

**MONIQUE LISBON  
AND 'IF THE TRUTH HURTS'**



*Monique Lisbon is a minister-in-training with the Churches of Christ in Victoria, Australia, with a specialist itinerant ministry in the areas of the 'mess' of life and faith. A composer, performer, workshop leader and public speaker, during recent years she has dealt with issues raised from being a survivor of child abuse. In her struggles to come to terms with an abusive past, she has expressed much of her pain and the journey towards hope in her music. This is part of her story...*

**Overcoming Violence: A Personal Perspective**

‘When it comes to describing my process of healing from personal violence, it can be tempting to paint a picture of complete resolution and victory. The alternative - acknowledging I continue to grapple with the traumatic after-effects of childhood abuse - is uncomfortable and at times threatens to overwhelm me with a sense of shame at my ‘failure’ to heal completely and instantly. We live in a world where personal comfort is held up as one of the greatest human aims, and where the common dreary realities of suffering and abuse are most easily described in terms of the ‘spectacular’. If we can envisage the kind of evil that molests and rapes children as out of the ordinary - the subject of news flashes or horror films - it is somehow more manageable. We can push it to the periphery of our consciousness; it is beyond the scope of our experience or that of our friends or family. And if we believe that recovery from this kind of evil is most commonly the stuff of miracles, then this also helps to distance ourselves from the pain and discomfort inherent in healing from personal violence.



**W.H. Auden once wrote, ‘Evil is unspectacular and always human, and shares our bed and eats at our own table.’ My story, the story of my childhood, is one of an evil that on too many occasions shared my bed and for too many years ate at my own table.**

When I reached the age of twenty and started to face the reality of my childhood abuse, I desperately wanted to believe that I could put the lid back on Pandora’s Box. I reluctantly entered counselling at the suggestion of several close friends who were alarmed at the dramatically destructive changes that had taken place in me, and who knew that it was not ‘normal’ to repeatedly huddle in the corner of a room, rocking back and forth like a frightened child, crying and whimpering, for hours on end. After just four or five counselling sessions, I tried to pretend it was all over. I went back to work, and recommenced my deferred university studies. I led the community singing at a Christian conference for over 1,000 people, and held doggedly onto the kind of faith that said that as a ‘new creation in Christ’, the pain of my childhood abuse was completely gone. **I tried to live as an ‘overcomer’. I soon discovered that ignoring my pain did not make it disappear, but just moved it to other parts of my life.** The memories of the powerlessness and fear of my past rendered me unable to work or study in a sustained way for several years. In my personal relationships I felt the strain of my fears, I became profoundly needy and lacked understanding of healthy personal boundaries. My family was deeply shocked at a tangibly distressed, often suicidal, sister and daughter who spent many months in a psychiatric hospital.

***Where was God in all this?***

## SEEDS OF PEACE

Many Christians described God to me in ways that seemed largely illustrative of their own personalities: there was the God to whom I 'should' pray a one-size-fits-all Forgiveness Prayer; who would wipe away all my pain if I just forgave those who had hurt me, before I had barely even begun to understand the sins committed against me; there was the God who simply demanded obedience in the form of regular Christian activities - when I could barely even get out of bed; and of course, the miracle-working 'Superman' God appeared many times; whilst several Christians blithely tied my depression and post-traumatic symptoms to the presence of satanic rule, and exhorted me to greater faith.

**In the end, the only God who made sense was a God who took my suffering and pain seriously enough to actually enter it. In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words, 'only the suffering God can help'.** Whilst many Christians I met were describing an all-powerful miracle-working God who would dramatically take away all my pain, I began to get to know the God who '*during all the violence, is nailed to a tree*'. (from the song *Help* by Monique Lisbon). As I increasingly reflected on God who in Jesus is revealed in *powerlessness*, rather than power, I began to find myself getting to know someone who understood me intimately. A fellow survivor of abuse and profound suffering, this God knew my experience from the inside - the sleepless nights, the betrayal at the hands of one loved and trusted, the humiliation of being stripped naked and abused, and the experience of being totally alone at the point of greatest need.

When I think of God's human story - the life, death and resurrection of Christ - the image it conjures up is the kind of life and hope that comes *through* death and destruction. As I've struggled to envisage what it might mean to 'overcome' the personal violence I've experienced, this has been a powerful concept. Healing has not meant avoiding the pain and suffering of the after-effects of severe childhood trauma; rather healing has been the experience of finding that God has brought life *out of* the 'death' of my pain and suffering. This redemptive power - the transformation of trauma into life - has slowly shaped all areas of my life. Increasingly over the last 10 years, I have been invited to share my story with others, many of whom share similar stories. This has led to a ministry called **MonoMusic**, through which I have recorded 6 albums of my own songs about the struggle to find hope in the midst of suffering, including two CDs about my process of healing from childhood abuse, *The Lies of Love* (1997) and *If The Truth Hurts* (2003). Under MonoMusic's umbrella, I also speak out publicly about the reality of childhood abuse, and try to communicate some of the hope I have found.



Surprisingly, the power of my ministry has repeatedly proved itself to reside in the honest and authentic sharing of my unspectacular and at times laborious process of learning to live in a different way from the abusive lessons of my childhood. This is a process which has already taken 15 years, and which I suspect will continue until the day I see God face to face. At that point only, will I know what it is to be completely healed, completely whole. It is that promise of total restoration that sustains me, as I continue to walk the rocky path of life, faith and healing. I am not called to 'overcome' all the effects of my childhood trauma, but rather to live in faithfulness to this surprising Companion; the one who walks alongside, inviting me to enter into both God's suffering and the profoundly rich life that springs out of death.'

### Sources and more information:

Check out [www.monomusic.com.au](http://www.monomusic.com.au) or write to PO Box 324 Ashburton Victoria 3147