

A Spark of Life – Pam Farlow-Wolgast

Pam is the women's facilitator of Reconciliation Ministries new Mending the Soul support group. She earned a Master of Arts in Psychology and is a Licensed Certified Social Worker and Licensed Professional Counselor in the State of Michigan. She is also a police chaplain for Madison Heights and a board member and trainer for the Oakland County Crisis Response Organization.



When I was very young, evil tried to steal my soul. That evil was my father's abuse, my mother's indifference, and the abuse by other family members and friends. What saved me was God's spark. I didn't know it at the time. Years later He told me that He had placed an undying spark inside of me. That spark kept me alive.

I was the oldest of three girls, born to parents who struggled. My father was an alcoholic and my mother the ultimate codependent. **From the outside looking in, we were indeed the ideal family. A doting father, a loving mother, and three girls always nicely dressed and polite and quiet.** We attended church, and numerous church groups met at our home. My sisters and I were well-behaved, and compliant... always compliant. There was a huge price to pay if we said anything, or acted out in any way. Compliance equaled safety. Friends would tell me they wished my parents were their parents, and I didn't know how to say, "Oh, no... there's something very wrong here."

The problem was the rules changed – they were arbitrary. What was acceptable one day was punished the next. At some point my father's drinking must have escalated, because his behavior changed. He told us our family was not a democracy, it was a dictatorship, and he was the dictator. He had the power of life and death over us. We better always understand this. So, we did. On the outside, our family looked so good. On the inside, it was terrifying and I couldn't breathe.

I grew up into adulthood and just "maintained" for many years, until another trauma stuck. I couldn't suppress or ignore the pain anymore. My oldest son was involved in his second SWAT team incident. I was there when it all started. He attacked me and I had to call the police to intervene. That incident eventually brought me to my breaking point. I lost my ability to maintain. I could no longer ignore my childhood abuse, or the pain caused by my son and the SWAT team. A year later, I was still feeling the effects of that incident, and a trusted friend took me, almost literally by the hand, to see a therapist. As we began to talk, I began to remember details of abuse. My therapist was there to guide me lovingly through the terrible memories – to help me regain my life...all with God's mighty help.

The abuse in my childhood was unending, and began when I was quite young. God brought me into memories and healing when I was ready. It's been a long journey – in the walking of these steps, I have discovered who God sees me as, and how I walk with Him throughout my days.

One of my earliest memories was when I was two or three years old. I went to the bathroom and was cleansing myself. My father came and "helped" me. He actually molested me. For years after, I was afraid of snakes in the toilet. During my healing process, Jesus reminded me that He was there at that time and I was not alone.

The evil that wanted to destroy me, to take my soul, was my father. I was afraid of his monster eyes. They were terrifying to look at, and kept me quiet. I was about three years old, and before my father tucked me in after saying good-night, he began to touch me – he had his hand across my neck so I could barely breathe. Looking at his face, all I saw were these monster eyes that glared at me. They weren't the brown eyes of my father – they were different.

They were terrifying and dangerous. I couldn't fight either the hand across my neck or those monster eyes... As I began healing, I learned from Jesus that I no longer had to look at the monster eyes – I could look into Jesus' eyes. When I did, I saw only love and compassion. The monster eyes were with me during the abuse as I was growing up. Jesus reminded me that He was with me and that I was never alone with monster eyes. I learned that I was able to trust in Jesus for protection, and slowly began to regain my authority in Him. As I worked for freedom from the terror of those eyes, Jesus never left my side.

I'd have thought the abuse lessened as I grew older. It changed. I remember, as a young teen, when my mother was hospitalized, sitting on my parents' bed, in my nightgown, hands clasped, waiting for him to come up the stairs. I hoped I was able to save my younger sisters by offering myself. As I began my healing walk, there was nothing so shameful that would cause Father God to turn His eyes away, or stop loving me. In that enormous love of our Father, I began to heal. I learned I had only to turn to Him; that He provided the safety and comfort I didn't often experience as a little girl. He showed me what a loving Father really looked like. No monster eyes, no abuse, no snakes... just the powerful loving surrounding arms of the safe, Heavenly Father.

That brings me to the spark that God placed in me when I was so young. That part of my heart that holds on to Him. Before I even knew who He was, He kept me alive for a purpose. I tried to kill myself when I was 7 or 8. I was disappointed because I couldn't figure out how to succeed. That was because of the spark; because of God in me. So, I survived. And I grew up – still not really understanding that life-giving spark until many years later. God and I spoke recently about the spark. He explained that the spark is life-affirming, and validating. Even when life seemed an endless path of pain, that spark kept me alive and moving forward. We can all have that spark – sometimes we forget or are so broken we don't remember it. Think of being in a dark cave. If one match is lit, it shines brightly and dispels the surrounding darkness. That is the way of God's spark. It is all encompassing light, and pushes away the darkness.



When I grew up I earned a Master's degree in Psychology and became a therapist. God has used my own healing journey to help others find healing through Him. I've worked at a crisis center, agencies, and as a school counselor. Later on I began to counsel people through churches and pastoral care ministries. The people God sends to me in this season have histories of abuse and trauma, so I am immersed in the devastating effects of it daily. This is one of the reasons God kept me alive, and placed that spark of life inside. I've learned that we truly do comfort with the comfort we have been comforted with.

I am thrilled to be the women's facilitator for the upcoming *Mending the Soul* program. It is an amazing healing ministry that combines Biblical truth with solid counseling practices. I am so humbled that God has chosen this path for me. My hope and expectation is that God sends those people who are ready to hear truth, and to fight for their own spark to be lit and shine brightly. What an awesome, and humbling, responsibility this is; what an awesome God we serve.

Evil didn't win. God did. Our God is a God of restoration. He is restoring me, and He wants to restore you. It is an on-going process. He will never let go of us as we cling to Him. As the song says, "It is well with my soul". Indeed, our Heavenly Father loves us and wants to make it well with our soul.