

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PARTICIPANTS' STORIES

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the life stories of the participants have been summarised and written in such a manner that the data that follow in the next chapter can be viewed in a context that, as far as possible, is the perspective and the interpretation of the participant, so as to keep the stories objectively accurate. Although the stories are not written as a first-person narrative, the content of each story is the data given in the interview. Whenever appropriate and definitive, the participant's words are quoted to ensure that the narratives are as close to the original interview as possible. The participants had the opportunity to read through the narrative and make any changes they thought relevant. Only one participant requested that the names of places where she worked be omitted. In Appendix G are the discs containing the audio interviews in MP3 form and in Appendix H there is a disc of the original transcripts.

Before the actual MTRR-I commenced, the participants were asked some basic biographical questions, which were used to provide a biographical sketch introducing each participant. The stories do not focus on the abuse, but on the emotional journey and the fears and challenges these survivors have been through. Each story also relates the coping strategies that each survivor has developed in order to deal with the pain of the child sexual abuse experienced.

Based on Shen's (2008) Cumulative Stress Model that purports that children are seldom exposed to only one form of abuse or trauma, the traumatic life events of the participants are summarised and presented in Table 5.1 (see p.110).

## 5.2 BIANCA (BIA)

Bianca is 32 years old, has been married for 11 years and has a five-year-old daughter. After matriculating, Bianca studied to be a dental assistant but later did a correspondence bookkeeping course so that she could help her husband in his business. She is currently employed by her husband as a bookkeeper/researcher, but she also takes her role as mother very seriously and feels that looking after children is a "*full-time job*" (BIA:29).

When Bianca was four, they moved to her uncle's farm where her father farmed with his brother for four years. She recalls a very happy childhood in her home where her parents used to play games with them often and they would make a big family bed on the floor in front of the fire. She grew up thinking that all families were this way. Amid all the happy memories of her childhood, the child sexual abuse stands out as the only painful thing that happened in her life and she explains it like this:

*Dit is nie meer 'n negatiewe konnotasie wat alles oorheers en emosies wat negatief oorneem nie, so... maar ja, dit het definitief, dink ek, my lewensuitkyk op alles beïnvloed. ... ek wens ek kon weet as dit nie gebeur het, hoe ek sou kyk na alles (BIA: 174-177)<sup>3</sup>.*

Only after Bianca was 30 years old, did she tell her parents about the abuse that took place when she was six. The perpetrator was her uncle and it happened during the day, over a period of a year, when her parents were at work. Her brother was also sexually abused by this uncle. Her mom now said that in retrospect, she noticed a difference in her behaviour because she used to be a very happy-go-lucky little girl and suddenly she was aggressive and moody. Her mother still blames herself for not noticing it and for not being at home to prevent it. Bianca says that her whole family split up when the abuse came to light and things will never be the same again, as they do not attend family events if they know he will be there. She admits that it was torture to come in constant contact with the uncle and “*om voor te gee dat daar niks fout is nie*” (BIA:326)<sup>4</sup>.

During the interview Bianca acknowledged that although the abuse was a horrible event in her life, she had been able to see the advantages of having gone through something that traumatic because it has helped her develop resilience. She said that one can reach the point “*dat jy al die goeie dinge daaruit kan trek en jy 'n punt kan bereik dat jy kan sê, Dankie God dat dit gebeur het want dit het 'n life-changing positiewe effek op jou lewe*” (BIA: 353-356)<sup>5</sup>. She has never used the abuse as an excuse for anything and she realises that although one does not always choose what happens to you, you can always choose how to react to things.

She describes her childhood as “*baie gelukkig, in 'n gelukkige huis, in 'n normale huis... ek het wonderlike vriende gehad op skool*” (BIA: 254-256)<sup>6</sup>. She recalled how her mom said that she was always “*hierdie verskriklike vrolike, happy gelukkige kind wat gelag het en vriendelik gewees het*” (BIA: 205-206)<sup>7</sup>. Her dad, who was unaware of the abuse, used to play-wrestle with her and when he would unknowingly do something that reminded her of the abuse, it would cause her to withdraw even though her father never had any bad intentions and she knew it.

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<sup>3</sup>It is something that overpowers you and the negative emotions and connotations take over your thoughts and it influences your whole outlook on life... I wish I could know how I would have seen the world if it had never happened.

<sup>4</sup>pretend that nothing was wrong

<sup>5</sup>that you can take all the good things and you can reach the point that you can say, Thank you God that it happened because it has had a life-changing positive effect on your life.

<sup>6</sup>Very happy, in a happy home, in a normal home... I had wonderful friends at school.

<sup>7</sup>this extremely cheerful, happy child that laughed a lot and was very friendly.

She described her father as her soul mate and the spiritual leader in their home. She felt that she could go to him with anything, except the abuse, and even as an adult she says she relied heavily on his advice. During the interview she admitted that she would always enjoy being in a situation in which she could ‘test’ her father and he would always show his integrity and prove that not all men were evil:

*Daar was nooit situasies waar ek op sy skoot moes gaan sit of wat hy jou in die bed... hy het my elke aand, selfs toe ek in die hoërskool was het hy my gaan mooi toemaak, veral in die winter het hy my so ingetuck soos 'n mummy... en umm... en dit was vir my so lekker om in hierdie situasies te kom waar daar iets, wat hy iets kon gebeur, maar my pa het altyd vir my gewys wat eintlik ware liefde moet wees, en vertroueverhouding moet wees (BIA: 866-872)<sup>8</sup>.*

Because of who her father was, Bianca felt that it was easy for her to understand God the Father. Two months before our interview, Bianca relates that she experienced the loss of her father after a long struggle with cancer. She admits that this was tough because he was living with her at the time and she was taking care of him.

Bianca related that she remembered as a child she preferred to have male friends because they didn't really talk much and girls were too emotional and inquisitive. She explains one of her childhood strategies as follows:

*Ek was 'n vreeslike pleaser gewees – juis omdat ek probeer wegsteek het wat gebeur het. Op skool ook, ek het my dood geleer om goed te doen. Alles ge... Ek was Miss Perfect net om nie aandag te trek op my nie want ek was bang dat iemand sal agterkom daar's fout (BIA: 663-666)<sup>9</sup>.*

She claims that she was a miserable, aggressive teenager and, furthermore, she used anger and antagonism as a coping mechanism to push people away. By behaving this way, she explained, she thought she would ensure that nobody would ever come close enough to her to hurt her again. As a child, Bianca said that she could manage to hide and suppress the abuse but when she became a teenager and started developing sexually, it struck her what had happened. She shares how she called Childline and that they advised her to speak to

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<sup>8</sup>There were never situations where I had to sit on his lap or that where he put you in bed... he used to tuck me in every night, even when I was in high school, especially in winter, he would tuck me in like a mummy... and umm... and it was always so nice for me to get into situations where something, where he could have tried something, but my dad always showed me what real love was and what a trust relationship should be.

<sup>9</sup>I was a terrible pleaser – especially because I tried to hide what had happened. Even at school I studied myself to death to do well. I was Miss Perfect just not to draw attention to myself because I was afraid that someone would realise that something was the matter.

her parents. She did not feel that was an option at the time, so she said that she kept it to herself for most of her life.

In her teens, Bianca describes that she would get into a relationship with a boy until anything physical or too emotional developed and then she would break it off immediately. She describes it like this:

*Ek het altyd gekyk hoe ver kan ek iemand push voordat hy sal ophou om lief te wees – of hoeveel sal hy vat in die verhouding. Umm... ek het rêrig gemors met hulle. Ek sou vir dae lank hulle nie bel nie. Of, die een dag date ek jou – die volgende dag los ek jou en vat iemand anders. Dit was vir my 'n emosionele toets amper waardeur ek almal gesit het, ... ek wou kyk hoe ver kan ek jou push om te wysok, jy sal my seermaak - verstaan jy? Ek het, ek het aspris goed gedoen om moeilikheid te soek. Maar op emosionele vlak (BIA: 540-551)<sup>10</sup>.*

One of the things that she mentions is that she thinks it would be easier to deal with molestation by a stranger than with the emotional pain and confusion of being abused by someone you trust. In fact, she feels that it affects your ability to form emotional ties with people for life because you do not easily trust people that you love. In her opinion it also contributes to a great deal of guilt because you always think that there is something you are doing that is causing the abuse. She says:

*Veral as jy 'n kind is, ek meen jy het nie 'n verwysingsraamwerk nie. Jy het jou klein dogtertjie van ses jaar oud manier en dan ongelukkig dink ek vat jy dit met jou saam ... tot jy self getroud is en groot is (BIA: 235-241).<sup>11</sup>*

Bianca revealed that two years before our interview, she had an emotional breakdown and realised that she could not deal with the past anymore and that it was destroying her marriage and affecting her own child. She confesses that the abuse overshadowed everything in her life until she admitted that she could no longer deal with it alone. She contacted her childhood pastor, who now lives in America, and shared her story with him for the first time. Although her husband did know about it, she had told him that it no longer affected her life. She says that she pretended that it was something in her past and that she

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<sup>10</sup>It was almost as if I wanted to see how far I could push before someone would stop loving me. Or how much he would be willing to take in the relationship. Umm, I really messed them around. I would not phone them for days. Or the one day I am dating you and the next day I drop you and take someone else. It was an emotional test that I put everyone through. I would deliberately build a wall around myself – I knew I was doing it, it was not unintentional. I wanted to see how far I could push to prove, ok, you will hurt me – do you understand? I deliberately did things to look for trouble. But on an emotional level.

