



OUT OF THE VIOLENCE

Sarah and Bulla Walker have recently become MPA leaders in the Eastern Bay of Plenty town of Kawerau. They were not always passionate about serving God and so here they tell their story . . .

SARAH

We were brought up on a farm by my mother who was a caring, hard-working person and my grand parents at a little place called Wainui in the Eastern Bay of Plenty. I have a twin sister, two older sisters and five brothers, two younger than me and three older.

We moved to Cheddar Valley with my mother when I was about 4 years old and lived there until we moved into Whakatane when I started school. There was a lot of physical and sexual abuse in my younger years and in my teenage years through into my marriage. What I was led to believe was love I discovered was not genuine love until I came to accept Jesus as my Saviour and He showed me the way to a life motivated by love and purity.

At the age of 17 I met a boy and fell pregnant to him thinking that he loved me but found out he didn't. I gave birth to a beautiful little girl who I brought up till the age of three when I met Bulla. At the time I was working as a waitress at the Tainui Motor Hotel in Whakatane and he chased me for about three years until I finally said "Yes". We went to live to live in Edgecumbe. In 1980 our first daughter was born and six months later I fell pregnant with our second child – a boy who we lost in 1982 with heart problems. It was also in 1981 that we were officially married on October 31st. It was around this time that the physical abuse started in our relationship which continued for about 10 years. When I was pregnant with our son through abuse I received a broken pelvis, broken ribs and black eyes.

In 1982 I came to know the Lord. I had been severely beaten up again and by Bulla and he took me to my sister who lived in Kawerau and we went to Pastor Jim McMillan and his wife, Dinnal. They met us at their church and there they led me to the Lord and I received both spiritual and physical healing because my jaw which had been broken through the beating I received was also healed. At the time Aunty Dinnal gave me a verse that has been a great help to me since, *“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High shall abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and fortress, my God in whom I trust”* (Psalm 91:1-2).

Pastor Jim rang Bulla and said he wanted to see him. He gave him a good talking to and asked him what his religion was. He replied that he was Ratana. Although I was now a Christian my problems with Bulla did not end because he was not yet a Christian but now people were praying for him.

I stayed at my sister’s place for about a month until I was well. Bulla promised he would not lay his hands on me again and so I returned back home. But it was not long before the beatings continued and I ended up in a women’s refuge home. The police were involved this time because of the abuse and also because of the children. I had been so beaten up that the neighbours had intervened and had called the police. The children were placed in a Christian refuge home. I was in refuge for three months and then transferred to my brother’s home in Wellington until Bulla’s court case came up.

During the court case photos were shown of my injuries. The plea of my two daughters – “We want to go home because we miss daddy” saved Bulla from a prison term. The judge summoned our two daughters, Sheralee (8 years) and Rickina (3 years) asking for their version of the nightmare experience and the effect it had on them. Sheralee described trying “to put mummy on the trolley with blood all over her and my little sister bawling her eyes out because we were trying to get mummy to Aunty Kathy’s house to help her and then we went far away from daddy for a long time. Now we want to go home because we miss daddy”. I believe this saved Bulla from going to prison.

The judge warned Bulla that if there was any further form of abuse he would go straight to prison. He was placed on probation. Many people ask me why I did not leave the relationship. But unless you have been in that situation it is hard to imagine the fear factor. Bulla had threatened that if I ever tried to leave he would kill me and the children.

BULLA TAKES UP THE STORY

From my father’s first marriage I have three sisters and from his second marriage I have six brothers and five sisters. From the age of 10 I lost my childhood because I was made to work every weekend with my father collecting bottles. His main job was as a timber worker at the local timber yard. He was also a rat bookie and sly grogger (selling illegal booze). On most weekends until about the mid 50s we had wild parties. At the age of 12 I had my first alcohol

black out, and many more were to follow over the years. From that young age I learned all about sin in ways I hesitate to describe – it was all around us at the time.

I witnessed my mother getting physically abused many times at those parties as were many other women by their partners. I saw men fighting men and women fighting women. The language was very colourful and disgusting but it was all we knew at the time. I also had a job selling papers in the hotels and would occasionally have an illegal drink before the police used to arrive at a certain time every night to make sure the place was cleared out. At the age of 13 I sold myself as a male prostitute in order to get clothes to go to high school. Nothing physical eventuated, but while the victim was stripping I attacked him, knocked him down and took his wallet.

When I was 15 I became the first juvenile delinquent in Whakatane. I smashed up the town clock and also a plate glass window at the same time while drunk. I was put on probation and had about \$1400 of fines to pay. My father and I had a disagreement which became physical. I nearly killed him, but my mother stopped me and I left home and stayed with an uncle. I believe that my life then changed for the better. It was like I was felt wanted for myself not just for the work I could do. The probation officer got me a full time job at a hardware store where I worked before and after school. Even then I played up, stealing detonators to put in the locks of doors to blow them up to assist with burglaries, educated by an older cousin, who spent time in and out of prison.

