

VOSAS

VOICES OF SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVORS

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TITUS 2 FOUNDATION

"Connecting Family, School, and Community"



Raychelle "Rae" Martin

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BEAUTY FOR ASHES

"To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for his own glory."

Isaiah 61:3 NLT

The above is one of my favorite scriptures. He will give you beauty for ashes. I know there have been times in my life that I did not always feel my best. I didn't feel worthy enough, felt like I always had issues happening, and didn't value myself at all. I was just going through life merely surviving. The tough part about just getting by, is that you are too consumed with life's problems, you can't enjoy the beauty in it. The moment I surrendered to God's voice and allowed Him to direct areas of my life that I didn't want to touch, my eyes began to open. I didn't enjoy the full beauty of myself right away, but slowly that journey was beginning, and I was definitely along for the ride! He showed me who I was, and how He saw me. I allowed situations to control me, and allowed others to define me. God said, "No Boo! That is not who you are!" And you know what I said? "You sho right!" Haha! Listening to God's truth gave me a new perspective on everything. I am worthy of everything He wants me to have! The same for you.

Beauty is not just how we look, or how we behave, it is also everything around us. God orchestrated my life in such a way that even the small things are special and beautiful. You may have thought, or still may think you are a mess, and nothing will ever change. I'm here to tell you that is a lie. I am 46 years old, raised three amazing children, and my life has really just begun, and I'm excited about it. If my mess can change, it can surely happen for you as well. He wants to give you all of your heart's desires. Just trust Him with those dark secrets and painful parts of your life. He will heal you, set you free, and give you Beauty for your Ashes!

Letter from... The Editor

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Survivor's Story



Raychelle "Rae" Martin with husband, Ty Martin.

The process of healing begins with the realization that something unusual has occurred, something that was beyond your control and was not your fault. For years, I thought the sexual assault was a dream. I envisioned myself saying “NO! NO! NO!”. I envisioned the pink tub at my grandparents house that I sat in to wash away the guilt, shame, and hurt. I remember the clothes I wore that day and the unbearable heat of the afternoon September sun. I remember being excited to skip soccer practice and hang out with a boy who (I thought) really liked me. I met him at the library; he was very tall and very sweet (I assumed).

After the incident I was extremely confused. I said “NO!” I resisted. I remember feeling another pair of hands on my arms holding me down while he raped me. I remember the dark, dank attic space where the incident occurred. Several years passed before I could verbalize that “I was raped”. I didn’t know that someone “you knew” could rape you. I should have taken my butt to soccer practice that day. The thought still haunts me.

After the incident, I spent years cringing at the thought of anything entering my vaginal canal. I was convinced that I was officially broken! Sexual intercourse and vaginal exams caused me massive anxiety and were often impossible to complete. I just wanted to be a regular woman. I wanted to be the type of woman who enjoyed

sexual intercourse, wore tampons, and wouldn’t hesitate to go to the gynecologist every year. My twenties were characterized by a series of events that resulted from the sexual trauma I endured at 14 years old: overeating, bad relationships, overspending, and self-esteem issues. I didn’t get to “choose” to lose my virginity. I was a functioning victim. I allowed myself to remain broken while

masquerading as a happy, stylish, and well put together woman. I continued to thrive academically and professionally. I finished high

school, finished college with honors, and finished grad school. I started my teaching career when I was 22 years old. Everything looked normal on the outside but inside, I was an emotional disaster.

When I was 25 years, I FINALLY acknowledged the rape. When I was 26 years old, I told my dad and my romantic partner (at the time). That same year I joined a church and began to submerge myself in the Word of God. I found my safe place and my hiding space. I didn’t acknowledge the need for therapy and healing because I assumed God would make my vagina “open sesame” when it was time to have intercourse with a husband that He had chosen for me. I was waiting on someone to rescue me; I was not yet ready to “do the work”. My father died when I was 30 years old and my sense of safety and well-being took a

devastating blow! I began to seek alternative ways to get closer to God and elevate my thought process. I joined a women’s ministry and aligned myself with women who were seeking God on a different level. When I was 31 years old, I met the man who would eventually become my husband and I assumed that all my problems were over. However, the pain, insecurity, and fear from the sexual trauma eventually drove me to suicide ideation. I had reached the lowest point in my life, and I FINALLY acknowledged that I needed to find a therapist.

I began therapy and I became very consistent and intentional about my healing. I was advancing through the sessions with my first therapist and began to understand the mind-body connection. I had a desire to have intercourse and knew I would need a sex therapist or someone who specialized in trauma recovery.

