

Todd Seyler



**Child abuse
and its lifetime of demons**

Please make the pain stop

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THE LIGHT FROM DARKNESS

By, Todd Seyler

As nighttime sets and darkness falls,

One rests their head safely knowing that light will follow.

But for some, when the darkness looms and replaces the safety of light,

One does not feel secure and panic sets in.

With the darkness, an aura of terror looms,

A cape of fear covers the one chosen like a blanket.

Instead of providing warmth and security,

This blanket provides chills and terror.

These chills and stomach wrenching fear become the level of normalcy for the one chosen,

No longer is hope present; light will follow darkness is a distant wish.

Only then is darkness the norm, a reality for many.

Darkness has found its victim,

It is a victim without hope, safety, or warmth.

How does one replace the darkness with light?

Who can replace the blanket of chills and terror with comfort and security?

The path out of darkness is navigated by you,

You must guide the one chosen to ensure safety.

This quest should not be taken lightly and will be filled with overwhelming obstacles,

But if you are successful,

You will provide an aura never once felt by the one chosen.

You will be the light that leads from darkness.

In this e-book, Todd Seyler chronicles his own experience, growing up engulfed in violence as a victim of daily child abuse. As an adolescent, the relentless physical abuse inflicted upon him and his three brothers was eternally damaging. Physiologically, the constant state of stress resulting from the abuse negatively impacted his physical growth, cognitive development, hormonal balance and overall maturation. Being raised in this tortuous environment has made it difficult for him to trust anyone, even loved ones. His suspicion of relationships blazed a path of one-night stands, womanizing, and an unfulfilled desire to be loved. In conjunction with this unwillingness to trust, the lack of understanding by loved ones regarding his past and current shortcomings in relationships has left him divorced and alone. Walk with Todd as he takes you through his life-long struggle, and learn about the demons he must face everyday as he tries to evolve from victim to survivor.

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DEDICATIONS

I would like to dedicate my story to those of us who have suffered physical abuse at the hands of another. Whether the abuser was a family member, a so-called loved one, an adoptive parent or a friend of the family. The abuse not only causes the physical pain and resulting bodily damage. But the abuse leaves the afflicted confused, seeking for truth and answers, hesitant to trust and believe, emotionally and psychologically tormented; essentially broken.

Originally, I wrote this book as a cathartic outlet for my story and the resulting emotional, psychological and physical burden that I am forced to carry for a lifetime. Over time, my story has manifested into a source of outreach for other victims as well as a vehicle to educate the public regarding this atrocity of child abuse and neglect.

If you too have suffered any abuse, please know that you are not alone. Peace and happiness may one day replace the feelings of pain and anguish and begin to navigate a more tranquil path to guide our lives.

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This book is non-fiction with names of the parties involved changed to protect their identities.

Protection from a Dining Room Chair...

I trembled behind the protection of a dining room chair seeking the refuge of safety from their violent temper that will haunt me for years to come. My head throbbing from my Aunt Sue's continuous slaps. Discipline and parenting has left my face a dark, amber red with heat emitting from every pore. Tears ran down my cheeks providing a perverse semblance of comfort from the temperature change. My body trembled in fear after I had been repeatedly thrown against the wall and eventually crushed to the ground. My muscles grew tense from the anger building inside of me. I cowered behind this chair anguishing over what was happening. "Why am I being beaten for spilling milk? What have I done to deserve this love? And what will happen when my uncle arrives home from work?" More of the same, I feared. Then self pity turned to rage. At five years old, I did not possess the physical prowess to fight back. However, this rage became my safety net as my childhood morphed into survival.

This wrath is the foundation for what I am today. My blueprint for life is the result of fury that has evolved from a fleeting emotion into a daily maintenance of rage resulting from constant physical abuse. This blueprint has affected every decision I have made; my relationships, my thought processes at school, my work demands, my abilities as an athlete, my hopes and aspirations, my dreams of comfort and happiness and my response to the destruction laid upon me by aunt and uncle.

And just so I am clear to point out, Richard and Suzanne Bender of 2308 McKinley Avenue, Lakewood, Ohio are child abusers and their treatment of me and my three brothers is the motivation for this book.

I realize that others have endured much worse pain and anguish worldwide. I am very sympathetic to someone's plight as the result of another's selfishness. If you, unfortunately,

have endured much worse than my story, please do not take offense to my writings. I am not making light of your misery.