<sup>11</sup>Especially when you are a child, I mean, you don't have a frame of reference. You have your little six-year-old girl way and then unfortunately, I think you take it with you... even till you are married and grown up.

no longer thought about it, but realised that lying to herself and others was catching up with her. She relates how her husband suggested that she should see a therapist about it but that she refused and initially reacted with anger and aggression toward him. She says that she saw herself as a very bad person and felt that she was to blame for what had happened to her. She remembers her feelings about herself and the abuse like this:

*... Ek het gedink dat ek rerig 'n slegte, slegte mens is voor die tyd. Want umm... met die molestering is daar, dit was moeilik vir my om te verstaan dat dit nie ek was nie. Ek het myself blameer en myself gesê: so klein, sulke slegte goed wat ek al doen. Terwyl ek weet dis verkeerd. Ek kan voel dis verkeerd want dit laat jou aaklig voel, het ek niks daaraan gedoen om dit te verander nie. So vroeër het ek myself vreeslik blameer en en ja, ek het gesê ek was sleg en ek het gedink ek verdien die ewige dood en ek moet brand virewig in die hel (BIA: 1157-1163)<sup>12</sup>.*

*Die fisiese manier wat God ons aanmekeer gesit het, is as jy op sekere plekke vat en streef is dit vir jou fisies aangenaam maar terselfdertyd is dit emosioneel verskriklik erg en dis wat so verwarrend is. Want hoe kan jy iets wat jy in jou hart so sleg en hartseer en omgekrap laat voel dat iets jou beset soos 'n demon, geniet?*

*En ek dink dis wat jou daai selfverwyf gee en ook wat maak dat jy vir niemand daarvan vertel nie. Want jy 'geniet' dit om gemolesteer te word. En dis hoekom 'n mens skuldig voel en hoekom jy verantwoordelik voel vir wat gebeur het want dis vir jou lekker en jy het dit nie gestop nie (BIA: 1343-1356).<sup>13</sup>*

Bianca portrays herself as a very devoted mom and wife and admits that her life revolves around her family whom she describes as intimately close and involved in each other's lives. Before she experienced spiritual healing, she described her experience of physical intimacy with her husband as "torture" and as a "huweliksplig"<sup>14</sup> (BIA: 505-506), but now she shares that she enjoys that side of their marriage more and more. She tells that for many years she felt that allowing intimacy was allowing repeated abuse and struggled to convince her

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<sup>12</sup>I thought that I was really a bad, bad person initially because the molestation is there and it was difficult to understand that it was not me. I blamed myself and said to myself: So small, doing such bad things! While I know it is wrong. I can feel it is wrong because it makes you feel terrible, I did nothing to change things. So earlier I blamed myself a lot and I said how bad I was and I believed that I deserved everlasting death and that I should burn in hell forever ...

<sup>13</sup>The physical way in which God put us together means that if you are touched or stroked in certain places that it is pleasurable, but at the same time it is emotionally awful and so confusing. How can you enjoy something that upsets you and hurts you and makes you sad and possesses you like a demon? I think that is what gives you that self-blame and also prevents you from telling anyone about it. Because you 'enjoy' being molested. That is why people feel guilty and why they feel responsible for what happened because you enjoyed it and you didn't stop it.

<sup>14</sup>marital duty

husband of her love because she constantly used excuses of tiredness or sickness to avoid intimacy.

Bianca says that the media are the one thing that she avoids because of the damaging effect these have on her. Things in newspapers or magazines can really upset her and fill her with fear and negative energy and she does not want to be aware of the rapes, abuse and kidnapping that goes on around her. One of the things that she says she still struggles with, is trusting people near her daughter because she sees a potential molester in everyone and admits that this was one of the things that led to her emotional breakdown because she realised that if she was not with her child every minute of the day, she felt panicky. She acknowledges that the only way she could overcome that fear was to make it a matter of prayer and to hand her daughter over to the Lord.

She reveals herself to be a very emotional person who still experiences certain intense emotions when she thinks about the abuse, but she expresses gratitude that she can control these emotions when they do arise. She acknowledges that she tends to concentrate on the emotional rather than the factual and discloses that there was a time when the thoughts and emotions evoked because of the abuse consumed her and influenced her whole way of thinking and seeing the world. She discloses that she can now think back and not feel sadness or pain, but that she still experiences days, especially when she has heard of something similar happening to someone else, that she is overwhelmed with emotion. She recalls that there have been times when she has wanted to share with people that she knows what it feels like to be helpless and that they do not have to feel that way, because there is hope.

She confesses that she has struggled with aggression all her life and always tended to react with anger and conflict first; to such an extent that anger and aggression were almost her trademark and, even though she has dealt with a great deal of anger in the past two years, she still has to guard against falling back on her old ways. She states that aggression was her way of dealing with helplessness and that she used a great deal of sarcasm toward other people with the intention of hurting them so that she knew she was not the only one experiencing so much hurt.

She recalls how, in the past, she could not think or talk about the abuse without experiencing severe negative emotions; whereas now she hardly feels any emotion at all when these thoughts arise. Now she says that her default mood is happiness; even though she can easily feel down, she picks up quickly again. She admits that she cries very easily and often and says that some people have told her that she suffers from depression; but she feels

relieved to know that she has learned to accept that she is always on an emotional roller-coaster.

Bianca describes herself as a creative, artistic person who enjoys expressing her emotions in art and expresses relief that, even though she has allowed her emotions to control her life, she loves the way she has learned to deal with her past through her emotions. She says she eventually sees herself as one of God's perfect creations and has learned to accept that He didn't create all people to be beautiful and thin, and that there are parts of her that she would like to change, but that she likes who she has become and feels free, at last, to be herself.

Before she experienced spiritual healing and this new freedom, she says that...

*dit was soos 'n fliek wat in jou kop speel oor en oor en oor en jy kan dit nie afsit nie, en nou kan ek daaroor praat, sonder dat ek emosioneel geraak word daardeur (BIA: 310-312). Maar ek moet sê as dit by die molestering kom, kan ons elke liewe fyn detail onthou. En daarom glo ek glad nie daarin as mense sê dit is so traumaties dat hulle dit uitgeblok het nie want hulle was te klein (BIA: 368-370)<sup>15</sup>.*

Bianca tells that since she has had spiritual counselling, she believes it is the only kind of counselling that can have any effect in healing something that has affected the innermost part of your being so violently at such a young age. She says that she feels that abuse violates an individual so badly because it forces itself into a place where nobody will allow outsiders to go. In her opinion, one can learn to control emotions that are evoked by situations and memories and she says that it is a conscious decision to accept responsibility for your behaviour and your feelings. She states that she no longer has any trouble sleeping whereas she would struggle to sleep every night before her counselling because she used to be plagued by nightmares in which she would always dream about running away and trying to hide. Now she says that she can look at the abuse objectively because she understands the emotions and knows that it is over and no longer painful.

Part of the healing process, according to her, was confronting the perpetrator and dealing with forgiveness. She shares how she asked him to forgive her for all the hatred and curses that she had placed on him and did not face the perpetrator with the idea of forgiving him for

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<sup>15</sup>...it was like a movie that played in my head over and over and over and I could not switch it off but now I can even talk about it without feeling emotional. But when it comes to the abuse, I can remember every little detail and I don't believe that people can block it out just because it happened when you were so young!

the abuse. Now Bianca says that she can talk about the abuse to others because she wants to share her testimony. She says that she can see when others have suffered abuse by the way they deal with their lives and can identify many of the symptoms that she also used to have. She has said that she is determined to help those who are dealing with the pain of abuse.

Bianca acknowledges that she is a very spiritual person and concedes that without God in one's life, there can never be healing of any sort. She ascribes her resilience and the fact that she has recovered 100%, to God's power in her life and believes that only God can reach that deep inner space where the incredible hurt is seated. She sums it up like this:

*Ek glo nie dat enige mens die mag of vermoë het om daai deel van 'n ander mens se siel te kan verander net met woorde nie. Ek dink dit vat bo-natuurlike, geestelike krag van God om dit moontlik te maak (BIA: 1406-1408)<sup>16</sup>.*

She shared her future dream of doing a Bible counselling course and then she wants to work with children who have been abused. She says that she feels ready to thank God that it happened to her because it had a life-changing, positive effect on her life.

### **5.3 CARON (CAR)**

Caron is a 37-year-old theatre sister. She is not married, has never been in a relationship with a man and still lives at home with her parents and younger sister. Her brother, who does not live at home, is also unmarried. It is her opinion that their family has stayed this close because her parents are such good people and she says that both her parents are Biblical examples of what good people should be. She recounts that they moved around a great deal in her childhood because her parents were missionaries and were often transferred to different places.

About two years ago Caron decided to adopt a little girl who had been abused and abandoned and she says that this child has brought a great change to her life and given her a reason to live. She even feels that she has changed some of her general views in life since she has had a child to take care of.

She describes her childhood as a generally happy one and classifies herself as a wild child who loved the outdoors. She admits that there are large parts of her childhood that she

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<sup>16</sup> I don't believe that there is any human being who has the power or ability to be able to change a person's soul with words. I think it takes super-natural, spiritual power of God to make it possible.

cannot remember and singles out the first seven years of her life as being very vague; even completely blanked out.

She remembers that the abuse took place when she was about four years old when they were living in Zimbabwe and then tells how it happened again when she was a teenager, by a different perpetrator. She says that she remembers only blocks and segments of the abuse, with clear flashbacks of certain images, but with no clear sequence of events; especially regarding the abuse. She admits to having a very bad memory in general and can sometimes not remember things that happened just a year ago. She admits that she has started remembering more details about the abuse recently. This is how she relates the experience of remembering:

*I couldn't remember anything for years. Only the last year or two that I have started to remember all the details of both me and my cousin and the guy at the beach, they were in my teenage years but I had feelings and sensations, but I didn't know what they were and I only took notice when it started to come out, the images started to make sense, the feelings started to make sense, those things started to make sense. As I have gotten older I have started to remember more. I think it is both good and bad to remember. 'Cause you know there is something, and not knowing isn't good because you don't know what it is which drives you insane. But knowing is also not nice because you remember more things (CAR: 402-412).*

Apart from the child sexual abuse she experienced, she gives an account of being molested by her cousin when she was a teenager and recalls an occasion when a man pushed her against the wall on the beach and attempted to rape her. She recalls how revolted she was by the fact that he tried to bite her cheek, believing that it has been the reason for the recurring theme in her nightmares.