(Message: don’t be afraid to try different forms of therapy or a new therapist. There is no such thing as “therapy doesn’t work”. There is someone for EVERYONE.)

I began free therapy sessions through a program at the YWCA for survivors of sexual abuse. My 2nd therapist was phenomenal, knowledgeable, and very serious about her job. We began exploring the possibility of a mental disorder like depression or bi-polar disorder. (cont’d)

My 2nd therapist was more clinical in nature and approached my therapy sessions very scientifically. I began to see a psychiatrist also and take medication for depression/bi-polar disorder. (Message: On the journey of healing, you must be willing to try things that may make you uncomfortable.)

About a year or a year and a half later, my therapist announced that she was moving out of state. I was crushed, devastated, and defeated. I had a panic attack and cried like a baby in her office. Another therapist at the agency took over her caseload, and luckily this was someone I had worked with in a small group before. I was reluctant to go to the new therapist, but I knew my work in therapy was far from over.

(Message: Don't give up on therapy! It works! Keep going!)

My 3rd therapist began to walk me through the process of acknowledging all the areas of my life the sexual trauma affected. At our first session, I told my new therapist that my goal was to be able to properly "get it in" with my husband (I had just gotten married when I started with the 3rd therapist in 2015). I had no idea that I was in store for a total life transition. We worked on positive self-talk, goal setting, acknowledging fault, the effects of trauma, pushing past fear, relaxation techniques, etc. Basically, we talked about EVERYTHING except for the sexual trauma. I needed to build my true self

from the ground up. I discovered my strengths and learned how to overcome my fears. I am so proud of myself because I did the work! I did the homework assignments, the journaling, the positive self-talk. I was open, honest, and receptive to therapy. I kept going when I didn't feel like being bothered. I uncovered emotional wounds and allowed the healing tears to flow. My therapist and I set weekly goals and eventually I was completely off of bi-polar medication. In fact, she thinks I may have been misdiagnosed.

Through this process, I learned how to be a better woman, wife, teacher, bonus mom, daughter, sister, and friend. I found the courage to share my story and acknowledge the trauma, but I no longer allow it to define me.

Because of therapy, spiritual life-coaching, an incredibly patient husband, a loving family, supportive friends, prayers, and increased attention to my mental and physical wellness, I was able to achieve the following: In August of 2019, I started seeing a medical weight loss specialist and I am actively fighting this disease of obesity and emotional eating. (I've lost 120 pounds to date!) In August 2019, I also started a new job that has renewed my love of teaching. In July 2020, I rebranded, Fashionably Rae Services, LLC, a business idea I developed in 2016.

The day after I agreed to write this article, I had an appointment with a gynecologist that specializes in women's sexual problems. I was diagnosed with vaginismus (a condition involving a muscle spasm in the pelvic floor muscles. It can make it painful, difficult, or impossible to have sexual intercourse, to undergo a gynecological exam, and to insert a tampon). I was so relieved to find out that what I have is diagnosable and treatable! For so many years I thought I was broken, deficient, less of a woman. By the time this article is published, I will have had my first appointment with a pelvic floor physical therapist. I'm so excited to add another layer to my journey of wellness!

Remember: healing is not linear, it is a series of curves and twists and turns and lumps and bumps! It will also be the most beautiful journey of your life. I pray that you find the power you possess to take control of your life and your healing.

My daily affirmations:
I am beautifully and wonderfully made, uniquely gifted, and amazing.
I am blessed and powerful beyond measure.
I have the power to change anything that I don't like about myself.
I have the power to create the life I want to live.
My marriage is blessed, my family is blessed, and my finances are blessed! In Jesus's name!

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Fashionably Rae Services, LLC (including Rae's Closet) is a place where you can find limited edition accessories, jewelry, cosmetics, and clothing items. My goal is to bring unique and affordable pieces to the practical, yet fashionable woman. Fashionably Rae Services also includes image consulting in the areas of appearance (wardrobe styling, personal shopping, personal styling, body image consulting, and photo shoot assistance) and written communication (editing, revising, and document review).



THE COUNSELOR'S CORNER



Andrea Jackson, CIT , contributor

Supervised by:Jean Moretto, PhD, LPC

Andrea completed her Master of Arts degree in Professional Counseling May 2017 from Lindenwood University. Andrea believes that a primary means of change lies in developing a strong therapeutic and collaborative relationship. She utilizes a strengths based approach in working with clients to develop a unique fit to their personal needs and draws from several modalities including, but not limited to, cognitive behavioral therapy and solution based work.

