

Delivered from Abortion:

Healing a Forgotten Memory

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Late in the fall of 1943, as Nazi submarines terrorized Allied shipping, a young Navy officer and his wife faced a terrible dilemma as they faced his upcoming deployment to an aircraft carrier in the North Atlantic.

Living in makeshift wartime housing with an 8-month-old baby girl, they had only the bathtub for washing diapers and no clothes dryer or heat but a volatile kerosene heater in the New Jersey cold. At least, there had been time to enjoy each other on a recent Thanksgiving furlough. But now, that joy was overcome by fear when they discovered another child was on the way.

The young woman's parents—already anxious for their daughter and only child--were furious at her husband for this, refused to speak to him, and threatened to disown her. Torn and confused, at her next visit with the Navy doctor the 21-year-old wife poured out her anguish and tears.

The doctor, however, had a solution to her problem. Handing her a small, dark red bottle and scheduling her for an appointment the following week, he explained that he could “fix everything” quickly and easily after she took the pills.

Days later, before the appointment, the young woman shook the pills out of the bottle into her hand and closed her fist. Shaking from both cold and anxiety, she poured a glass of water with her other hand. Uneasily, she hesitated and looked out a frost-covered kitchen window. “What if this is the son my husband wants?” she thought, and waited. Turning to her fist, she paused, then opened it and lifted the glass of water.

“Did Mother ever tell you about the time she was going to abort you?” my 17-month-older sister asked casually as we chatted one day 35 years later.

Stunned, I stared at her and shook my head in silent disbelief. My mother did mention it briefly later in a letter, but in that moment I stood transfixed as my sister continued the story.

“At the last minute, she just threw the pills away into the trash can.”

This jarring revelation stirred a host of unsettling, lifelong mysteries.

I remembered my recurrent nightmare of swimming frantically underwater and, strangely, breathing while submerged—an amniotic, prenatal “memory”? Once, I told a psychiatrist how I felt “trapped” and panicky in close relationships with women. Fears of death had dogged me, and a pervasive, empty sense of not belonging anywhere,

“You were a colicky baby and cried awfully, night after night,” my mother had told me years before.

“Gordon's always afraid he's going to miss something,” Dad often teased me as a boy.

At the time, I was pastoring my first church out of Harvard Divinity School and, during my ministry about a year earlier, had experienced an upending supernatural encounter with Jesus (see my chapter, “Healing Emotional Wounds: Seeing the Past as Jesus Sees It” in *Broken by Religion, Healed by God*). Soon after talking with my sister, I began struggling with headaches and anxiety, and at last, decided to invite Jesus into my fearful memory.

Lying on the floor, I curled up in a fetal position and imagined the kitchen scene 35 years earlier as my sister had related it: myself tightly bound inside my mother's womb, her holding the pills and glass of water, pausing over her decision.

As I "saw" my mother lift the pills, I began to shake in terror. "Jesus, help!" I cried out desperately. "Save me, Jesus!" As I lay trapped and trembling, in my mind's eye I saw Jesus come into the kitchen and stand by my mother. With a single gesture, he reached and swept the pills out of her hand and into the trash can.

Amazed, I watched as he then turned to me. "You don't owe your life to your mother," he declared. "It was I who stayed her hand. You belong to me."

A cool sensation of release swept over me. Sighing deeply, I lay quiet.

Later, I remembered Jesus' promise to his followers, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32NIV).

Indeed, this watershed revelation freed me to face many unhealthy patterns in my life--most notably, feeling overly responsible for my mother's happiness and guilty for wanting a life of my own. In the years since, I've gone back into that scene with Jesus several more times to cry out my feelings toward both my mother and father—until I could forgive them in their predicament, sense their genuine love for me, and become current with my heart.

I've identified and cast out from myself numerous demons—from abortion and death itself to worthlessness and anxiety—which entered through my shattered defenses from that pre-natal trauma (see my chapter, "How Demons Enter—and Leave" in *No Small Snakes*).

The proverbial "survivor's question" yet stirs: Why me? Why was I saved when millions of other children who shared my plight have been killed? Why did Jesus not stay the hand of their mothers? Indeed, I live today not because of any righteousness on my part in an embryonic state—nor even, as Jesus revealed, on my mother's part, thankful as I am that she "just threw the pills away."

In my dismay and unknowing, I find direction in Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel's statement, "The role of the survivor is to testify." (*A Jew Today*, Vintage Books, 1979, p18.)

To tell the story of God's deliverance saves you from both the presumption of deserving and the shame of undeserving. Better, it can jar others out of complacency or despair to entertain saving power far beyond their own.

In fact, honest testimony trumps both politically correct tolerance and religiously correct dogma. "Jesus saves" is for me not about religion, but reality—as unwieldy as it is exciting.

Today, 68 years later, I remain humbled by this awesome mystery, but determined to entertain it. I'm neither obligated to believe nor ashamed to be alive.

I'm privileged to testify. The more I do, the more thankful I am to Jesus, and the more determined I am to see others experience his saving power themselves.

Is that enough to earn the deliverance I didn't deserve? I don't know. I only know it's all I can do, and I do it gratefully.