She explains that she felt abandoned as a child because she was going through all these traumatic experiences and nobody knew about them or, in her opinion, seemed to care about her. Her youngest sister has diabetes and all her parents' attention was always on that. She relates a story of how the whole family went for a walk one afternoon with the cousin who was molesting her when he was home on an army pass. She recalls the following:

*I was walking up ahead and I turned around and they all got into the cars and went off and I was left alone - totally! And I still thought they had forgotten me there in the bush. I started walking home; eventually my parents discovered I wasn't at home so they came back for me. I remember feeling so devastated that, because my cousin,*

*the molester, had to get back on time to the army base that they left me behind. I remember feeling so abandoned and betrayed (CAR: 92-98).*

Apart from that, Caron says that she felt that she wanted to protect her parents from what happened to her because she did not want them to be hurt. When she describes her flashbacks, she refers to seeing her mother sitting outside:

*I only remember seeing the porch and my mom sitting out in the back garden. And then I remember segments like the carpet or the light under the door, or that kind of thing (CAR: 604-605).*

One of the most painful childhood memories she recalls, apart from the abuse, was finding a letter that her best friend had written in the first two weeks of high school:

*"I know Caron is annoying, but I told her she could sit with us 'cause I feel sorry for her but we'll just ignore her and she might go away." So after that I didn't make friends again. My entire high school I was by myself. Because then I figured that I was the bad one and that's the concept I had. I was bad (CAR: 61-64).*

Caron disclosed one of the things she decided as a teenager directly after the incident on the beach: she would never allow a man to touch her again! After all these years she assures me that she has kept to that and, in fact, she is revolted by the idea of men or of sex in any relationship. In reality, she admits that she has never even tried to have a male friend because she says that she cannot relate to them at all, does not know what to say to them and always feels uncomfortable and unsafe in their presence. She says, too, that she knows that not all men are bad, but she just has no need to interact with them. She explains that she specifically prefers to be overweight because men, in her opinion, generally do not look at fat girls. She says that she struggles now with her adopted daughter because she wants to be hugged and cuddled and Caron is not used to that; in fact she does not enjoy physical contact at all. Below is a description of how she experiences physical closeness with her adopted daughter:

*I think what gives me a lot of flashbacks is when Janet hugs me and she has her bottle in her hand, and the bottle touches my face, I get the feeling of a penis in my face again. And I think that gives me a lot of flashbacks and I have to contain myself not to panic there and push her away because it's not what it's about. I can't push her away because it's not her fault (CAR: 361-365).*

Somehow, though, she says that she feels that this child has taught her that "*not all touch is bad ... and it's ok to allow someone within your wall*" (CAR: 158-159).

The emotions that she recalls experiencing as a result of the abuse were fear, confusion and anger, and although she says that she cannot remember much about the detail of the abuse, the emotions are very clear. However, when she has a flashback, she can “see *that little blonde girl and [she] can see that it happened to her. [She] know[s] that she is feeling these things but [she] can’t remember the intensity of the feelings* (CAR: 372-374). Caron also describes how she can still see the picture of this blonde little girl, sitting on the porch and she wonders why she was such a bad little girl and she sometimes gets the feeling that she does not know who that little girl is. She says that she often hears in her mind:

*You stupid little girl. Why does she allow it? She is just stupid. And that’s what I think when I cut myself. Stupid girl! (CAR: lines 72-74).*

Caron states that, no matter what she went through as a child or teenager, she never spoke to anyone about the abuse and says that she pretended most of her life and she smiled; regardless of what she was really feeling.

Caron admits that she started self-mutilating by burning herself when she was 27 years old and at 31 she started cutting. She even makes a joke and says that she is a “*late bloomer*” (CAR: 565) because most people start this behaviour at a much younger age. She explains how she sometimes cuts herself so severely that there is no place left to cut when she is stressed and states that it is the blood on the skin that makes her feel alive; as a teenager, she remembers burning herself just to see if she had any feelings at all. She discloses that she has been struggling to reduce the cutting since she has adopted a daughter because she realises it is disturbing to a little child. She clearly stated in the interview that when she is cutting herself, she does not think about any aspects of her abusive past, but a flashback or a bad memory from the past could lead to anger that will grow and then later it will lead to cutting. She emphasises that the anger she experiences is never directed at the perpetrators, but always only at herself.

Caron explains that the emotions that she feels when she has flashbacks of the abuse are still the same as when she was a child, except that they are not as intense now because she can think more logically about things. She acknowledges that she knows that the little blonde girl on the porch went through some really horrid things but that she cannot remember the intensity of the emotions she was experiencing.

Caron clearly portrays how she experiences severe nightmares that can upset her whole day because they are so violent and bloody:

*I have always had nightmares about blood. Since I can remember. Like a hand going into a neck and taking out handfuls of blood and the blood's getting deeper and deeper, or just blood splattered all over or ...and sometimes I'll have like... I would dream that there's a doll and the doll's being raped and when the doll turns its head it's my face that's there, kind of thing ... like these disjointed nightmares (CAR: 425-429).*

She does not, however, seem to think that there is an association between her nightmares and the cutting. She admits that when she experiences a flashback, she can calm down in a few minutes, but the nightmares that follow later are serious. She also describes physical sensations that cause her flashbacks and negative emotions: she gets the feeling that there is something between her legs or that she needs to wash herself. Caron mentioned that her mother often has people staying over at their house and she says that she never sleeps well when there is a man, other than her father, in the house because she keeps waiting for the man to try to come in. She laughs when she says that she now keeps a Rottweiler next to her bed so that nobody can enter her room without the dog waking her.

Caron hated studying and explains how she felt depressed and suicidal whenever she had to study; therefore she hated school and barely passed her subjects. When she started nursing and studying, she states that she kept feeling like a failure and admits to feeling suicidal often when she was a student. Caron suffers from very low self-esteem and describes herself as follows:

*I used to think that Frankenstein's monster was more beautiful than what I was. I would never walk next to people because I was sure they were ashamed to be seen with someone as ugly as me. I didn't want to talk to people because I felt they were just talking to me because they felt sorry for me because I was so ugly (CAR: 138-142).*

She does not like to talk about herself or what she thinks of herself and prefers to use neutral to negative words when doing so. She says that she has always felt that other people are more important and of more value than she is and feels intimidated - because she is damaged goods - to be surrounded by people who seem to be so perfect in her opinion. In fact she said in the interview that she thinks that "there are two Carons – a good one and a bad one" (CAR: 590-591).

She explains that in relationships she tends to keep quiet because she does not want to upset and risk losing a friend. She also confesses that she does not easily trust people and that she generally remains suspicious of them until she has known them for a long time. If she had to identify one word to describe her general mood it would be a "*nothing*"

mood” (CAR: 510) and a basic feeling of mere existence. She admits that she is not an emotional person at all and jokingly says that she thinks she cries about once a year about something big. She repeats that she feels fear, anger or nothing. She adds that since she has adopted her daughter, she has started feeling happiness a lot more than she ever used to.

She acknowledges that she still experiences a great deal of guilt too because she often feels that the abuse was her fault; she admits that she has never really blamed anyone else for the abuse. She said openly in the interview that she feels that coping with her own issues is hard enough and that when she has learned to do that, she will then consider trying to cope with the rest. She singles out sadness as the emotion that she finds really difficult to talk about or handle because she fears that people will see her human side and whenever she does feel any sadness, she will rather convert it to anger because she feels very weak when she is sad. When her emotions are too intense she explains it like this:

*If they do start to get too intense I often get an out-of-the-body experience where I feel like I am not in reality, everything's far away as if I feel I'm not actually here. I'm that little girl but may be in a shopping centre. I have to do things but I don't know what to do because I'm not here. And I just need to get out. Quite a scary sensation (CAR: 554-558).*

Caron suffers from pelvic pain which she cannot seem to find an explanation for. She has had sonars and similar examinations, but nobody can find a reason for her pain. She feels that she does not take good care of herself medically or physically.

Somehow, Caron says that she has taught herself not to think about the future and has a day-to-day survival approach. Although she admits to struggling with depression and a great deal of sadness, she is grateful to God for the role He has played in her life and He has kept her from suicide and drug abuse. She states:

*And I had this feeling of depression over me, this darkness that was suffocating me, I wanted to cut, and I asked a few of the girls at work just to pray for me. Within five minutes of the prayer the feeling just left. So I just said there I am so amazed at the awesomeness of God's... prayer, how God answers prayer and then people asked why so I decided well, maybe it's a good thing to tell them what God has done for me (CAR: 282-287).*

She points out clearly that she has never blamed God for what happened and, although she feels it does not make any logical sense, she has always seen God in the following light:

*If God could have stopped it, but he would have to take away my free will as well to be fair. Otherwise He wouldn't be a fair God. So he could have stopped the people hurting me, but to be a fair God he would have to stop me doing things as well. And we each got our free will. Even when I was four, those people that were hurting me had a free will. If God could have made them choose to not do it, then He would have to stop me doing what I do now and He doesn't work like that! (CAR: 663-673).*

#### **5.4 CHRISTIE (CHR)**

Christie is a 39-year-old entrepreneur who has been very happily married for 19 years and is the mother of a son (16) and a daughter (12) who bring her a great deal of joy. She describes them as great, happy kids! She was working in a half-day six-month contract at the time of the interview but admitted that it was not what she really wanted to do as she and her husband had their own business and she was only doing the extra job to generate cash flow. In the interview I realised that, although she is an ambitious entrepreneur, her life centres on her relationship with God.

Christie is the youngest of three children and her two brothers are a lot older than she was. It was her elder brother who was responsible for the child sexual abuse she experienced. She was about five or six when it happened and it continued for about a year. She says that parts of the abuse are still very clear but she is grateful that there are details that she cannot remember. Her parents were never aware of the abuse and it only became known recently when Christie was concerned about her brother's daughter.

She portrays her mother as a very difficult person who was extremely emotionally abusive toward her children. She in fact stated in the interview that the abuse she experienced at the hand of her mother was almost as bad, if not worse, than the sexual abuse she experienced because it never stopped and still continues now. Below are extracts that summarise her reasons for leaving home immediately after school:

*Die vrees vir my ma. Ek het op 'n stadium in Standaard 8 ... het ek besef: Wat is die ergste wat... sy kan my doodmaak. Maar, ek het die Here. Verstaan jy? Um, ek het so half die vrees begin... wat ook nie goed was nie want ek het meer cheeky begin raak [laugh] Maar toe het ek opgestaan, jy weet, ek gaan nie meer hierdie hanteer nie en dis hoekom ek na matriek gesê het: nooit weer gaan ek lat... en dit werk nie so nie. [laugh] As dit so maklik was, maar ummm... ja, daai, daai dat ek nie weet wat om te verwag as ek by die huis kom nie, ek dink dis dit. Want sy is nogal jaloers, sy wou hom [her father] net nie deel nie... Die goeie tye by die huis was daar. Dit was lekker maar dit*

*was baie op en af so jy konnie daarop staatmaak nie (CHR: 146-153).*<sup>17</sup>

Even though she is an adult now, she says she still feels the need to prepare herself emotionally before speaking to or seeing her mother. On the contrary, however, she shared that she saw her father as her hero and soul mate. Christie says that the most traumatic experience she has had in adulthood is the death of her father six months prior to the interview. She recalls how gentle he was and how she would go to places with her dad just to escape her mother's wrath. She feels that to this day she has a huge gap in her life where a mother should be.

She describes a very unhappy childhood. She relates how she often thought about ending her life when she was younger and at the age of 12 actually taking 10 Panado tablets, thinking that it would be enough to do the job. She also remembers that one afternoon late when she was still at school, the old caretaker of the school touched and kissed her and not only did her friends not believe her, she could not go to her mom with it. She admits that she felt that she could never trust her mother. She was in primary school when a man rode past her on his motorbike and exposed himself to her and once again she reports that she could not muster the courage to tell her mother.

