



Changing Lives, Minds, and
Communities through Jesus Christ

Coming Back from the Unspeakable Crime

by Bob Van Domelen

The various Wisconsin prison cells that I occupied for almost three years were very similar: a simple bunk, a small table or desk, and a barred window that opened no more than a few inches.

Other inmates nearby me had committed murder, rape, armed robbery, and other crimes. My sentence: first- and second-degree sexual assault involving young men.

The events that eventually led up to my imprisonment started many years earlier.

Like any young child, I loved to be held. One evening when I was about six years old, I climbed onto my father's lap to kiss him goodnight. My mother abruptly interrupted me, "Don't you think that you are getting a little too old for that?" I hesitated, then climbed down and offered only a verbal "good night, Daddy." I never again held or kissed my father.

Several years later, some older boys initiated sexual activity with me. I was scared at first, but came to enjoy those times of intimacy.

In the years that followed, I found other boys who responded to my encouragement for the same type of physical contact. For a few brief moments, my great need for love and touch were answered.

When I was 16, my dad died of diabetes. I tried to cry but the tears came with great difficulty, as though something inside of me had shut down.

The Slippery Slope into Sin

In college I lost my heterosexual virginity in an effort to convince myself that I was nor-

mal. While I had no problem finding physical pleasure with women, the most meaningful relationships to me occurred with male peers.

When I was a college freshman, an older man in a public restroom propositioned me. Soon I went to such places often. For a while I clung to the idea that such behavior was just experimentation.

After graduation, I got a job as a teacher. One Sunday afternoon, I stood in the shower room of a local school after a swim. A young man was there. He seemed to watch every move I made. When I smiled, so did he. I suggested that he might like to come to my apartment. He agreed.

After having sex, I asked him "Why did you let me do this to you?"

"Today is my fifteenth birthday. I just wanted to find out what it was like to love a man."

I panicked and thought, *I'm a teacher and I just assaulted this kid! Please God, don't let me get caught, and it'll never happen again.* But it did happen again.

When I was a teacher, most of my students called me "Dad" and openly shared their hurts and hopes with me. The absence of their own fathers made them vulnerable to me. Before the end of any school year, I would be sexually involved with at least one of the male students.

Fighting the Flesh

I met my wife during my first weeks as a teacher, and I married with the hope that a heterosexual relationship might correct my own distorted life.

There were many nights when I lay awake and prayed that God would release me from the darkness. Tears flowed at the terrible thought of losing my wife and family, but my prayers always ended, *Please, don't let me get caught.*

In April 1985, a student from 14 years earlier returned to our town to confront me. When he confronted me about how many other young men I had abused, I lied and told him "none." He sensed that I was not telling him the truth, and so he went to the police. Within days, the police had arrested me, and the media soon aired all of the information about my arrest.

Deeply ashamed, I frequently thought about committing suicide.

A year passed from the day of my arrest to the day of my sentencing. During that time, God's healing love worked on me as individuals and then a prayer group taught me how to seek God's presence. At first I sought their God, their experiences. Eventually I learned to pursue my own personal relationship with God. I desperately needed to believe that I—Bob Van Domelen—was worth saving.

The hardest part of the final court appearance was listening to the court clerk read out the charges against me. A year had passed, spent free from pornography and behavior hiding in dark secrecy. I wanted to scream, "I am not the same person that you are reading about!"

Whenever I was given the chance, I offered a sincere apology to all those I had harmed, although I am not sure who—if anyone—believed me at the time. Then the judge

sentenced me to serve five years in prison and 10 more on probation.

Word spread quickly among inmates in the county jail where I waited for transfer to the state prison. It wasn't long before handmade signs appeared on my bed frame announcing that I was a "baby raper." Lewd remarks were usually included, along with comments that I was not fit to live. I rarely slept more than 15 to 20 minutes at a time.

While I was in prison I spent many hours every day reading through the Bible. No matter where I was sent within Wisconsin's prison system, I attended as many of the available Bible studies as I was allowed to. At a Prison Fellowship meeting one week, I met the director of a local Exodus International outreach, Bill Windel, who gave me permission to call him collect whenever I felt a need.

Darkness Turns to Light

Upon release from prison, I drove 120 miles round trip every week from my small town to Madison, Wisconsin, to attend Bill's support group, Broken Yoke. Bill's witness and love gave me the courage to believe that sharing my own testimony could make a difference for others.

My healing process is firmly grounded in the knowledge that God loves me. I surrender

my whole life to Him on a daily basis. As I have grown spiritually, I have become more keenly aware of my choices, rather than simply giving in to compulsive behavior. I now look at young men far differently than I did years ago, no longer feeding off their vulnerability in order to find completion within myself.

Pornography no longer has the control over my life it once did, but I am vulnerable in this and in other areas. I avoid adult bookstores, and I say a quick prayer before entering public restrooms. Temptations offer only empty promises of fulfillment.

I have a freedom that I do not want to lose. A freedom built on what God has done and what He promises to do in my life.

Some years ago I spoke at a church, and I felt God encouraging me to confess the sins that had brought me to prison. Afterward a woman came to me and opened her arms in what was clearly an invitation for a hug. As I stepped forward, she said, "I am Sue—Oscar's mother." With a sudden shock I realized that I had been sexually involved with her son years ago when he was one of my students.

I accepted the hug with an earnest plea for forgiveness. She told me that Oscar was now a minister in a large city. She added, "Up until a few months ago, I really hated you."

She then explained, "One day I was sharing about some of my hurt with my pastor's wife, and she mentioned Broken Yoke." And when Sue told her son about me, he responded, "I have been praying for that man ever since he was my teacher." I have since written to Oscar and asked for his forgiveness.

In 1997, Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson appointed me to serve on the board of directors for the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board. On December 12, 1998, I successfully completed my 10 years of probation.

Many people—including Christians— may say that there is no hope for someone like me. But they are wrong. As Christ occupies more and more of my life, I am changed into the man of God that He created me to be. My prison doors have opened, and now I am walking free.

Bob Van Domelen produces two newsletters: Wellspring, dealing with homosexual issues, and Into the Light, which focuses on sexual addictions. If you would like to be put on a mailing list to receive one free for one year, please write to: Broken Yoke Ministries, P.O. Box 5824, De Pere, WI 54115-5824.

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