I chose to write this book not because I am a survivor and have overcome my struggles to achieve great things. Rather, I would not call myself a survivor at all. I am still more of a victim. I suffer the effects of the abuse everyday. Unfortunately, at times I succumb to the internal demons resulting from the burden that I am forced to carry. Even with the constant impact of these internal demons, I have graduated college, worked in professional baseball, pursued a career in both strength and conditioning and teaching, achieved a quasi successful ultimate fighting career, and most importantly, not become a statistic; I am not dead or in prison.

I will share these events of my life with you not only as an avenue for child abuse prevention but as a way to unite all victims together. As a victim, I wish to establish balance and peace in my present to manage my past for the hopes of a brighter future. Thank you for reading my story.

Please feel free to share your thoughts with me at achildsdemons@gmail.com.

The Beginning

My memories do not extend back to my early childhood days. I think this black out is due to my wish not to remember. Why would I want to recollect a childhood of abuse? Strangely enough, the abusive sessions themselves I remember vividly, any happy times mostly have been forgotten.

My story begins in Titusville, Pennsylvania where I was born to Judith and Dennis Seyler on September 27, 1974. I am not sure what my mom did for employment, but I have been told that my father was a steel worker. My dad was a rather large guy. He was roughly 6'2" 220 pounds with a full beard, large shoulders, a large beer belly and big, strong hands. Like my dad, my mom is also a larger woman in stature. I do not remember a single detail about the house I lived in. Nothing about its dimensions, number of rooms, yard size, whether or not there was a fence, any pets, nothing.

Considering that Titusville is a blue collar town that survived on the steel mills in the area, I can only assume that I lived in a working class home. Like the details about the house, I do not recall any interaction between my parents. I do not know if they were affectionate to one another, or to me, or my three brothers. Whether or not a kiss was exchanged when my dad came home from work or what a typical dinner conversation entailed. In essence, I do not remember much about my childhood. It is as if my senses were stricken from me and my life begins behind my aunt and uncle's dining room chair when I was five years old. That scene, horrifically, is my first childhood memory.

Granted, a number of people do not recall their childhoods. Typically, however, one can usually remember a pet, or evidence of their growth is marked in a doorway with a date, or the fact that their living room had shag carpet. I, sadly, have a completely blank recollection when it

comes to my past. What I learned was that my father was an alcoholic. His vice of choice was beer. And around the age of 34, when I was five years old, my father died of cirrhosis of the liver as a result of his alcohol abuse.

Two years prior to my father's death, my parents divorced. With neither parent wanting, or capable of taking care of four young boys, my brothers and I began to live in different group homes and with foster care families in Pennsylvania. The arrangements were short term. We would stay in one setting for a few weeks or a few months, and then move on to the next arranged home. We had no established address for the better part of two years from when I was three to five years old. Finally, the adoption process would conclude when Richard and Suzanne Bender of Lakewood, Ohio agreed to become our legal guardians. Why they accepted this responsibility still puzzles me today. The approval of the court in Pennsylvania to award us to these two demons was the beginning of my hellish journey.

When I was growing up, teachers would ask their students generic questions such as, "What would you like to be when you grow up?" Or, "what is the one wish you would like more than anything else?" The first time I was presented with these questions I thought to myself, "When I grow up, I want to be nothing like my aunt and uncle. And the one wish I had more than anything else would be for the reversal of the court's decision."

The alternative to my aunt and uncle obtaining legal guardianship of us would have been for each one of us to be adopted by a different family and ultimately, be split up. In hindsight, I would have much rather taken this chance than the harsh reality.

Following our move to Lakewood, Ohio, my mom entered the Army and was stationed in Frankfurt, Germany. Like so many aspects of my childhood, I do not recall many details of her involvement in the military. What I do know is that she served as part of the Military Police on

the base. After her term, she moved to Oshkosh, Wisconsin where she would ultimately remarry and continues to reside. One gut wrenching phone conversation I had with her when I was 13 years old caused me to cease any relationship we developed. I will provide the details of this discussion later in the book.

The term home is used casually and without question often times. However, what if the term home does not reflect a dwelling of peace and safety? What if the term home spawns memories of abuse, neglect and terror? These thoughts dilute my mind. I have written a short passage using symbolism from the 2000 blockbuster movie *Gladiator* to illustrate the contradiction in the term home.