Christie believes that the sexual abuse most probably led to her becoming sexually active at a very young age. She spoke about her relationship with the Lord throughout the interview and she admits that she knew it was against what she believed was right. Although she was always sexually active in the context of a steady relationship, she says that it is something she regrets most! She says that she does not want to justify what she did but she still thinks that she was looking for love and affection:

*Ek dink net ek het 'n substituuat gesoek vir die, ek weet nie of dit die regte woord is nie, maar obviously het ek 'n leemte gehad vir, ... um, vir liefde en toenadering en ek het dit in die verkeerde plek gesoek (CHR: 425-427).*<sup>18</sup>

She states that the moment she was old enough to leave home, she did and she moved to a different city where she started working and only after she was married did she enrol at the

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<sup>17</sup> The fear of my mother... At a point in Standard 8, I realised what is the worst that she can do, is kill me, but I know that I have the Lord. I started feeling that the fear was sort of... which was not a good thing because I became cheeky. But that was when I stood up and decided that I was not going to take it anymore and that is why I decided after matric that I was never going to allow her... it does not work that way. If only it was that easy. That of not knowing what to expect when you get home, I think it was that. And she was jealous, she did not want to share my father. There were good times at home. They were nice but they were always up and down and you could never rely on it.

<sup>18</sup> I think I was looking for a substitute, I don't know if it is the right word for it, but obviously I had an emptiness for, umm, for love and affection and I looked for it in the wrong places

university and do her BCom. She admits to specialising in industrial psychology and counselling because she was sure that it would help her understand better what happened to her as a child. Christie explained in the interview how she worked her way up in management at a very young age, but there came a point when she realised that to proceed even further, she would have to compromise her values and it would have affected her family negatively. Both she and her husband left their jobs to pursue this venture and they believe that God has led them this way and that He has great plans for them. Faith and trust play vital roles in her life.

When asked in the interview how she dealt with the sexual and emotional abuse as a child, Christie said that she cut it out of her life and in her opinion it did not exist; however, her husband was the one who convinced her to go for counselling to deal with the child sexual abuse, as well as the terrible emotional abuse inflicted on her by her mother. She explains how she wanted to stop the cycle at all costs and shared the following during the interview:

*As kind het ek dit uitgesny. Ek dink die ding was, ek het begin besef wat my kinders kan, met hulle kan gebeur. Dit is, dit is, dit is snaaks, as die goed met jou gebeur, is dit fyn, soos my ma ook, jy kan daarmee hanteer, verstaan jy, maar die, die hele ding wat ek jou gesê het dat ek en my oudste boetie rusie gehad het, is dat my dogtertjie begin aanval. En toe't ek baie lelik geraak. Want ek's jammer! Jy't tot by my gekom, ek hanteer dit en hanteer dit en gaan nie verder, jy gaan nie verby na my kinders toe nie. Hierso het ek 'n sê (CHR:732-739).<sup>19</sup>*

She openly shares that she feels so blessed with a wonderful husband and children, but has also found it difficult to treat her children the way she wanted to because she never had the role model of a mother. She admits that she and her husband do sometimes have to deal with marital conflict, especially because they work together, but there has always been an underlying love. She feels blessed too because both her children and her husband have given their hearts to the Lord and, in her opinion, that has made all the difference in her family.

She shared the experience she had when she actually confronted her brother about the abuse about six years ago. Christie says that she was worried about her brother's daughter,

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<sup>19</sup> As a child I cut it out. I think the thing was that I realised that it can happen to my own children. It is funny, but if these things happen to you it is fine, with my mom too, you can handle it, do you understand, but the whole thing that I told you about with the argument with my eldest brother, is it affected my daughter. That is when I became offensive. Because I am sorry! You have come as far as me, I can handle it and handle it but it is not going any further to my children. Here I have a say!

as well as her own daughter and felt responsible for saying something. When she phoned him to confront him, she blurted it all out to him:

*Ek en hy het'n ongelooflike rusie gehad, wel, skreeu oor die foon, jy weet, en, um... [Name], maar jy't my 'n onreg aangedoen, en elke keer as ek dink ek is oor dit, dan kom dit weer, jy weet. En,... um... en hy het net vir my gesê: Get over it! En ek was so kwaad. Wie's hy om dit vir my te sê? [laugh] En hy bly vir my sê, GET OVER IT! En weet jy, ironies genoeg, dis wat ek moes hoor (CHR:172-176).<sup>20</sup>*

She says that she does not hate her brother and they all get together for special occasions quite often. She states that there is a fundamental knowledge that bad things happened but that they have managed to work through it.

She also acknowledges that she remembers a great deal of aggression at home in her childhood. She explains that when things went relatively well for two or three weeks, everyone in the family would start to get anxious because the longer the period of relative peace, the more dramatic her mother's outburst would be and as a result they would trigger it so that it would just happen. She says that she was often the one who would start the fights. She admits that most of her childhood memories are centred on emotions and not physical detail.

Christie openly stated more than once in the interview that she has dealt with the abuse and has managed to move on and sarcastically sings: "I got over it, nah,nah,nah,nah"(CHR: 711) and laughs. She shares that she has many burdens in her life now but they concern the happiness and well-being of others, including that of her mother. The quotation from the interview that would probably summarise her emotional space best is:

*Ek dink ek het tot 'n punt gekom dat ek gun myself die seerkry maar jy kan nie te lank daarop talm nie, jy moet dit omdraai en dan sê: Weet jy wat, um... ek het soveel meer om voor dankbaar te wees. Ek het so wonderlike gesin en die Here is net elke dag by my en so dis minors, dit maak nie saak wat met my gaan gebeur nie, die Here gaan my daardeur dra (CHR: 639-645).<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup>We had an exceptional argument. It was more like screaming and I told him straight out: "You violated me and every time I think about it, it all comes back to me!" He replied with: "Get over it!" I was so angry! Who is he to say that to me? And he repeated it a few times: GET OVER IT!! And ironically, that was what I needed to hear.

<sup>21</sup> I think that I have reached the point that I grant myself the pain but you can't agonise about it for long, you must turn around and say: Do you know what, um... I have so much more to be grateful for. I have a wonderful family and the Lord is with me every day and so it's minors, it doesn't matter what happens to me, the Lord will get me through it.

## 5.5 COLLEEN (COL)

Colleen is a 25-year-old travel agent who has recently remarried after a stormy marriage of a few months in which she was physically abused. Her first husband was previously married to her sister and when her sister died in a tragic accident, she married him, but they were never happy. Her current husband, who is a devoted Christian man, suggested that she get help to deal with her past and in the process she underwent a spiritual transformation which, she acknowledges, has enabled her to deal with the pain of the traumatic child sexual abuse she experienced.

When Colleen finished school, she did not have exemption to go to university to study education, but went to college and did her National Diploma in Tourist Management. She still has a goal to study education sometime and describes herself as someone who will attain the goals she sets for herself because she knows what she wants out of life. She taught Tourism as a subject in a high school for a year and really enjoyed it.

Colleen is the youngest of seven children; four brothers, who all sexually abused her, and three sisters. Her parents were married and divorced to and from each other three times and during her childhood she spent a lot of time in children's homes and foster families. Her own biological father also abused her sexually with the knowledge of her mother. She explains it like this:

*My mom was not planning to do anything about it and then my stepdad said to my mom: Well you will have to do something about it because it is unacceptable. And then, umm... she went to court, you know the whole thing that they basically got it all in the open and I had to go to the gynaecologist and write a letter and you know, all those things. Never really went for psychological help as such because my mom had this thing of: Ja, you can cope on your own (COL: 5-11).*

She explains how her father went to prison after the court sentenced him to prison for 10 years and her mother refused to allow her to expose her brothers' abuse although she was aware that it was happening. Although she knew her mother was aware of everything, she still does not know whether her father knew that her brothers were also abusing her and she also does not know whether the brothers were aware of each other's activities. She says:

*I don't know! I don't know, I am not sure... I never said anything to anyone. I just kept quiet. I just never told! I don't know, I just never said to anybody anything. Umm... but my mom was aware because it happened in the house. Even my stepfather was aware of it. Umm...but that just never,*

*nothing ever happened about that. So, [sigh] ja, I basically coped with it all my school years (COL: 31-36).*

Colleen says that she remembers the detail of the abuse and how she would not be able to sleep because she knew someone would come into her room at any time. One of the things that she remembers most clearly about her childhood was that she would be constantly trying to hide away so that nobody would find her. She mentions going shopping with her mother as one of her most pleasant childhood memories because she knew that she would not have to be alone with the brothers at home.

Her childhood was turbulent and after her parents' divorce all the children were sent to children's homes or foster homes until her mother remarried and they went to live with her at home again. When she was 14 she was also removed from her mother's home and placed in a home for unmarried mothers because there was no space for her at an ordinary children's home. When she matriculated she was placed in a foster home where she experienced what normal life could be.

Regardless of what her father did to her, she is not angry at him and still loves him because he is her dad and she feels that "*blood is blood... you have to love them*" (COL: 169). Though she even visited him in jail, she explains that she still feared him because she knew what violence he was capable of when he got out of prison. When he came out of prison, she met with him and hoped for some kind of reconciliation and relates the situation like this:

*I also spoke to him after he came out of jail and I spoke to him and said to him, umm... I also expect an apology from him. I mean he... And then he said to me, Ja, but he has served for what he has done. So I said but I am still here. You never said anything to me and even though you served it doesn't take my frustration and my pain and my things away. I would like to know your take on it and then he said, ja – he is sorry, but... I think he needs to meet with God [laugh] that's the best I can say about that (COL: 188-194).*

Colleen realised that she needed to confront her brothers too, which she did individually and as discreetly as possible so as not to cause trouble for them in their marriages. She says that her brothers were relieved that she had taken the initiative to deal with the abuse and also appreciated the way that she dealt with it. She actually went to them so that they could ask her for her forgiveness and talk about what happened and hence find closure. She says that they welcomed it and she is glad that she took the first step toward reconciliation and forgiveness because it brought closure for her. She relates how she also approached her

mother to try and gain understanding of why she remained so apathetic during the painful things that she had to endure. This is how she recalls that meeting with her mother:

*She phoned me the day before Christmas and she said to me we must go and just chat a bit. We spoke and I said to her I am very frustrated with all the hurt and pain and I don't understand why... why me? Why all the abuse? Why all the 'keep quiet'? I don't understand all this. And she... well her reasoning for this was she thinks she had so much hate for my biological father that she took it out on me because I was the last child and everything. And then she really apologised and she asked for my forgiveness and that we can really start over basically and be in each other's lives from now on (COL: 170-179).*

Although she admits that she has forgiven them, she feels that they are the ones to blame for what happened to her, because she feels that especially her mother could have spared her much pain. She acknowledges that although the confrontation with her brothers was a very difficult situation for her to handle, fortunately, when she confronted them, they did not deny what they had done, allowing her to find closure.

