time for the birth of my son, I had gone into labor. I was bleeding and very worried – given my history that something was wrong. I asked him to drive me to the hospital—he told me I could wait until he was finished his supper. After this birth my doctor recommended that I not have any more children. He stated that if I were to get pregnant again that perhaps I would loose my life and the child. My daughter received a diagnosis of asthma

when we were still living at with my husband. He did not have a good medical plan and granted the medications were expensive. We argued about this. She needed the medications. When I look back on this I think he had the money to spend on drinking – but never enough for the necessities. I had applied for credit cards to have something when he was away because as I stated before I was left with no money. When I left the relationship I had to declare bankruptcy because a lot of the charges were from him – for gas to drive up north. By the time all was said and done I was \$10,000 in debt. Through the years with my husband I came to believe that I could not do much—like go to school and drive. I was always told that I couldn't do these things.

I left my husband on February 23 1991. I had called him and asked him to come home, as his son needed medical attention. I had wanted to tell him in person. His response was typical—ask your family. So, with 2 small children – my daughter was 2 ½ years old and my son was 7 months old I hopped on a Greyhound bus and came to Red Deer. I had left with 1 bag of belongings and less than \$52 in my pocket. Previous to my departure I had called and spoke to a Crisis Worker (Annie) at the Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter. I do remember the support and encouragement. When I arrived in Red Deer I was provided transportation to CAWES. I remember feeling very supported. During our stay my daughter, who is asthmatic, became very ill and had to be taken to the hospital. I almost lost her as her oxygen levels had dipped down to 65% when it should have been at 95%. Due to her condition she was admitted and stayed 10 days in the hospital. My son and I stayed with her. I notified the shelter and explained the situation and they held our room for the time she was in hospital. Afterwards, my husband and I did try to rectify the relationship. We did attend counseling – however, he thought the counselor was taking sides – mine. Needless to say the relationship was not salvaged. I have been a single parent since I left and I have had relationship –none of which worked. I often comment that I have an “S” on my head that means sucker. I have come to believe that I do not attract the “right” person. Quite frankly I enjoy my life. At times I do wish that I could find someone—but I know that it is not the end of the world. I have been through therapy for the sexual abuse and I have learned to take a look at myself and accept me for me. I have looked at my shortcomings and have tried to “fix” them. I have realized that over the years that I cannot run from me that I am who I am. I have learned to accept as well that I am responsible for my own happiness. I have devoted my life to raising my children and doing the work that I love. My ex –husband does not see my children. Over the last almost 17 years I can probably count on my fingers the amount of times he has taken the opportunity to see them or for that matter call them. The one that perhaps has suffered the most would be my daughter – who had the first 2 ½ years with her father. She has called him occasionally to talk about that hurt – the broken promises. My son does not remember having a father. I have asked him occasionally does he miss having a father—his answer is always the same—no. I have come to realize over the years that it is better to have one “sane” parent than to live in such dysfunction.

You know as I look back on my life and as I am writing this story of my life—I am at times teary and other times excited that I lived. I am a survivor. I have been asked in the role that I have now would I change anything in my life. Looking back on my life I would have to say no. All of the experiences that I have had have made me the person that I am today. It has brought me to the place that I am at. When my mother passed away I remember talking to my father about all of his children – there were 7. I commented that given all the hard times we had put them through as parents—we did not turn out so bad. We are all productive members of society and did not turn out to be axe murderers! I guess as far as regrets go – I do regret the tough times that I gave my parents. I do believe that I robbed them of some precious years. We had all left home fairly young. Another regret for me would be seeking my mother’s forgiveness for those lost years – while she was on her deathbed. I do take comfort in knowing that she is watching from up above and hopefully is pleased with what I have become and with her grandchildren, who she did not have the opportunity to meet.

Anita