

## **Author finds forgiveness is the key to healing**

By HUEY FREEMAN - H&R Staff Writer

URBANA - When Karen Rabbitt was 4 years old, her father took her on a ride in his car to buy her some ice cream.

Instead, he molested her on the car seat, turning her world upside-down.

Feeling betrayed by her father, whom she fervently hated for many years, she later suffered from depression and was hospitalized as a result of psychotic breakdowns.

Rabbitt, 57, a recently retired psychotherapist, has written a brutally honest memoir of her battles to overcome her horrifying upbringing and subsequent triumphs.

"Trading Fathers," released in March, tells the story of how Rabbitt, who grew up on a Central Illinois farm, wrestled with the pain that tormented her for years as a result of the recurring sexual abuse.

During a recent interview, Rabbitt, a public speaker at churches and conferences, explained why she wrote the book and how she overcame the effects of her own abuse.

Rabbitt, named 2009 Writer of the Year by Write-to-Publish, a Christian writing conference, said it took three years to write her book, aided by a journal she kept since 1979.

The first step was distilling her theme into one sentence: Even if you have a difficult father to overcome as I did, God wants to father you into all he's made you to be.

"I wrote the book to show the process of healing from abuse and that God can redeem anything," Rabbitt said. "I wanted to use my story to illustrate God's character. The book focuses on my wrestling with God, on where he was when I was abused. My father sexually abused me at a very young age. As sexual abuse goes, it wasn't extensive, but the threat was always there."

Rabbitt discovered that forgiveness was at the core of recovery, but how could she forgive a sadistic, oppressive man who committed crimes against her without remorse?

"In my 20s, just after my daughter was born, I had not just a postpartum depression, but a postpartum psychosis," Rabbitt said. "I was totally out of touch with reality. I didn't know who the president was. I didn't know what the day of the week it was.

"Two years after that, I had another episode of psychosis, which then became a much more serious diagnosis. Then they called it manic depression; now they would call it bipolar."

After praying for help, Rabbitt read the passage in the Gospel of Matthew in which the unjust steward was forgiven his debts, but then threw in prison someone who owed him money.

"The reflection on that really penetrated my heart, that you are in a torturer's den unless you forgive from your heart," Rabbitt said. "I felt like God was saying to me that those breakdowns were a torturer's den, and I needed to forgive my father."

The process of forgiving her father and becoming emotionally healthy took about 10 years. She became a therapist near the end of that process.

Rabbitt said she relied on God rather than a human therapist to become whole. She especially relied on scripture verses, which she memorized and repeated aloud, including "The Lord is my light and salvation: Whom shall I fear?"

"Fear was just pervasive in my life," Rabbitt said. "So I really focused on believing the word of God rather than my feelings. It wasn't that I ignored my feelings of worthlessness, but I assumed that God is right and I am wrong."

Rabbitt, who is happily married with a 34-year-old daughter and 1-year-old grandson, said people ask her if it was traumatic to write the book, but she said the memories no longer haunt her.

"Forgiveness is remembering without the sting," Rabbitt said. "That's when you know you've really forgiven. I used to have the intrusive memories that came up, and I was revulsed. But it has been a long time. It's really been cleaned out."

"I am extremely thankful for what God has done in my life because of that evil. It is God's power in my life that has enabled me to get to this point. There is no other reason. There are way too many people who have not overcome."

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