

From Victim to Victory

After she was raped, Anika Tillery spent years in despair. Then she found hope.

February 16, 2006 By Anika Tillery

“You’re pretty for a dark-skinned girl,” the two 18-year-old guys told me. At 14 and consistently teased that my color was ugly, I basked in the compliment. When they invited me to hang out, I jumped at the chance. We arrived at an abandoned building, and I felt anxious but ventured inside. I wanted to be accepted—I got raped instead. Outnumbered, I said no, lost hope, then lay there crying. Later, I felt ashamed. I should have known better. I should have fought. It was my fault, I thought.

For seven years, I hid behind a wall of shame, guilt, depression, worthlessness and loneliness. I didn’t tell anyone. I avoided therapy. Who would believe me? I was black, lived in the hood and was certain I’d be judged and blamed. So I made myself a victim and became entangled in unhealthy relationships and situations. I thought of killing myself, but remembered my mother’s statement “Committing suicide is like saying there is no hope and, therefore, no God. However, there is a God and, therefore, hope.”

Thankfully, one night God rescued me. While watching *Montel*, I heard him state that no one deserves to be raped, regardless of circumstance. This brought me peace. Maybe God might use my experience to strengthen me and help other survivors, I thought. Someone once said that when a person is tired of sitting in a hole, they will climb up. My time had come.

I decided to give up my identity as rape victim and to heal instead. I journaled, wrote poems, talked positively to myself and watched talk shows featuring survivors. Instead of wondering “Why me?” I considered that the experience could help shape my character rather than define me. I decided to trust God to heal my hurt and started to see myself as His beautiful, special creation.

Today, I am a college senior, living a new-normal life full of love and the potential that I can be great. I’m also a licensed sexual assault advocate, helping survivors rediscover their voices like I’ve found mine. More than 200,000 women are raped yearly. One in six women experiences rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. Most don’t report the crime. Though the memory lingers, every day gets easier. I have stopped waiting for a way around the wall. I am climbing it instead.

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. If you have survived rape, molestation or incest, you don’t need to suffer alone. Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800.656.HOPE. For resources,

including rape crisis centers in your area, visit the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (www.rainn.org).

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