Home

“My house is in the hills above Trujillo. A very simple place. Pink stones that warm in the sun. A kitchen garden that smells of herbs in the day... jasmine in the evening. Through the gate is a giant poplar. Figs, apples, pears. The soil, black. Black like my wife's hair. Grapes on the south slopes, olives on the north. Wild ponies play near my house. They tease my son. He wants to be one.”

Maximus speaking to Marcus Aurelius

Gladiator, 2000

Please read that excerpt again. Take time to visualize the words. Begin to view the hills, the pink stones and the garden. Take a deep breath and smell the herbs and jasmine. Envision the home surrounded by life and vitality. Now, please visualize your home growing up. Begin to experience a morning when you arose to the smell of breakfast. Picture yourself exiting your bedroom and walking into the warm embrace of your parents. Feel the hugs shared as you begin another day under the protection and stability of your family's

home. Begin to mouth the dialogue between you and your siblings as you create an agenda for the day. Allow yourself the opportunity to embrace all of your senses as your mind recreates your youth. Take in every sight, sound, smell and tactile experience. Mindfully revisit these wonderful, blessed familiarities.

One of the true paradigms of human kind is to prevent jealousy and symbiotically appreciate the blessings of another. If a person is capable of preventing this reflexive resentment, then we all can share in the warmth and compassion that is the foundation of a home. With that said, please stop reading this note and go hug your parents. Take them into your arms and squeeze tightly. Say thank you to them for all that they have done. Thank them for their guidance. Thank them for their support. Thank them for their love. As your parents stare blankly at you wondering if you are experimenting with pharmaceuticals, let them know that you appreciate the life they have provided you. Tell them that they have made a difference and that you are the man or woman today because of what they taught you in your past. Do this for me so that I too will experience this bond forged that is the backbone of each family.

As I sit here with a tear rolling down my cheek, I am not saddened by what I have never had. Nor am I saddened by what I may never experience. I am not saddened at all, actually. These tears are symbols of appreciation for those of you who have allowed me to experience the true essence of a family and live, albeit vicariously, in a home. I have shared holidays, birthdays, get-togethers, and family functions with some of you. Proudly and humbly I say, thank you. During these blessed times, unbeknownst to most of you, I allowed myself to absorb the love that is shared amongst your family members. In all

actuality, I stole some of that love (shhh! That was a secret). I wanted to genuinely fill up my being with an experience that I have rarely felt.

Now that you are aware of my covert operation, I only ask that you continue to place smiles on your family member's faces and embrace this time you have. Allow yourself to engage in deep conversations. Witness the passion and understanding between your grandparents. Provide your parents with the hugs and kisses they deserve. I ask you this because I too want to experience all of that the next time I am in your home. I too want to recreate the visualization of a home with implicit detail as Maximus has done. If you do this, not only will you be helping a friend, but you will be providing the 16,000,000 other people just like me who know not what it means to live in a home. You will be making a difference.

The Evolution of the Abuse

*“My life has been a nightmare,
My soul is fractured to the bone,
So if I must be lonely,
I think I’d rather be alone...”*

Stabbing Westward “Save Yourself”

I am not sure if Stabbing Westward’s song, “Save Yourself,” is a song about child abuse. When I first heard the lyrics above, I could not think of a more fitting way to describe my childhood. The nightmare started when I cowered behind the dining room chair and is present everyday of my life, even today. I say present in the current sense because the physical abuse inflicted upon me as a child may have stopped, but the residual debilitating effects haunt me daily.

Because of the horrifying existence, while I was still living under my aunt and uncle’s roof, I began to escape inside of myself. I became very withdrawn at home, even from my brothers. I developed survival instincts slowly losing the ability to trust, rely on anyone else or turn to another for assistance. I became disassociated and completely independent relying on my own abilities and thoughts. I later found out that I was suffering from a form of paranoid personality disorder.

“Paranoid personality disorder is characterized by a distrust of others and a constant suspicion that people around you have sinister motives. People with this disorder tend to have excessive trust in their own knowledge and abilities and usually avoid close friendships. They search for hidden meanings in everything and read hostile intentions into the actions of others. We are quick to challenge the loyalties of friends and loved ones and often appear cold and

distant. Additionally, those suffering from paranoid personality disorder usually shift blame to other people and have a tendency to carry long grudges.”ⁱ

My survival mode was not very effective, however. The abuse continued daily and my withdrawn attitude at home caused my aunt and uncle to believe that I had an attitude problem that needed discipline to remedy. Instead of trying to hide myself from them, I actually put myself at the forefront whenever my aunt and uncle wanted to vent their anger. Like my dad, these two monsters drank heavily. They were professional alcoholics, working day jobs and drinking three to six full glasses of Crown Royal nightly. The amount of alcohol consumed weekly was staggering.