Andrea has worked with clients of all ages and has dealt extensively with depression, anxiety, sexual abuse and behavioral issues. When requested by the client, Andrea finds that seeking God authentically in session results in healing and can lead to life forming changes.

Andrea is a member and also on the board at Moving4ward Ministries, a 501c3 organization created to provide the community of St. Louis and St. Charles counties of Missouri, a place where adult survivors of sexual abuse ages 18 and older, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, can feel safe sharing experiences that has caused lasting effects on professional resources so healing can begin. Andrea is Youth Mental Health First Aid Certified. Andrea is also a member of the International Honor Society of Counseling Professionals, Chi Sigma Iota.



YOU DESERVE SUPPORT



Psychotherapy can help people cope with a wide range of experiences. Anyone can enjoy the benefits of therapy, whether you want to set life goals or establish healthy relationships. You don't need to be in a debilitating crisis to get support.

LET ME REPEAT THAT STATEMENT AGAIN.....

You don't need to be in a debilitating crisis to get support.

Therapy is for everyone and if people would become more proactive about their mental health, they could prevent their concerns from festering into a larger problem. Therapy can provide relief from symptoms and restore one's quality of life. It can help people learn how to be themselves again or be a better version of themselves.

Everyone has emotional challenges from time to time. In today's society solutions are available to more people than ever. No one needs to suffer alone.

With all of this being said, I know talking to a stranger can be intimidating and weird but if it can help you in the long run, please do it. Don't suffer in the (dis)comfort of your head. There is absolutely nothing wrong with you and your feelings. Your mental health is just as important as your physical health. Never forget that.

How you can help

Effective communication is important to a victim's well-being. If you are wondering what you can do, here are some suggestions:

- Remain calm. You may feel shocked or outraged, but expressing these emotions to the victim may cause confusion or discomfort.
- Believe the victim. Make it clear that you believe the assault happened and that the assault is not her or his fault.
- Give the victim control. Control was taken away during the assault. Empower the victim to make decisions about what steps to take next, and try to avoid telling her or him what to do.
 - Be available for the victim to express a range of feelings: crying, screaming, being silent, etc. Remember, the victim is angry with the person who assaulted her or him and the situation, not with you. Just be there to listen.
 - Assure the victim of your support. She or he needs to know that regardless of what happened, your relationship will remain intact.



- Avoid making threats against the suspect. Threats of harm may only cause the victim to worry about your safety and risk of arrest.
- Maintain confidentiality. Let the victim decide who to tell about the assault.
- Encourage counseling. Give the victim the hotline number for the nearest rape crisis center, but let the victim decide whether or not to call.
- Ask before offering physical support. Asking “Can I give you a hug?” can re-establish the victim’s sense of security, safety, and control.
- Say what you can guarantee. Don’t make promises you can’t keep, such as saying the victim will never be hurt again, or that the offender will be put in jail.
- Allow the proper authorities to deal with the assault. Confronting the person who committed the sexual assault may be harmful or dangerous. Attempting to investigate or question others who may know about the assault may hamper a legal investigation. Leave this to the proper authorities.
- Be patient and recognize that healing can take years with advances and setbacks.
- Take care of yourself. If you need support for yourself, please contact your local rape crisis center for a confidential place to discuss your feelings.



HEALTHY LIVING



“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.” - 3 John 1:2

Speak Life To Yourself!



30 AFFIRMATIONS TO BUILD CONFIDENCE



1. I am fearless.
2. I am always improving, but for today, I have the knowledge I need.
3. I am calm and mindful.
4. I am compassionate with others and myself.
5. I am a positive being, aware of my potential.