When I was working at the hardware store I met a girl and married her just before my 19th birthday in 1961. By then I was working at the timber yard. The day I got married the probation officer cancelled the rest of my term. We had four children, but separated in 1977. I left her the house and stayed at the Waterfall Lodge opposite the Commercial Hotel. At that time I didn't know that the owners of the Lodge were Christians and they held Gospel meetings there and were praying for me. I left my place of employment after 14 years and moved to the Tainui Hotel to work as a barman.

While I was there a long-time barman introduced me to a set of "loaded dice" and showed me how to use them. I decided to use them on the owner of a local butcher shop who was also an alcoholic. We had two sets of dice the – one loaded the other legal. He had the legal and I had the loaded ones, and I won the butcher shop off him! After two weeks my conscience got the better of me and I told him I didn't want the shop, but didn't tell him why. During my time there I started courting Sarah. I chased her for about three years before we started going out together.

In October 1986 I received a letter from my eldest son who was in the Hanmer Springs Queen Elizabeth Hospital for alcoholics. He had written and said, "Dad, this is the place for you. They will help you down here". I showed Sarah the letter and said, "The only help I need is more money to buy more alcohol". She just looked at me and said, "Why don't you take it and show your manager?" So I did that, and my manager said, "Yes, you could do with that help. Why don't you go? You have lots of days owing". The manager was a 20-year man (that is 20 years

free of alcohol) and was also the head of Alcoholics Anonymous. So I went down. I actually went down as a support parent but became involved in the programme. While I was there I admitted and accepted the fact that I was an alcoholic. When I returned home I decided to seek help to stop my drinking and where I found my help was with my two brothers and Sarah. They would take me to the hotels and stand on either side of Sarah and me and have a beer and put a fruit juice in front of me. We broke the cycle within a month. (Many people were praying for me which I didn't know about till afterwards). I have never touched a drop since then.

In June 27th, 1990 at 5.10 pm I met with a bad motor-cycle accident. Before the ambulance arrived a passerby stopped and came over to see if he could help. He asked, "Are you alright?" and I replied, "I can't feel my hands. Are they there?" I knew something had happened to my foot and my shoulder hurt. The only thing that kept going through my mind was that if I had no hands and had to have hooks, how I was going to use toilet paper. When he said, yes your hands are there, I just let it go. I passed out and woke up in the hospital. The doctors were deciding whether to take my foot off or leave it on. As they were talking Sarah walked in and overheard them, and said, "No way. I'll pray over his foot. Jesus will heal it". They were very worried because gangrene had set in. They kept me over night in Whakatane Hospital and transferred me to Tauranga Hospital the next day when I had stabilized.

For two days they were very concerned about my foot. On the second day I had to go for another operation. A nurse grabbed my left shoulder. I let out a yell and they realized my shoulder was damaged and found the collar bone had been smashed. I spent three months there and it was during that time I invite Jesus into my heart as my Lord and Saviour. A nurse asked me if I wanted to attend a Sunday service at the chapel. The pastor taking the service that day gave his testimony and as he shared I could see a reflection of myself. Afterwards I asked to speak to him and asked him how he came to know about my life. He said, "That was not you, it was me". At that point I broke down and right there received the Lord into my heart.

This now meant that both my wife and I were born-again Christians and we have served the Lord ever since. We have been involved in missionary work in Fiji, with Full Gospel Businessmen and have fostered children from Waiheke Island, Auckland, Bay of Plenty and Kawerau.

Here I would just like to tell you about an event that took place back in 1964. During the tea break while doing a double on blue shift when I was employed by NZ Forest Products at the Whakatane Board Mills I encountered a man by the name of George Faulkner. As we started to eat in walked this man carrying a black book in his hand and a beaming smile on his face. (I believe to this day that beaming smile was an inheritance from God).

As George began reading his work mates began heckling him, threatening to report him to the shift boss for Bible bashing in the smoko room. For me this wasn't upsetting at first, as I didn't know what George was reading aloud. But I had the good fortune (or misfortune) of copping an earful many times as I did several doubles on blue shift. Finally I too had had enough and told

George quite bluntly what to do with his Bible. George's reply nearly floored me when he said, "Your turn is coming. God wants o use you!"

Twenty-six years later while in Tauranga Hospital in 1990, I accepted Jesus Christ into my life as my Lord and Saviour. Two years later I was water baptized in the Whakatane Christian Fellowship Church on April 19th, 1992.

I met up with George during a church service at a local marae and tol him I had become a Christian. George gave me that beautiful beaming smile and said, "Praise God!" And I say Amen! Recently we have become local leaders with Maori Postal Aotearoa. We have proved that the Lord makes all the difference in all situations of life and gives real meaning to a marriage relationship. Now we thank the Lord for everything He has done for us and brought into our lives.