Colleen states openly that as a result of strong spiritual strength she has managed to find meaningfulness in life. She recalls a time when she struggled with suicidal thoughts every day and made numerous attempts to end her life. She is very excited when she describes how everything, including how she experiences her sexual relationship with her husband, has changed since she has taken God into her life. Because of gynaecological complications caused by the abuse, Colleen was told that she could possibly not have children, but she says that she has chosen not to believe that anymore. Now she tells how God has always played an important role in her life; even as a teenager she always used to attend church youth activities and found strength in it. She explains how it is also her relationship with God that gives her the sense that there is meaningfulness in her life, that she has positive self-esteem and deals with emotions and memories in an adaptive way. She also attributes her ability to be optimistic about the future, to be able to forgive and to deal with the pain of the abuse, to her deep relationship with the Lord. She explains it this way:

*I think I had the Lord always in my life and that made a difference for me. It made it easier for me to deal with things... especially now again. It was not safe where I went on my own and didn't want to know anything about church or the Bible or the Lord or anything, but when I came back now recently again to church and just getting involved and that really makes a difference in your life! Really, it does! As soon as you don't have that, you*

*sit and ponder about the past and things and you think about things that it's actually not necessary to think about (COL: 89-95).*

Colleen reports that she feels a whole spectrum of emotions; often her highs are very high and her lows very low, but she does not seem to have problems with controlling anger, anxiety or panic. As a child she recalls being able to feel nothing, but says that she cannot do that anymore:

*I cannot put my emotions off. It's either very sad or very happy or very something, but no. During the time of the abuse I can say there were stages that I put off my emotions and get it over and done with, type of... you cannot feel sad, you cannot feel anything, you are just – ok! (COL: 766-769).*

The future, adds Colleen, is bright and she is optimistic about life and believes that this world is a happy place, only if you have a relationship with God. She discloses that she has dealt with the abuse of the past and now focuses on the present and the future. The following extract summarises what she has managed to achieve with God's help:

*It doesn't help to sit and ponder about it. It's done! There is nothing I can do to change about it. It's gone! Move on! Umm ... I tend not to look into the past and more into the future and the present, the present is what is here and now and what we are doing with what we have here and now and really making the best of all of this (COL: 970-974).*

## **5.6 JENNY (JEN)**

Jenny is 54 years old and is currently a theatre sister in a private hospital in Pretoria. She has been married for 33 years and has two adult children of 26 and 29 years old. In all these years, she has never spoken to her husband about her childhood abuse and has resolved that she never will, as she does not have a good relationship with her husband, in her opinion. For most of their married life, he used to work away from home and she would often work night shifts.

Her brother and sister were a lot older than she was and she basically grew up as an only child. Both her siblings have passed away – her sister at the age of 40 and her brother when he was 52. Her mom passed away at 62 when Jenny was only 18 years old. She always valued her relationship with her mother and although her mom was a lot older than most moms, they were close friends and did everything together. She says that she can recall very few details from her childhood but remembers being very happy and sharing much laughter whenever they were together.

Jenny tells that she was five when her sister's husband started sexually abusing her and this continued into adulthood. She admitted that even after she was married he tried to have his way with her. When she spoke to her mother about what had happened, her mother told her that she had also experienced something similar and that she should just keep quiet because her sister was dying of cancer at the time and she did not want to devastate her with that. This is how she explains the effect the abuse has had on her life:

*It's a kind of vibe that goes through your life. It's always there. You kind of don't understand where it started because it started so young that you still carry it with you (JEN: 281-282).*

What worries Jenny a great deal is that, when her sister died, her brother-in-law was left alone with his daughters and she says that she thinks that he must have done the same to his own daughters. She never spoke out about it because of the repercussions she thought it would have in her family. Jenny admits that her sister died having no idea what had been happening and what she had left her children to.

*Ja, he married a woman with five kids a year after my sister died. And that... this little one, she stayed in, basically a closet, because they didn't have a room, and she kept hiding her panties away and they asked me, and I said that I really don't know what the problem is (JEN: 393-396).*

Jenny mentioned in the interview that there was a time when her children were young that she used to work all the time and would always offer to be on call and was at home very little. She recalls that her husband commented that she was always tired, unhappy and aggressive when she was at home. She says her daughter once commented that it seemed that she preferred to be away from home. Jenny admits that although her husband has improved a little over the past while, he is a very difficult man who always humiliates her and puts her down; so she felt that at least at work she was worth something and that people valued her for who she really was.

She acknowledges that she never had a really close relationship with her husband and she definitely attributes most of it to what happened to her as a child. No matter how hard she tried, she felt that she was never good enough for him. She experiences her husband as a cold man but also puts the blame on herself because she has always kept her distance from him. She disclosed that for many years now they have not even shared a bedroom and that their sexual relationship was never something she enjoyed and she believes it partly had to do with the abuse and partly that he always blamed her for anything that went wrong in their physical relationship. The fact that he worked away from home for almost six months of the

year made it easier for her to handle but she recalls how difficult it always was when he came home.

One of the things that she struggled with most in her marriage was her husband's preoccupation with pornography. She explains how it made her feel:

*My daughter found one [magazine] and he was working away and I just said to him I am burning all your books, I can't stand it anymore. I made this huge bonfire to throw all the books into... Anything like that gets imprinted on your mind... (JEN: 283-287) You wish you had never seen it. You wish you had never been part of it. And I think it's something you see, and you absorb it and how do you block it out?(JEN: 298-300) ... I think you kind of feel dirty (JEN: 308).*

Jenny explains how he would always blame her for not doing things right and that he felt she was never dressed properly because she was always in her uniform or in a tracksuit.

She and her family moved away from Pretoria for a five-year period to work at a game reserve. Even there she remembers working overtime. She believes now that she was always trying to prove, especially to her husband, that she was worth something. She does state now, however, that she no longer feels the need to do that.

Jenny says that she considers herself to be a normal, stable person who is peaceful and not moody and that she generally gets along well with people. Because of her career, which in itself is a very stressful job, she feels that she has learned to cope with stress very well and when she has to deal with people who are difficult, she will keep quiet and then later address the issue. She admits that she is not ruled by her emotions; in fact emotion does not seem to play an important role in her daily life when the following is considered:

*Ja, I just go into total shut down – it has happened a few times in my life - and I feel nothing for anybody and I will just barricade myself up into a... until it's over and then it's and then I am... but I will feel nothing for anybody and it happened once there at the farm and it was almost like I just looked at everybody with no emotion. It was awful (JEN: 754-758).*

One of the things that Jenny reports having trouble with, is trust and she prefers to keep people at a distance – especially those whom she instinctively distrusts. Some people, she explains, one can sense are not trustworthy and so she finds it hard to accept love and care. This is how she relates it:

*Someone said to me the other day: You give too much and you are always giving love but you don't think you can actually receive it... I*

*don't feel I deserve it (JEN: 545-546). [My daughter] says can't you just accept the fact that I do love you and I want to help you and I say – no that's fine, you know... you don't want to bug anybody and be a pain.*

Jenny does not struggle with outward anger, but she gets angry with herself because she keeps thinking of the hurts in the past. She emphasises that these hurts are not only related to the abuse, but also to her marriage. She feels she is constantly trying to convince herself to let go of her anger.

## **5.7 JOLENE (JOL)**

Jolene is a 54-year-old gospel singer and missionary currently working in Chad with her husband of 32 years, Rob. She married when she was 20 years old and has two adult sons. She lived most of her life in the USA but spent about 20 years living in South Africa, where she met Rob. She did not complete college and has always wanted to complete her Spanish studies, but has never been granted the opportunity. She has always been an active member of her church community and has always been involved with music.

Jolene relates that she is the oldest of four children. Her father, who is the one responsible for sexually abusing her in her childhood, was, according to her, a musical genius. He taught all the children to play multiple musical instruments; nevertheless he was a very harsh task master and would expect hours of practising, not tolerating anyone getting tired or making mistakes. She explains that practices were always violent; not only toward her, but also her siblings and mother. Jolene realises that her mother was also a victim and she does not blame her for not interceding to stop the abuse because she believes there was nothing she could have done.

Jolene clearly recalls her earliest memory as follows:

*The earliest thing I remember is still being in a crib with the sides up and being afraid of the big person that was hovering over the crib and then wetting myself and then being spanked for being wet. That's the earliest thing I can remember... I don't even know how old I was (JOL: 29-32).*

She also explains that there are large portions of her childhood, for example her primary school years, that she has very little recollection of at all, and that not even looking at class photos jogs her memory. She says that a few specific incidents do stand out, but much of it has been suppressed to the extent that she has never been able to recall it. She expresses that there have been constant questions in her mind about these memories and she has

come to terms with the fact that she is probably better off not knowing and has decided rather to focus on the positive emotions she has experienced in her married life. She has a few very specific memories that are completely clear, but one particular memory is given as follows:

*I had a bread knife under my pillow one night. I was going to kill him. And he didn't come in that night. I know that sounds so silly! I was in high school. What damage could I have done to him? He would have turned it on me. That was the ONE night he never came in (JOL: 705-710).*

She can also clearly recall that she would imagine that she could get out of her body and watch what was happening to her from the ceiling:

*My life was threatened. I was never allowed to tell anybody. There was nobody around to tell or call out to or to help you. It was a secret. I remember being able to watch myself from the ceiling. I could see what was happening to whoever that was on the bed. I was on the ceiling looking down [JOL: 132-136]. It doesn't seem as painful talking about them because it feels like I am talking about somebody else. It's not me, but how do I know so much about this somebody else? I feel so disconnected from emotion. When you are so helpless, you cut yourself off because there is not point to emotion. Crying doesn't help, screaming doesn't help. Fighting doesn't help! You just get hit! So you are helpless and you feel nothing (JOL: 673-680).*

Jolene admits that they all grew up in constant terror and that they never spoke to anyone about what was happening. Not even her mother and siblings know the details of what happened to her because, to this day, they have never spoken about it. Her father died 26 years ago without her ever having had the chance to confront him and find closure. He was living in South Africa at the time and she was the only one of the family that attended the funeral. This is how she relates that experience:

*I had to go to the funeral and I dreaded it. Oh, how I dreaded going to that funeral! They took me in to look at the open coffin, and I begged Rob to come with me. I could not do that alone. That was so traumatic! ... I didn't want to be there at all! I would have traded places with [my siblings] for anything. I did not want to be there to attend the funeral. But when it was all over my mom and I breathed a sigh of relief. He couldn't hunt us down anymore (JOL: 528-537).*

Jolene acknowledges that friends could never play a major role in her life because her father did not allow it and he also embarrassed her when they came to the house. She admits that she was envious of her friends who had special relationships with their dads and that she

would secretly visit friends when her dad was away just to experience what a loving relationship was. She feels that she still struggles to maintain strong friendships and explains that she easily feels pushed out because she tends to take things very personally and is very insecure in her relationships with others. Whenever she feels hurt, she says that she would rather keep quiet and just keep in all the frustration and feel hurt and rejected. She acknowledges that, not only did this affect her friendships, but also her marriage and that in her insecurity, she became over-dependent on her husband, thus causing him to feel claustrophobic in their marriage. She spoke openly about her frustration when she was a stay-at-home mom for many years and felt trapped in her life because Rob would go to work and she would be home without a car and with little children to take care of. She confesses that she attempted suicide more than once, but now she believes that God had a purpose for her life; however, she did not always see that purpose:

*No matter how I prayed, I was not helped. I was positive He was not there for me. He never heard my prayers (JOL: 145-147). In fact, I was angry at God for a long time. A long, long, long time! I decided that if my father was going to heaven, I was not going to be there. I didn't want any of it. I was angry (JOL: 693-699).*

She shared in the interview that her husband and boys, and having a loving relationship with them, have been the focus of her adult life, but that the child sexual abuse obviously affected her marriage; especially her intimate relationship. She says that what she feared most, and experienced as true, was that there would be more similarity than difference between the abuse and her sexual relationship with Rob and she confesses that as long as they have been married, they have experienced problems in this area of their marriage and that the child sexual abuse has affected her adult life in a very severe way. The painful memories have always been just below the surface, in the forefront of her mind. Although the most agonising ones are extremely vivid, she cannot piece them together:

*It is like a jigsaw puzzle but I only have 10 of the 500 pieces. The greatest majority of them are missing (JOL: 216-217).*

Jolene spoke openly about the many serious relationship issues that she has experienced throughout adulthood and believes that she still gets things completely turned around because she either trusts the wrong people completely, or she is unreasonably suspicious of innocent people. She blames the fact that she was never allowed to say 'no' as a child for the fact that she allows people to walk over her; and when she does say 'no', she feels guilty and selfish. She relates a recent instance where she decided to stand up to Rob for what

she wanted regarding her music career, and although it caused much conflict in their marriage, she believes that it was the first time she stood up for herself.

Jolene says that since she attended a church weekend away, which was specifically intended to deal with the hurts of the past, she has felt the pain decrease in intensity; however, after her father died, she felt a great sense of emptiness because she realised that she would never be able to confront him and get closure.

Another thing that came across very strongly in Jolene's interview was her inability to deal with stress. She admitted that most of her adult life she did office work in order to supplement their income and send their boys to private Christian schools and although she realised it was worth it, she never experienced job satisfaction. She explains that work was always stressful for her and that stress had always affected her health negatively because whenever she feels helpless because she cannot cope or feels that she is not in control of the situation, her health is adversely affected. She openly admits that she cannot deal with stress at all and she feels easily intimidated and inferior to others who seem to have a stronger temperament:

*I guess my temperament is a little more retiring and so I am extremely intimidated; I'll be specific, I'm extremely intimidated by choleric[s] and they know it. I try not to let that show, but they can find you and squash you... [laughs a lot]... so... (JOL: 252-255).*

Jolene seemed to find it painful to talk about the problems she encountered in her marriage many years ago and admitted in the interview to going through a phase in her marriage when she had an obsession with feeling secure and loved and that this neediness overwhelmed Rob and he emotionally withdrew from the relationship and left her feeling vulnerable. At that point, she confessed to becoming involved in an affair because there was someone who cared for her and gave her a sense of belonging. She says that she does not blame Rob for this, but because he later understood her needs in a relationship and realised that he was not fulfilling them, he forgave her and has been very supportive; and, ironically, this strengthened their marriage.

She believes and states that because she never had the opportunity to confront her father and resolve some of the pain and find some kind of closure, she now struggles with anger and experiences all emotion very intensely on a daily basis:

*Unfortunately. Oh yes, up and down by the minute!... Oh boy, I feel frustration, disappointment and anger and happiness and totally out of the box and I think I feel everything (JOL: 826-832). [I get] ... like that heart attack feeling. Like the pain in your arm, the pain in your*

*jaw and that scared me. The heavy chest, you know, there's a real heaviness in your chest (JOL: 889-890).*

Although she is thin and runs a lot, she tries to hide the fact that she has an athletic build. Jolene openly admits that she really struggles with her own negative self-esteem and has a complex with respect to her physical appearance.

*I am often behind the camera, and I love taking pictures of other people. But if it comes to me wanting to be in a photo with somebody, asking my hubby to take a picture, he won't. So I feel unattractive. Because he doesn't want me in any of the pictures. I am not sure what I need to be doing. I don't know how to make myself more attractive. I feel very unattractive (JOL: 894-899). I have had so many people say to me: You wear your self-esteem like your poor posture. Thanks a lot [laugh] (JOL: 918-919). I was told that so much one can't help believe it. Nobody will ever want you because you are damaged goods (JOL: 923-924).*

She maintains that because she has lived in two countries all her life, she has often felt that she does not belong anywhere; so in the USA she feels too African and in Africa she feels too American and because she felt that she belonged nowhere, she did not set high goals for herself and tended to let go of dreams rather than be disappointed because she could not attain them.

Jolene describes how her greatest dream of recording a gospel CD came true last year despite initial resistance from her husband and that this liberated her more than anything else; now she feels that she can look back and thank the Lord that the negative thoughts are no longer the centre of her life, but that she has a new focus, a new view of life, an increased understanding of what happened and where she stands in the bigger picture of life:

*For a long time I carried a great deal of guilt around. Then I realised that most of it was not mine to carry (JOL: 845-846).*

Jolene says finally that she has hope for the future and looks forward to doing mission work with her husband.

## **5.8 LINDY (LIN)**

Lindy is a 25-year-old hairdresser who has recently opened her own salon and is engaged to be married in a year's time. She grew up with a brother who is two years older than she is. Lindy was very emotional during her interview but had no difficulty in answering the questions. She describes her childhood as an extremely unpleasant, emotional childhood

and blames the abuse for the fact that she never felt like a normal child and that she still does not know how it has affected her.

She was sexually abused by her grandfather who was murdered, with her grandmother, in a farm attack when their house was set alight and they were burned to death. Lindy believes that because of his parents' violent death, her father withdrew from the family and started working away from home for long periods of time. She believes that she was her father's little darling and his withdrawal from the family was extremely hard for her. She says that she started to feel that her parents' marriage was also starting to deteriorate and that she had nobody to turn to.

She painfully recalls how her grandfather also abused her brother and forced him to perform sexual deeds on her too; however, she says that she never felt resentment toward her brother because he was so young that she believes he didn't realise what was happening either. She admits that she has, all the same, never spoken to her brother about their childhood experiences and there is a great deal of anger in her voice as she blames her grandfather for robbing her of her childhood, as the abuse started before she went to nursery school and continued until she was in grade 6, when he was murdered. She stated emphatically that she hated her childhood and teenage years.

She never had friends as a child and recalls many, very sad incidences of being seriously disappointed and ridiculed by friends for all sorts of reasons. She has struggled with rejection all her life and relates one of her most traumatic experiences, which happened the night after her grandparents' murder when her dad came to fetch her where she had stayed with her other grandparents for the day, as follows:

*Toe my oupa die deur oopmaak, het ek uitgegaan om vir my pa-hulle hello te sê, het ek na my pa toe gegaan en hy't net so weggedraai van my af [shows how he turned away] en dit was vir my, partykeer in 'n mate, afhangende van hoe ek voel, vir my erger as die een van my oupa. Want van toe af was dit...ek het baie keer... want die gevoel wat ek daar gehad het, hy't gedink dis my skuld, en umm ... dit is sekerlik nie so nie, maar dit voel vandag nog vir my hy kyk na my met hierdie: Dis jou skuld (LIN: 151-158).<sup>22</sup>*

Lindy openly admits that she does not understand why her grandfather molested all his own children and forced his sons to molest their mother and the whole family knew what was

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<sup>22</sup>When they came to pick us up that evening I ran out to give my dad a hug and he just turned away from me. And from that time on, my dad has treated me differently. Sometimes, depending on how I feel, that hurts as much as the abuse did. Because since then, and many times since then, I get the feeling that he looks at me as if to say: It's your fault.

going on; yet, they were taken to visit him on the farm for three weeks in the holidays. Her father, however, completely denies that he was aware of any sexual abuse. She says that this has caused her to feel a great deal of resentment towards her parents for not preventing the abuse from happening to her and disagrees that it is possible to completely block out what happened, as her father is claiming he has done. She recalls undressing her dolls and hanging them up by their necks and yet nobody saw that as a sign that she was crying out for help. She says that she refuses to accept that they did nothing about it.

She explains that one of the only people to whom she can speak about the abuse is her older cousin who was also abused by the same grandfather:

*Ek en my een niggie praat baie daaroor. Sy is drie jaar ouer as ek. Sy is ook deur my oupa umm ... Maar sy... But she doesn't cope at all! Dit gaan horrible sleg met haar! En umm ... everything is because of that! Umm... Sy's nog nie grown-up about it nie. Nie dat ek sê dat ek is... sometimes is ek nie grown-up about it nie, maar ek is net... If you keep blaming that, you are not going anywhere (LIN: 417-422).<sup>23</sup>*

She says that she clearly remembers feeling such relief when she heard her grandfather had died because she is certain that if that did not happen, she would personally have killed him. She remembers that as a child she had to deal with the sadness of losing her grandmother, whom she loved dearly, and the relief of her grandfather's death; these opposing emotions had a great effect on her life. Another emotion that she explains is the feeling of overpowering emptiness when her grandfather would close the door and lock it and she now compares it to a big black hole that would press down on her. Loneliness is also something that she says she often experienced because her peers used to mock her and push her out of the group.