6. There are no blocks I cannot overcome.

7. I am strong and wise.

8. I love to meet other people and make new friends.

9. Life is beautiful.

10. I am my best source of motivation.

11. Challenges are opportunities to grow and improve.

12. I only attract positive people because I am a positive person myself.

13. I am unique and that's my Gift to the world.

14. I make a difference by showing up every day and doing my best.

15. I am becoming a better version of myself one day at a time.



16. My actions are intentional and they bring me closer to my goals.

17. I deserve what I want because my wish is pure and I have the required qualities.



18. I am solution-driven. I am not afraid of obstacles.

19. I am capable of accomplishing my tasks and responsibilities.

20. I am grateful for my journey and its lessons.



21. I have unlimited power.

22. I love myself and the circumstances life presents me.

23. I accept compliments easily because I know I deserve them.

24. Everything is possible.

25. I am creative and open to new solutions.



26. I am talented and intelligent.

27. My work fulfills me.

28. I acknowledge my Super Powers and use them to assist others.

29. I am enthusiastic, confident and persistent.

30. I let go of fearing mistakes and failure.

HEALTHY LIVING

OVER THE RAINBOW

BY MINISTER LATONYA BUFORD

I was having a conversation with a group of young ladies from church. We were talking about life problems, self-evaluation, and moving forward in spite of situations. As we talked, God began to show me a rainbow. I couldn't really understand what the significance of the rainbow was, so I began to analyze a rainbow. Rainbows are colorful and beautiful. They bring a sense of happiness, joy, and hope. There are not too many people I know that will look at a rainbow and continue to maintain an unhappy disposition. But in order for rainbows to form, there first must be a storm or rain shower. They are unpredictable; we can never tell when one will come, but we know that once the sun comes out, even though it may still be raining, the rainbow is going to show itself. Then I thought, well God, what is it that you want me to learn from the rainbow? He said that adversities will come. Problems and storms will arise, but if we have patience and wait, the sun will come out and a rainbow will show itself. When the rainbow shows it will bring hope, happiness, and joy. The key is to wait and be patient. We cannot predict the time the solution will come but we must know that it will come. He also said children wait in expectation of the rainbow when they recognize the conditions are right for one to appear. We must be like children and expect peace, expect joy and hope to come at the end of our storms.

A natural storm has rain, thunder, and lightning, but at the end when the storm calms and the sun shows, there's the rainbow. As this is also the case in our lives, the storms of life will come. There will be thunder, lightning, and rain but on the other side of our storms when the sun shows we will see the rainbow. This rainbow will be one of peace, one of joy, and one of hope. So, what must we do? We must not give up. We must get through the storm and then we must expect and know that joy and hope will come after it's all over.



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SPOTLIGHT



TITUS 2 FOUNDATION



Dawn Richards currently serves as the St. Louis Career Pathways Regional Director for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. She has over 20 years of experience in the field of education. In her former role as a high school business education teacher, she also held several leadership positions within her school such as the instructional leadership team chair, the building leadership team chair, the building improvement committee chair, and she had the responsibility of planning the school's advisory program. Dawn has a passion for helping young people recognize their options after high school and feels it is important to know what career opportunities are available to them. Titus 2 Foundation was born as a result of that very passion. Throughout her career as a teacher, she witnessed students with a huge amount of potential fall through the cracks for many reasons; some of which include lack of support, motivation, and other underlying issues such as unaddressed trauma. They would often receive sub-par grades and do enough just to get by. Upon graduation they would not have any plans to sustain themselves and work dead-end jobs, or matriculate college unsuccessfully. Titus 2 Foundation aims to provide those students with tools, resources, and extra support to help them navigate their high school careers successfully and be well informed about their post-secondary options. Dawn believes that connecting family, school, and community will help these students be able to do that.

Dawn received a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Fisk University in Nashville, TN, a Masters in Education Administration from Lindenwood University, and a Doctorate from Maryville University in Educational Leadership. She is the mother of two children, Lance and Brianna. She also cares for her 8-yr old niece Ariyah, and has a god son Brandon. She is a member of the Ark of Safety Christian Church and serves faithfully with the music ministry and social media team. In her spare time, she operates a small business and enjoys a good laugh, and spending time with her family and friends.

OVERVIEW

The Titus 2 Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization created to help students from non-traditional families navigate their high school careers and make informed decisions regarding their post-secondary options. We service students in school districts located in North St. Louis County.

MISSION

To develop underserved high school students into productive citizens through family, school, and community partnerships by way of monitoring self-progress, academic achievement, extracurricular activities, and community service.

VISION

All graduating high school students will be provided with long-term opportunities and resources to fulfill their post-secondary endeavors.

MOTTO

Connecting Family, School, and Community

While we focus on preparing students for their post-secondary endeavors, our goal is to develop the whole individual. We will offer support groups for students and parents/guardians/caretakers in order to promote mental health and well-being. Most students have experienced some type of trauma which affects their success in school. The support groups will help students sort out their feelings and offer coping tools so their trauma will not be a hindrance to their academic success.



TITUS 2 FOUNDATION

"Connecting Family, School, and Community"

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