Most evenings were the same and I knew at some point I would be made an example of. Besides withdrawing from my aunt and uncle, I am also very stubborn and strong willed. Both of my character traits, often times, increased the violence projected onto me. One night in grade school, I came home from wrestling practice. After a quick shower and an even quicker meal, I attempted to retreat to my room for the evening without even as much as a hello exchanged. Unfortunately, my plans would not come to fruition. Upon walking through the living room to go upstairs to my bedroom, my aunt asked if I had made myself dinner and cleaned up the kitchen afterwards. I responded with, “Yes I did.”

Beginning to walk closer to the stairs, my aunt quickly retorted, “Don’t you talk to me like that.” By the tone of her voice, I knew I was in trouble.

My stubborn and strong willed side engaged and I responded, “Talk to you like what? I didn’t say anything.”

“Don’t give me that attitude,” my aunt screamed and followed up with a smack to my face. As I stood there dumbfounded, my aunt began her verbal assault on me. “You think

you're better than us. You walk around here like your shit doesn't stink. You think you can come and go as you please and do whatever you want!" Mixed between berating was a multitude of slaps and violent hair pulling.

My face began to emit heat and I could feel the redness setting in. In an act of bravery, or maybe stupidity, I would clench my muscles and stand as strong as I could. I never wanted to show my aunt fear or provide any indication that she had physically injured me. I would take the slap and bring my face back to center as quickly as possible. And I would never dare protect my face from the assault. Blocking her slaps would provide her the satisfaction that she was causing me pain. And I did not want to provide her any level of pleasure. Additionally, I learned earlier in life that using my arms to protect against her swings would only irritate her more leading to more intense beatings.

Following continuous slaps and hair pulling with an onslaught of verbal attacks, my uncle would then put down his drink and join in the beating. At this point, my rage was beginning to consume me. Almost as if David Banner was transforming into the Incredible Hulk, minus the giant muscles and freakish strength. In preparation for my uncle, I would anchor my feet to the floor. His tactics were more like a bully. He would begin with pushing and shoving and asking juvenile questions which would lead to mockery. "You think you're tough? What, do those slaps hurt? Go ahead and cry. You're such a fucking baby."

The shoving and playground rants would then escalate into violence. His slaps would hit with so much more force than my aunt's. At the point of contact, my head would spin to the opposite side with tremendous velocity. The deafening sound of the slap would echo throughout the house. Instantly my face would swell and the inside of my mouth would suffer lesions. I could taste the blood beginning to flow down my throat. One slap after another would snap my

head from side to side. My neck would begin to ache from the trauma. A ringing in my ears would increase as the magnitude of the beating increased.

Throughout the attack, I would try not to move and show that the beating had no physical effect on me. I was not going to provide any level of victory for my abusers. This sadistic approach fueled the loathing I have for my aunt and uncle. Ultimately, the beating would intensify and my uncle would begin to throw me around the room. Smashing into one wall, crumbling to the ground then picking myself up and standing strong would be the repetitive cycle. Without pity, I would be violently slammed into another wall. With my head rebounding off of the cement, I could feel shots of pain radiating down my back through my arms and legs. To this day, I believe my current back issues are a result of this abuse.

As I tensed for the impact, my body braced as I was repeatedly slammed against the wall. The pain would be too much to bear and I would whimper to the ground. My shirt torn, bleeding from my mouth and head, body bruised and beaten, I would pick myself up to stand my ground yet again. This courage was a losing battle, however. My uncle, like my father, was a very large man. A little shorter in stature when compared to my dad, my uncle is about 6'0" tall, yet weighed nearly 350 pounds. Even though my uncle was not all muscle, simple physics proves that a man of that size can generate tremendous force, especially when that force was applied upon a 65 pound boy.

Throughout the barrage of slaps, punches, shoves and violent crashes, I found myself driven to stand up, shake it off, stick my chin that much further out and prove that I would not be broken. On the outside, I was displaying an unbreakable façade. Internally, however, my spirit and soul were crumbling with every strike. I was forced to live in fear, but I would not show any outward display of this fear. I was developing a dual personality. Not a split personality in the

traditional sense. Rather, I was displaying a very tough, dominant exterior while protecting a fragile, weakened interior.
