

Wounds...Healing...Change, by Richard

In childhood and adolescence, I remember my father screaming at us and my mother clinging to me. I was quite distant from him and too close to her. When I was five, a friend of the family came to live with us. He gained my trust, won my heart, and sexually abused me. I was also the bearer of a gift—the gift of sensitivity. It led me to experience life quite deeply and made it hard for me to let things go. I was more artistic, whereas my father and brother were more athletic. My dad would emotionally beat my brother Neal, and then Neal would beat on me. These are some of the causes that led to my experiencing same-sex attractions.

I sought refuge in the arms of men. I had several boyfriends in college, and then a lover of three years. However, it was not enough. I wanted to marry and have a family. I had a religious conversion experience that helped me leave the homosexual lifestyle. Eventually, I met Jae Sook and she became my wife. That was not enough. I had repressed my same-sex attractions. I needed to heal my wounds and fulfill unmet needs. I found this through therapy, support groups, mentors, friends, and my faith. In this way, I was able to change and finally come out straight. I share my story to give you some idea of where I have been, where I am, and the knowledge that change is possible.

### **Early Childhood and Adolescence**

I grew up in Lower Merion, a suburb of Philadelphia. I was the youngest of three children in a Jewish family. My brother Neal was four and a half years older, and my sister Lydia was two and a half years older. Most often, my dad would come home from work and scream at us. Because of my sensitive nature, it felt like daggers piercing my soul. My dad and Neal had a very antagonistic relationship. There was constant fighting and tears in the Cohen household. My role was that of a peacemaker. I would clown around, trying desperately to relieve the tension that was in the air.

From middle school, I began to experience same-sex attractions. Though girls noticed me, I experienced an ever-increasing interest and desire to be close to guys. From the seventh grade, some of my guy friends wanted to experiment sexually. I went along with it, but what I really wanted was to be physically intimate with them. I wanted to hold and to be held.

I would sleep over at my friend Steve's house. It was great to snuggle up with him. I couldn't get enough, but Steve felt a bit uncomfortable with my continuous overtures for intimacy. My same-sex desires got stronger with each passing year. I had more sexual experiences with school friends. For them it was a novelty, but for me it was a growing obsession. At the same time, I tried to act "normal," so I had girlfriends. But this growing obsession for a man continued to haunt me.

At seventeen years of age, I went to my father's health club and met a man who invited me back to his place. My heart was pounding so loudly that I thought it would burst out of my chest. I had never done such a thing in my life. When we got to his apartment, the seduction began. I was so nervous since this was all so new for me. What he did to me that day, I didn't know two men could do. My body and spirit felt ripped in two. Afterwards, I left his apartment and took the subway home. When I was underground waiting for the train, I walked into a dark corner and deeply sobbed. I felt so violated and disappointed. I was looking for closeness, for a safe place to be held and to hold. What I experienced felt like rape.

I went home and never told anyone about what had happened. Finally, toward the end of my senior year of high school, I told my parents about my struggle with same-sex attractions. My mother said she knew, which made me very angry. From early infancy, I had a love-hate relationship with her. I didn't know where she began and I ended. I knew part of my gender confusion was due to our inappropriate closeness. I embarrassed my father, who had grown up in military school and was a marine in World War II, by my revelation. I requested to see a psychiatrist, which I did, but it was a fruitless experience. He and I didn't connect at all.

## **College**

In 1970, I went to Boston University to study music. I began psychotherapy twice weekly with a traditional Freudian psychoanalyst. This continued over the next three years. It was an excruciating time of pain and little gain. I did learn a bit more about myself; however, I didn't learn about the origins of my desires, nor did I experience any relief from the pain.

During my first year at college, I went to some "gay" bars, but I didn't like the scene. It felt like a meat market, and I didn't want to be a commodity on the shelf. I attended some

meetings at my university's "gay and lesbian" student alliance. In my first year of college, I had several boyfriends, each lasting several months.

After one visit home, my father wrote a letter that hurt me deeply. At the same time, I felt suffocated by my current boyfriend, Mike. Besides all that, my schoolwork was overwhelming. I decided to take a bottle of Bufferin and end it all. However, I woke up in the middle of the morning sick as a dog, and still alive. I called my sister, who lived nearby. She came over and took me to the emergency room at the hospital where they pumped my stomach and stabilized my condition.

I recovered, continued therapy, went back to school, ended my relationship with Mike, changed my major to theater, and felt a bit more hopeful. In my second year of school, I met Tim, an art major. We would become lovers for the next three years.

Since my early childhood, I had three dreams. First, I wanted to have a best friend, someone with whom I could totally be myself, without apology or excuse. Second, I wanted to perform in a group that would travel the world, both educating and entertaining people. Third, I wanted to marry a beautiful woman and create a loving family.