Lindy mentioned that her brother was academically very strong at school and her parents always used to brag about him and his achievements, but they never acknowledged her. In fact she recalls feeling that she was not part of the family and that her parents were ashamed of her; so Lindy really struggled to adjust in her teenage years. She felt that she was also very negatively affected by an experience of an exhibitionist who exposed himself to her and followed her, making sexual remarks, while she was walking to school. She

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<sup>23</sup>My cousin and I talk about it a lot. She is three years older than I. My grandfather also um... But she... but she doesn't cope at all! It is going very badly with her and um, everything is because of that! Um, she is not grown-up about it yet. Not that I am, sometimes I am not grown up about it but I always ... if you keep blaming that, you are not going anywhere.

remembers being overwhelmed by fear and immediately reporting it when she arrived at school.

She feels that her lack of confidence caused her to leave high school after grade 10 and decide to do home schooling for grades 11 and 12. She tells of an incident when she was in high school when she decided she was going to commit suicide by shooting herself, but when she had the gun in her hand, she realised that she did not have the courage to pull the trigger and so decided to shoot herself in the foot. She then says she couldn't do that either so she shot a bullet into the wall and the bullet reflected and fell into the kitchen sink behind her, after which she lied to her parents, telling them she thought it was an intruder.

She admits that she realised that if she did not make a concerted effort to change her life and her views, she would just continue on a downward spiral of unhappiness. She confesses that she has a tendency to pity herself but she is very worried about the fact that she does not feel that she has matured in the way she deals with the abuse. She explains it as follows:

*Dan voel dit vir my ek is nog dieselfde as die klein dogtertjie wat niemand voor 'n f\*\* kan omgee nie en net wil weggooi en vuil klere en nie worry nie en not care and not give attention [crying and speech almost inaudible]. So ek voel nie of die feelings ge-mature het nie. Dit voel asof dit nog dieselfde is (LIN: 591-595).<sup>24</sup>*

She says that she has made a conscious choice to get up and start over and with the power that God gives her, she has managed so far. Still, she does not experience her life as extremely meaningful because she has not discovered what her purpose here on earth is if we are all either going to heaven or hell. She feels that life is a bit pointless at times, but regardless of this, she is excited about the future because she is such a dreamer.

Lindy does not even try to hide the fact that she feels very uncomfortable around men and that even greeting hugs make her feel very uneasy and she says that whenever she is alone in a room with a man, she feels sick and feels physical pain in her abdomen and groin.

Only during the past three years, since the start of her relationship with her current fiancé, can she say that she has been really happy and enjoying her life. So far, Lindy explains, she loves adulthood and enjoys creating new challenges for herself at work. She uses work to escape from reality by setting big goals that will preoccupy her mind and once that project is

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<sup>24</sup>It feels like I am still that same little girl that nobody gives a \*\*\*\* about. Someone who they would prefer to throw away without worrying, just like dirty clothes... someone to pay no attention to. So it feels as if my emotions have never matured. They still feel the same (Translated: LIN: lines 604-608).

completed, she will focus on something new and exciting. She shared in the interview that work is her safe place and she believes that nobody can interfere with that and that without her work; she would not have any direction in her life.

She knows that her relationship with her fiancé poses challenges because she has so many unresolved issues; however, he is the first man she has ever had a sexual relationship with and she admits to having a very conservative view of sexual commitment. She says that she thinks that she copes well with the sexual/physical part of the relationship, but that closeness and touching can become too much at times and she tends to feel claustrophobic.

During the interview she admitted that she had great fears about having her own children, but says that she has made a deal with God that she would only be willing to forgive her grandfather for what happened if God could promise to protect her children from ever being abused. She also feels that she will not be able to produce anything good, because nothing good can come out of her. In fact she feels that she has a dark side that originated from her child sexual abuse but that parallel to this, there is a strong side that is willing to fight for what she wants and reach the high expectations and goals that she has set for herself.

On the other hand, she mentions that she is still plagued by so many bad memories that she tends to forget all the good. She explained at length that there are large gaps in her childhood memories, but that there are sections that replay in her mind clearly, like a horror movie. She believes that it is the mind's way of protecting itself by making some memories too blurred to remember, but that finding out what the gaps are will, in her opinion, help the healing process for the future. She has taught herself to forget things that are painful as quickly as possible.

She says that if she has a flashback of the abuse, it can make her feel miserable for the whole day and it is so intense at times that nothing can lift her out of the hole she is in except going to sleep. It has happened a few times that she feels that she is outside her body, looking at herself; she says that she can hear a person talking and she knows that it is her voice, but it feels surreal. She admits that she has not developed successful strategies to deal with her pain as yet, but she tries to focus on something positive at work to help her get her mind off her memories, and sometimes she shuts off to the extent that she cannot hear people speaking around her; in fact, she relates that if a flashback catches her off-guard, it could feel as if everything in her life has turned back to the childhood abuse and that is all she can think about. She experiences the memories she does have in more detail as time passes and explains it like this:

*Dit word vir my meer duidelik. Veral met kleur sal... umm... ek sal... ek sal... dis amper asof dit altyd swart en wit was, en dis nou asof dit... ek kan onthou hoe't dit geruik, ek onthou die wind het gewaai of ... so dit voel vir my in daai opsigte dis meer... die prentjie wat ek het is, asof ek na iets real gekyk het en as ek na myself gestaan en kyk het en dit is wat ek sien, word dit vir my meer real (LIN: 655-660).<sup>25</sup>*

Many times during the interview Lindy repeated that stress is something that she does not cope well with; to the extent that she feels it debilitates her to the point of being useless. She hyperventilates and cannot focus on anything that needs to be done; she also acknowledges that she does not have the ability to cope with stress. Something that causes her extreme stress is when she feels she has no control over a situation.

Another thing that Lindy mentions that she struggles with a great deal is trust. Because she cannot trust any man, this has affected her relationship with her fiancé negatively. She admits that she has many insecurities and she fears that he will leave her and find someone better. It is hard for her to accept that he wants to be with her forever because she has always believed that she is not good enough. She realises that she treated him extremely badly in the beginning of their relationship and goes as far as to call it emotional and verbal abuse. She confesses that she still has far too much anger cropped up inside and that she struggles to deal with her temper. It physically feels as if her heart is going to jump out of her body and she starts screaming and yelling and cannot control it in any way. Sometimes it is something really small that provokes such extreme anger in her that she feels as if she is having an uncontrollable attack of some kind.

She admits to feeling ashamed of herself all the time and says that not a day passes that she does not feel guilty about what happened to her as a child. She describes herself as many different parts and not as a whole. When asked about how she feels about herself she said:

*Nie baie goed nie! Ek voel... [very emotional] ek is 'n slegte mens. Umm... Stupid! Dom! Ek voel INCREDIBLY dom! Umm... Ek voel daar is – ek het eenkeer vir iemand gesê: As iemand weet hulle is dom gaan hulle weet hulle is dom? En hulle het gesê ja. En ek weet*

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<sup>25</sup>It is getting clearer. It is as if my memories were always in black and white and now they are in colour. I am remembering what it smelt like, whether the wind was blowing... so it is feeling as if there is more... the picture that I have is as if I am looking at something real as if I am watching myself and this is what I see. It's becoming more real.

*ek is dom! Umm... Ek is baie verleë daarvoor umm... en ek voel ek is 'n slegte mens en ek voel net dat die Here dink ek is self below sy koningkryk (LIN: 777-782). Toe ek hare gaan swot het, toe hoor ek na die tyd want ek moes vir myself betaal het, het my ma-hulle gesê hulle wou nie vir my betaal nie want hulle het nie gedink ek sal dit kan doen nie (LIN: 786-788). Ek is bang dat ek nooit gaan anders voel nie. Ek sal hou daarvan om anders te kan voel daarvoor. Want ek dink dit bepaal baie hoe ek optree in sekere situasies (LIN: 803-805).*

*Ek het baie stupid drome [giggle] ... Want dis... ek dink nie, uh, 'n kind van ses jaar droom selfs sulke stupid goed nie [laugh] (LIN: 839-842).<sup>26</sup>*

Lindy says that she struggles to sleep because of nightmares and when she jolts awake, she is wet with perspiration. She also experiences migraines at least three times a week and suffers from severe back pain.

On a positive note, she explains that there are things that make her happy and that she enjoys. She loves fantasy movies and even though she is an adult, she still loves the princess fairy tales and says that she tries to relive her childhood through these stories; she even bought herself the Disney Princesses magazines because she likes *iets wat [haar] bietjie in 'n ander wêreld vat* (LIN: 718).<sup>27</sup> She enjoys “*a happy place waarnatoe ek escape so dis vir my baie meer positief as negatief*” (LIN: 813-814).<sup>28</sup>

When Lindy was asked whether she thought the abuse had any purpose in her life she responded as follows:

*Ek het gesê dat ek sal ok wees daarmee as ek weet dat dit gebruik kan word om ander mense te help. Umm... ek voel dit is die enigste positiewe uitkoms van dit uit, as dit wat ons hier doen of as ek met iemand kan praat met wie dit self gebeur het en kan net relate, umm... want dit is die enigste positiwiteit wat daaruit kan kom (LIN: 1001-1005).<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>26</sup>I don't feel good about myself. I feel like a bad person. Stupid.Very stupid. I feel incredibly stupid! I feel there is – I once asked someone: If someone is stupid are they going to know that they are stupid? And they said yes. And I know that I am stupid! I feel very embarrassed about the fact that I am not clever. I feel like a bad person and I feel that even the Lord thinks I am below his kingdom. When I went to study hairdressing, I heard afterwards that I had to pay for myself because my parents didn't think I could do it. I am afraid that I am always going to feel this way. I think it determines how I behave in certain situations. I even believe that my dreams are more stupid than a six-year-old's dreams.

<sup>27</sup>Something that takes her to another world for a while

<sup>28</sup>a happy place where I can escape to it's much more positive than negative.

<sup>29</sup>I said that I would be ok with it if I can know that my story can help other people to deal with their abuse and pain. That will be the only possible positive outcome of all that suffering. If I can talk to someone that it happened to – someone who can relate to it, umm, that is the only positive that can come from it.

Lindy used to be involved with a church until she was told that “*daar’s demone in [haar] wat uitgedryf moet word*” (LIN: 729)<sup>30</sup>. However, she rejected this idea and is no longer involved with cell groups or church activities. She admits that although some of her thoughts are feelings of anger or despair, she is a very spiritual person; however, it is a very personal thing. She sees herself as a child of God and desires to bear the fruits of the Spirit and this is what guides her life.

