

**Prologue: Secrets  
(or, where my journey began)**

Maybe it was the frightening flashbacks. Maybe it was the way my muscles cringed when techno songs blared on the radio, taking me back to plastic cups full of beer and frat houses full of hormones. Maybe it was the infuriating 10-foot tall Hooters billboard showcasing a woman made out of paper, with boobs the size of my head and probably a wedgie deeper than the Grand Canyon. Maybe it was one of my best friends calling me up to tell me that she had an STD after seven years of "blissful sexual liberation." Or maybe it was Doctor Phil confronting yet one more person who was addicted to pornography or had been abused or had cheated on her husband. Whatever it was, something recently sent me right over the edge. *I'm tired of sex hurting everyone! And I'm tired of not talking about it.* I wrote in my journal. For all of the sex talk we do in America, we sure do a fine job of covering up the deepest, most hurting places. Maybe we put sex on billboards and T.V. shows to distract us from the sexual pain that's hiding in our hearts: the vivid memories, the shameful fantasies, and the unmet desires. Chances are, most of us are harboring painful sexual memories that keep us locked up in a world of regret, shame, confusion, and despair. Most of us rely on secrecy to keep our deepest heartaches locked safely away from any chance of healing or freedom.

It took a brave little girl to teach me how to reverse this trend. The summer Ryan and I were married, I found out that my littlest neighbor, Chloe, was sexually assaulted by her older cousin. A feisty 6-year-old girl, Chloe told her mom right away. Nora sought help immediately despite the family's stance that she would ruin the family tie and cause an unnecessary uproar. Soon after, Chloe's four-year-old cousin, Sarah, woke up in the midst of a terrible nightmare. She couldn't tell her parents the secret that terrorized her dream. Her parents feared that she, too, had been assaulted. Both girls attended Christian counseling because their parents

knew that sexual abuse could destroy their daughters' lives if they were not healed.

Although Chloe was talking through her pain and finding healing, Sarah continued to have nightmares and refused to open up about how she had been hurt. Until one day when Chloe knocked on the office door during Sarah's counseling session. The counselor welcomed her in. Chloe walked towards Sarah, who was sitting at a table that was strewn with crayons and paper. Wrapping her thin arms around the even tinier girl, Chloe kissed Sarah on the cheek and grasped her hands in her own. Then, in a hushed but passionate whisper she said, "Sarah, you are so brave. It's okay...it's okay to tell your secret." Releasing a sigh and a flood of tears, Sarah began to tell the counselor how she had been hurt.

Sometimes a child's wisdom can begin a revolution. That summer, with my new husband by my side, I took Chloe's words personally and got honest with God about my secrets. This changed my life. Until then, I hosted an entire galaxy of sexual memories inside my mind. I had never mentioned a word about it to anyone. On my wedding day – the day of the *white dress* when a woman and a man are supposedly joining pure hearts, minds, and bodies – I walked down the aisle under the weight of that silent galaxy: countless spinning definitions, preconceptions, disappointments, and regrets, all under the name of Sex.

Chloe's words were God's gift to me: they were His way of getting my attention and giving me a place to start in disbanding that intimidating galaxy. I remember the day I began jotting down a list of my earliest memories of screwy sex-related experiences. Some memories seemed silly but were somehow significant. Like, when Craig Johnson accidentally touched my chest during swim practice in seventh grade and announced to the entire team, "I just touched her muffies!" (My *muffies*?) Needless to say, for the rest of the year, I was known as "Muffie." Or the joke about the frozen hotdog that I naively repeated to far too many people before

someone clued me in that it was disgustingly sexual. I noticed that as I got older, this galaxy grew more complex and burdensome. These memories were serious and painful to remember, let alone pray about and write down; I called out to God for strength just to get through the process.

For the life of me, I can't explain why some experiences affected me more than others, but getting a couple of these incidents out of my mind and onto paper felt so good; it was as if I was disbanding the silent galaxy and bringing all of the junk out of the dark recesses of my memory and into the light where I could finally see clearly. Once each memory was in the "light" – written down on paper, acknowledged before God – it felt far less secretive, less powerful, less destructive. For the first time in my life, I had hope that perhaps God could – and would – heal me from all of the ways I had been hurt by sex.

Getting real like this is freeing – frightening -- but freeing. You'd think this would've been a lonely experience, looking back on years of choices, regrets, and heartaches, facing memories that I had intentionally "forgotten" or kept secret, but it wasn't. On the contrary, God was working through it with me as if He, too, had painful memories from my life that He wanted to talk about; as if He, too, wanted me to be healed; as if He, too, was fed up with when sex hurts.