Tim was my first dream come true. However, there was a price to pay. It was a roller-coaster relationship. I was the pursuer and he was the distancer. This was our continuous dance for three years. The close times were incredible, and the love we shared was wonderful. We were best friends. I learned many things by seeing life through Tim's eyes. He had an affinity for nature, and I learned to see things I had never seen before. He was and still remains an exceptional man.

### **Spiritual Journey**

Another significant event occurred through our relationship. Tim loved Jesus very deeply. I persecuted him for his beliefs until he said, "Richard, stop it. You believe what you want to believe, and let me believe what I believe." I realized he was right, and I apologized. Since I loved Tim, I wanted to see why he loved this Jesus so much. For the first time in my life, I began reading the New Testament. As part of my Jewish upbringing, I was both bar-mitzvahed and confirmed, studying only the Old Testament.

I had always been on a spiritual quest, trying to find the meaning and purpose of life. I tried so many kinds of faiths and ways: Judaism, Buddhism, and therapies. Then I met

Jesus. He was a remarkable individual. In fact, he was the kind of man I had always wanted to be myself. What I admired in him was that his thoughts, feelings, words, and deeds were one. He was a congruent man, the same inside as he was on the outside. He spoke of forgiveness and God's grace. These were new concepts for me. I wanted to be like him. This began my journey as a Christian. I joined an Episcopal Church in Roxbury and began teaching Sunday school.

More and more, Tim and I knew that homosexuality was not compatible with God's Word, so we eliminated the physical part of our relationship. We both met the Unification Church shortly after that. I believed that God was calling me to explore this faith, and in 1974, I joined. For nine years, I remained celibate. I lived a life of service, trying not to think about myself, but focus on God, His Word, and others. The same-sex desires emerged now and then. I would push and pray them away. I begged God to take them away for good.

I fulfilled my second dream by performing in the church choir, traveling throughout the States and Asia, bringing a message of hope and love. While performing, I met my wife-to-be. We performed together. She was in a Korean folk dance troupe. We spoke very little, but would come to know each other better in the years ahead.

### **Marriage and Therapy**

In 1982, Jae Sook and I married, and I was on my way to fulfilling my third dream. The first few months were wonderful. I told her about what I thought was my homosexual past. Then the problem resurfaced. I felt so much rage toward my wife. I projected onto Jae Sook all the pent-up hostility I had previously felt toward my mother.

It was a shocking mess, heightened by the fact that I was successful in my business. I was an arts manager, touring classical musicians and ballet companies throughout Asia. Many people loved me and thought I was just the greatest. At home, Dr. Jekyll turned into Mr. Hyde, a rageaholic. I had become what I vowed I would never be—just like my father. My wife soon became pregnant with our first child. I knew I must begin therapy again. So, in May 1983, while living in New York City, I went to see a noted psychologist. For one year, I attended weekly individual and group sessions.

**It was the beginning of my journey out of homosexuality.**

One night, after Jae Sook and I had made love, I turned away from her. In an instant, it felt as if my spirit had jumped out of my body! I dissociated from my physical self. My heart was screaming. At that moment, I came to realize that I had experienced some kind of abuse in early childhood.

I could not wait for the next therapy session. My therapist introduced me to several bioenergetic techniques. I pounded several pillows with a tennis racquet to release pent-up anger and frustration. While pounding away at what I thought was some abuse caused by my mother, I had a flashback. All of a sudden, I saw male genitals coming toward my mouth. I screamed. I felt shocked. I felt horrified. I cried and the tears flowed for the next few years, as I worked through memories of sexual abuse that occurred when I was between the ages of five and six years old. A friend of the family—we called him Uncle Dave—lived with us while he was in the process of getting a divorce. Dave was a very large, powerful man. He provided for me what my father could not. He spent time with me, listened to me, held me. He gave me the feeling that I mattered and that he cared. He was actually the first adult with whom I had bonded. Then, it began. He started playing with my genitals and had me do the same with his. It was shocking and horrifying. Of course, it felt good, too. God has, after all, designed the human body to feel pleasure in the genital areas.

This is one reason that sexual abuse is so confusing for a child. It feels painful and pleasurable all at the same time. I cried so many tears sorting through the web of confusion and destruction that those experiences caused me. I learned that my neurology was programmed to respond to men in sexual ways. For me, intimacy with a man equaled sex. I learned that to be close to a man, I must give him my body. This was the learning of a child hungry for his father's love. Because of my hypersensitive temperament and my father's rageaholic nature, I never had a chance to bond with him. Uncle Dave was my first male mentor.