## 5.9 SHELLY (SHE)

Shelly is a 37-year-old sales consultant who has been married for seven years and is the mother of two boys, aged five and seven. She is the oldest of three children and has two younger brothers. Her father died when she was only two and she says that she does not remember anything about his death and has only fleeting, but special memories of her father; she believes that he was the only one who ever really loved her. She was raised by her mother, with whom she did not, in her opinion, have a very good relationship.

Her mother remarried when she was very small and she recalls her stepfather being good to them. Tragically, he accidentally shot himself fatally while working with his gun. Shelly remembers that she and her brother and mother moved into somebody’s outside flat and their mom worked long hours. She does not have happy memories of her childhood; she hated school, did not get along with her mother and had no friends. She also remembers many family issues because her mom was Indian and her dad coloured and they never really knew where they belonged.

Shelly says that she struggles to recall details about many things in her childhood and most of what she remembers is what people have told her. In her opinion she was always the “*ugly duckling*” (SHE: 152) and was mocked because she has always been very thin and perceived herself as the centre of derision.

When asked during the interview to relate a happy childhood memory, Shelly thought for a long time and then recalled, in detail, a special birthday card that she was given by her mother. She says that one of her biggest fears is becoming anything like her mother and when she notices that she is dealing with things the way her mom did, it really upsets her. She feels that she does not want to destroy her children’s lives as her mom destroyed hers.

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<sup>30</sup>that she was demon-possessed and needed exorcism,

After her stepfather's death, her mom started to bring boyfriends home and one of these boyfriends was responsible for the sexual abuse she experienced. This is how she related it during the interview:

*He was responsible for the most fear I ever experienced in my life! I was afraid constantly. I remember one evening my mom coming home and she went to bed and Zach came and sat next to me in the lounge and I could smell the rum. And I can automatically feel his beard on my face and then the rest is gone. I know what happened to me, but I don't remember the details. Strangely it is always the same little pieces of memory that are clear and at the same place it fades (SHE: 546-554).*

Because of what Zach did to her, Shelly refuses to love people and does not know what to do when others want to love her. She knows that it affects her marriage negatively too and she realises that she needs to deal with this. In her view, love has always been equated with being violated or neglected and getting hurt.

According to Shelly, her whole life has been tumultuous; in fact she cannot recall a restful, calm period in her life. She clearly remembers leaving home on her eighteenth birthday and she finally decided that she would not be her mom's slave anymore.

She relates how she started working at SAA as an air hostess and enjoyed that because she wanted to run away and constantly travelling was perfect for her. At SAA she got into an abusive relationship with a pilot which took years to get out of.

She met her husband, Eric, and shortly after that, fell pregnant with her firstborn, Jay. After the birth of her second son, Dan's she struggled to get her life back on track and expresses a great deal of emotion because he was very ill in hospital for a long time. This caused extreme stress in her relationship with Eric and she tells about this painful traumatic experience as follows:

*My husband, who is a police officer, was in the process of being boarded when our youngest son, Dan, was in hospital for almost four months. This triggered the post-traumatic stress and I lost my husband and it took me four years to get him back to a point where I said to him I can't do this anymore and I walked out. He then went for counselling and I got my husband back. So that period of not having my husband, having to take care of the kids on my own and this adult that just wouldn't function, almost killed me. I had a nervous breakdown. I ended up in Vista because of it. But, we're fine now (SHE: 475-482).*

She emphasises that she has never had problems with being in a relationship with a man, but that she found she was automatically attracted to men who wanted to take care of her and who were gentle, but because of her past experience, she always saw such men as weaklings. In fact, she realises now that it was because she had always wanted to take care of herself and answer to nobody. She admits the following:

*It's the thing of being rejected as a child; it becomes like a blueprint in your brain that you automatically want to do things to prove to people that you're ok, but that has stayed with me (SHE: 235-237).*

She summarises her views of people below:

*I have learned to judge people and I can feel whether they have different motives or not. I have figured people out and have studied all the reasons why people don't love me, but rather hurt me (SHE: 414-416; paraphrase).*

Shelly considers herself to be an extremely emotional person and also realises that her emotions have changed a lot in the past few years. She experienced a great deal of fear and anxiety in the past, but now she has to deal with sadness and anger instead. Sadness, because she feels robbed of a childhood that she never had. She says that, apart from being an emotional person, she likes to withdraw and be on her own. According to her, she has no problems relating to people and can easily talk about what has happened to her; however, she does not want to be a burden to people or want their sympathy.

Anger is the emotion that Shelly singled out during the interview as being the one she struggles with most. She explains her anger like this:

*But I've also understood why I get like that, because by not acknowledging what I am saying or what I want, you are rejecting me and that is the issue that I had. My rejection caused anger (SHE: 443-445).*

Her mom passed away due to cancer when Shelly was 24 and they never discussed the childhood sexual abuse or many other issues that scarred her childhood. Her mother's death, in her opinion, was like the ultimate betrayal and when her mom died she felt as though her mom had abandoned and rejected her one last time. Her frustration and anger are clearly portrayed in the following:

*When my mom died I felt absolutely nothing, because at that point I felt: Fine! You've, you've, you've gone and died on me now. It's like the ultimate rejection! You know... Stupid woman! I was, I was angry at my mom for dying. Because I really generally wanted a mother.*

*And I just thought: There's no point! And I just went to work, did my thing, came back... umm... I just shut down... emotionally.*

*My mom went to her grave without knowing what happened to me as a child. With Zane... she went to her grave, not knowing that a lot of things that she said to me was wrong and made me a bit of a dysfunctional... not a bit... a dysfunctional adult, you know, and, and, I wanted her to know, not to make her feel bad, but to make her realise that she has a daughter that needs to be loved. So, opportunity moment lost. So I got a tattoo... (SHE: 761-774).*

She admits that she has become a very domineering person who likes being in charge in relationships because, in that way, she feels she can prevent getting hurt. She wants things done her way and gets very impatient if things do not happen fast enough in her opinion. She confesses that she can be a very difficult person because she has learned to be an assertive perfectionist. In her interview she stated that she handled stress very well and, in fact, she believes that she functions better at work when under stress.

Although she still feels that there are not many things beside her children that bring her a great deal of happiness, she does feel that her views on life have changed. Growing up she tended to rely on herself, but nowadays, since she has developed a relationship with God, she acknowledges that she has learned to give things to Him. She has developed a great deal and sees things differently now. She shared the following about the way she sees life now:

*I think that as one matures, one starts to make better decisions. A person starts to choose more stable friends and that means a more stable boyfriend, which means a more stable company to work for. Now that I understand who I am and what has happened, I am able to make better choices (SHE: 466-470).*

She looks forward to doing simple things now like playing games and baking cookies with her children and doing childhood things that she feels she has missed out on. God plays a very important role in her life and she enjoys Bible study and meditation on a daily basis and also attributes her ability to cope to her spiritual strength.

## **5.10 SUMMARY**

These eight women's stories can hardly be contained in these few pages, but for the sake of the analysis of the data, it is important for the reader to be made aware of who the participants are. As Patomäki (2000) makes clear, it is necessary to investigate a whole as an integral system with interconnections and never as isolated fragments out of context. In fact, the parts cannot be properly understood apart from their relationship with the whole.

In these stories related above, one can hardly claim to have a 'whole', but this background lays a foundation for the data analysis and discussions that follow because without this background there will not be any connectedness between the data and the individuals. The Cumulative Stress Model (Shen, 2008) emphasises the contextual, holistic views on which Harvey (2000; 2003; 2007) has based the MMTR-I. Shen (2009) looked into the fact that children are seldom exposed to only one form of abuse or trauma. Other researchers have also identified different forms of trauma such as life-threatening illness, life-threatening accident, robbery/mugging, traumatic bereavement, sexual assault (penetration), attempted sexual assault, molestation, child physical assault/abuse, adult physical assault/abuse, threatening with a weapon and witnessing death/assault (Goodman, Corcoran, Yuan & Green, 1998; Leitenberg, Gibson & Novy, 2004; Matheson, Skomorovsky, Fiocco & Anisman, 2007).

Although the participants did not complete any questionnaire regarding the traumatic life events, the data presented in Table 6.1 were gathered from the interview data recorded and it gives a clearer description of the participants.

Table 5.1  
Traumatic life events of participants

	Bianca (34)	Caron (37)	Christie (39)	Colleen (25)	Jenny (54)	Jolene (56)	Lindi (25)	Shelly (37)
<b>Own divorce</b>				√				
<b>Parental divorce and remarriage</b>				√				√
<b>Problematic marriage</b>				√	√	√		
<b>Suicide attempts</b>	1	1	1	many	-	2	1	-
<b>Death of family members as children</b>					mother		grand- parents: homicide	Father, stepfather suicide
<b>Death of family members as adults</b>	father		father	sister: homicide	sister	father		mother
<b>Emotionally abusive mother</b>			√	√				√
<b>Victims of crime</b>	√	√	√					√
<b>Rape/attempted rape</b>		√						√
<b>Other sexual molestation</b>		√			√		√	
<b>Multiple perpetrators in child sexual abuse</b>		√		√			√	
<b>Perpetrator</b>	uncle	cousin, family friend	brother	4 brothers, father	brother- in-law	father	grand- father,	step- father
<b>Ignored by parent as a child</b>		√	√	√			√	√
<b>Perpetrator confronted</b>	√	x	√	√ jailed	x	x died	x died	x died
<b>Physical abuse</b>				√		√		√
<b>No closure due to no confrontation</b>		√			√	√	√	√
<b>Mothers aware of child sexual abuse but did nothing</b>				√		√	√	
<b>First disclosure of child sexual abuse in adulthood</b>	√	√	√			√		
<b>No support after disclosure</b>		√		√			√	
<b>No disclosure</b>					√			
<b>Often ridiculed by parents/friends</b>		√					√	√
<b>Duration of abuse in years</b>	1	±4	1	±8	14	16	±7	±2

Although the different traumatic life events of the participants presented in Table 5.1 above are self-explanatory, there are certain observations that need to be made. These traumatic events, or lack of them, are not predictive of how resilient participants would be. Half the participants lost close family members as children, some to homicide and suicide. Only three of the participants confronted their perpetrators and three could not confront their perpetrators because they had died. Before any deductions can be made, however, there are many considerations to take into account and it is important to consider at what stage of development each participant experienced these traumatic events. Shelly's father died when she was two years old and she hardly has any memory of him, whereas Jenny lost her mother at 18. Although both these participants lost a parent, it is not going to have the same effect on the individual. These data are essential in creating a fuller context of each participant.