

Pat's Story: A Victim Ministry Testimony

When Pat O'Dell came to Crime Victim Services for help, she had already survived a horribly abusive childhood. Some of her earliest memories include being told she should never have been born. Pat endured years of physical, emotional and sexual abuse and, after much soul-searching and therapy, had emerged from her victimization a stronger woman who no longer labeled herself a "victim." Pat was a survivor.

Then Pat was sexually assaulted by a trusted professional. Instantly she was plunged back into a world fraught with confusion, fear and anger. She was once again battling feelings she had thought were in the past.

Deb Wyant, Crime Victim Services Sexual Assault Victim Advocate, worked with Pat for several months helping her to navigate through a confusing and at times frustrating criminal justice system. At one point, Deb asked Pat if she would be interested in Crime Victim Services' Victim Ministry program, and Pat agreed.

Victim Ministry of Crime Victim Services was begun for Allen and Putnam Counties (Ohio) in 1992 and is the first program in the nation to have paid and volunteer staff within a victim assistance agency providing Christian support to victims of crime. Trained volunteers are matched with victims to provide emotional, spiritual, practical and financial assistance, as well as to create a safe place for victims to share their grief and loss with someone offering compassionate listening and meaningful pastoral conversation.

After a few weeks of telephone conversations, Pat was finally able to meet Linda, her Victim Ministry Volunteer. When she first saw Linda, her response was one of surprise. "Oh- I thought you'd be older," Pat chuckled. They ate lunch together and enjoyed getting to know one another, chatting for more than two hours. Pat says, "I liked her right away."

Right from the start Pat felt comfortable talking with Linda about Christian issues and the Bible. Both women hold onto a strong faith in God and a prolific knowledge of scripture.

Nearly a year later, Pat and Linda continue to visit several times a month, keeping up with each other through emails,

telephone calls and the occasional lunch. They discuss scripture whenever possible. "I feel like I've made a friend," says Pat. "I don't have any fear that she's going to repeat anything I've said. And she's allowed me to be a friend to her, too."

Through Victim Ministry training and monthly meetings, Linda is able to assist Pat in a myriad of ways. Sexual assault education is one of the topics discussed at monthly meetings to help teach volunteers effective ways to reach out to the victim of a crime. Armed with the knowledge imparted to her through the Victim Ministry program, Linda is able to provide Pat with spiritual fellowship, a prayer partner, and a shoulder to lean on.



Victim Ministry Volunteer Linda (left) with Pat and Sammy

When asked about Crime Victim Services Victim Ministry Program, Pat is happy to elaborate. "Victim Ministry is a wonderful thing! People always need someone to talk to."

Pat's past victimization will always be a painful part of her life. However, through much prayer, and the encouragement of her friend Linda, she is now using her experiences in a constructive way.

Pat is a strong presence in her own neighborhood, closely observing and reporting any suspicious activities to assure the safety of children. She assists friends as often as she can by keeping an eye out for their kids or even helping them to report crimes. She speaks on Victim Impact Panels, another program of Crime Victim Services, shining a light on the violence to which she was so often subjected and changing lives in the audience.

Pat manages her own website and publishes a newsletter called Rainbows 4 the Heart. She also savors time spent caring for her two dogs, Sammy and Bill, and her cat suitably named "Kitty."

"I have decided that I will not hide from life but will, instead, travel full speed ahead and be the best that I can be at whatever it is I am doing. What I want most is to be an inspiration to others. I hope that in some small way I am succeeding."

Pat is, indeed, a survivor.