### **Healing and Hell**

Working through the effects of the child sexual abuse brought havoc to my life. We had little emotional and spiritual support at the time. There were few organizations in New York City to help those who desired to come out of homosexuality. I attended one Christian group, but they rejected me because, at that time, I was still a part of the Unification Church. I tried another ex-gay ministry in a nearby state, and the director

approached me to have sex with him. This created more pain and feelings of hopelessness.

I knew the wounding occurred because of my unhealthy relationship with Uncle Dave and the emotional detachment from my father. Therefore, I knew that I needed to be close to men in healthy ways to heal and grow. I needed mentoring, corrective parenting to reconcile what had gone wrong so many years before. I reached out to men in my church. I was voracious to experience healthy love, but I scared most of them away. I threatened them with my powerful needs, and they didn't know what to do. I am also sure I must have triggered some issues within them, as most men in our culture carry deep father wounds (one reason for homophobia).

Finally, I decided I couldn't take it anymore. I needed touch, to be held, to be mentored, to be initiated into the world of men. So, I told God, my wife, and several friends that if I couldn't find what I needed through godly men, then I would go back into the homosexual world to find someone who was willing to be with me.

It certainly wasn't plan A, not even plan B, but I knew what I needed, and I knew I wouldn't stop until I found it. Back into the sad "gay" world I went. I felt like a complete hypocrite, going against all my religious convictions, but the need for love is more powerful than religion. I shared everything with God. Through that period of my life, I knew He was guiding me.

It was a very bizarre time. It was a most painful and lonely time for Jae Sook and our first son, Jarish. I was out running around New York City with my boyfriend, and she was at home alone taking care of our son, knowing her husband was out with a man. I cry now, as I write these words, realizing again the pain I caused her and our children. I am truly sorry, and I have repented to her, our children, and God for what I did.

I told her of my commitment to our relationship and of my desire for her not to divorce me. I needed to heal with men. I didn't know how to do it. I couldn't find anyone at the time to show me the way, so I had to do the best I could. I prayed the whole way through this unusual course, from start to finish.

It would take volumes to describe what I went through in the next two and a half years. I learned that I was indeed looking for closeness, not sex. I needed to make up for all the

times that I had never shared with my dad—just being together, doing things together, talking about life, and learning from him. This I experienced with a wonderful man. I was very honest with him from the start about being married and wanting to heal these same-sex desires. There was no pretense with him, my wife, or God.

Slowly, my heart began to heal as I grieved the effects of the sexual abuse in therapy and I spent time with my friend. However, there was still a deep wound in the pit of my soul. We had had a second child during all this. Jessica was a beautiful girl.

More and more, my wife and I were growing distant in our connection to the Unification Church. We were struggling emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. In the years to come, we would eventually resign and return to our Christian roots. (Now we attend a wonderful church in our community. There we find fellowship, support, and love.)

### **Breakthrough**

By the grace of God, I found a Christian friend who was willing to help me heal the homo-emotional wounds of my past. He himself was quite stable and comfortable in his masculinity. I cannot describe everything that took place between David and me. Yes, his name was David. God is just. It was Dave who abused me at five, and it was David who helped me heal at thirty-five!

Together, with the guidance of God, we walked back into the room of my abuse, and there I faced my biggest demon—myself, my accuser. "It was all my fault!" This is how I felt. This is what I thought! "It was all my fault!" David helped the child in me see that I didn't cause the abuse, that it wasn't my "fault." In that instant, the connection between Uncle Dave and I was cut, and I became free for the first time in my life. With that sense of freedom, I sobbed for about an hour in David's arms. It was such a release and relief to know that I wasn't responsible for what had happened and that God had forgiven me. In those moments of release, I found my freedom from same-sex desires. Cutting this neurological connection to the sexual desires freed me from thirty years of relentless pain and an endless pursuit of men.

After that, I needed to do maintenance work to ensure that I was receiving healthy, nonsexual love from other men. I found several men who were willing to mentor me. This was another critical part of my healing. Developmentally, I had to learn the many lessons

I missed as a child, adolescent, and young adult. My friends poured and continue to pour into my soul lessons of love, initiating me into the world of men.

### **More Healing**

My marriage with Jae Sook is loving and fulfilling. We now have three precious children, and we all continue to grow deeply in our love for each other.

I have learned over the past twelve years that no matter what issue or issues we are facing in our lives, our wounds all originate from the same sources. For, as Leanne Payne said, "To write about the healing of the homosexual is to write about the healing of all men and women."<sup>2</sup> We all fall short of our original design for greatness. When we heal ourselves, the world heals a little more. When we help others heal, we heal in the process.