



The *Poetry of Abuse* Collection

Selected poems by
Christine Hagion Rzepka

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third edition



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Domestic Violence

Feelings on a Carousel
Encased in a Box
I, The Butterfly
The Rose
The Bridge, Continually Burning
Survivor
Broken
Wounded

Child Abuse

My Constant Companions
On Life, Death, and Hell
If You Really Wanted To

Healing

Excavation
A Prisoner, Released
Thief
Tears in a Bottle
For My Guardian Angel
A Warrior of Peace



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Domestic Violence



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FEELINGS ON A CAROUSEL

*This poem was written while the author was still in her abusive relationship.
It was only years later that she realized it describes the Cycle of Violence.*

Feelings
 riding on a carousel
Rising in heights of ecstasy
 only to fall
 to the depths of despair.

I am the gentle rider
 and you, the wild stallion
 prancing to the melody
of this circular utopia.

We go around and round,
 endlessly spinning, reeling in circles
in cycles, a series of ups and downs
 forever riding, yet
 never quite reaching our destination.

Feelings,
 yours and mine,
riding on a carousel...
See my smile light my face,
 watch my tears as they fall—
As I reach out to lift you up,
 you only let me down.

Christine Hagion
May 1983

ENCASED IN A BOX

*This poem was written to describe how a battered woman loses her identity
in the midst of her abusive relationship.*

I was whole, loving
trusting you.
Seduced by my anxieties
I merged with you
and lost my identity.
For in your eyes, I
do not exist.

I became the mirror of your image of me
having no self outside you.
Your world became my reason for being—
your happiness was my only concern,
your disappointment, my failure.

I am ornamental,
yet valueless:
a mere reflection of
what and who I once was...

Your lover,
Now, your hostage
imprisoned in this framework—
broken.

All that is left are splinters,
jagged pieces of glass,
the fragments of my being
Encased in a box,
tightly wrapped and sealed
with masking tape of false bravado.
Appearing whole,
yet remaining shattered.

Christine Hagion
Winter 1984

I, THE BUTTERFLY

*Victims of domestic violence often feel trapped in their relationship.
This poem addresses the feelings of yearning for freedom from abuse.*

Long ago,
A woman in love existed
free, and softly
I, the butterfly
with golden wings
flew into the trap of your open arms,
attracted and enraptured by your spell.

With seductive mystery
you spun the cocoon,
enveloping me within your love,
lulling me to complacency
with your sweetly disguised whispers
till I regressed to the poise of a caterpillar
with nonexistent grace,
lethargically inching along
going nowhere
but to hide in the leaves....

And deep within my heart, I yearn
to fly free again
alone and unhindered
high in the sky,
touching the clouds
exploring my world
rediscovering myself in the
metamorphosis of growth.

I, the butterfly
a creature of beauty
and capable of flight, I
break through the smothering cocoon
and take to my wings
to fly among those free in heart.

Christine Hagion
Spring 1985

THE ROSE

*As part of her healing, the survivor must mourn the loss of the relationship,
even if it was abusive. It is hard to let go of someone you love.
Many well-meaning loved ones may not understand this,
but the grieving process is critical for the survivor
to be able to let go of the past and embrace her future.*

On a sunny Spring morning,
a gold rose opens
to the beauty of the day—
to the warm gentle breeze
and the sweet, melodic tune of the chirping birds,

The long stem, intricately woven,
its glory set
into a beautiful bouquet
of baby's breath, lace, and ribbon—
symbolic of love's vows to be eternal.

Time goes on, the glory of the rose fades,
to brown, wilted petals
that once spoke of love's great passion.
Pressed in a book, long forgotten.

Opened years later, the rose is dead
its life drained away
as did the promise of love it once witnessed.
It lives on, only
in bittersweet memory.

Christine Hagion
Summer 1984

THE BRIDGE, CONTINUALLY BURNING

As a survivor moves along in her healing process, she comes to a stage where she resolves to never again allow herself to consider going back to the abusive relationship.

While it is a slow and painful process, this is a necessary step.

It is also one she revisits again and again, as a reminder to herself to never allow someone to abuse her in the future.

Memories of years gone by
the seductive swirl of ashes in the sunlight
blowing about in the cold wind,
bringing to mind
the bridge, long ago burned.....

A wooden bridge of love
spanning the chasm between you and me
seemingly strong and enduring
yet splintering, crumbling,
not able to withstand
the burdensome weight
of abusive elements.

Remembering, I see the bridge,
flames leaping and dancing happily
ever burning, destroying
the destructive memories.

How cleansing and soothing was
the charred wood, the smell of smoke
purging my soul of pain
in the all-consuming fire...
Only ashes remain as evidence.

Years later, the howling wind
scatters the melancholy ashes of my memory
—a bittersweet smell in the icy air,
I close my eyes to shut out the pain
and recall once more
The bridge, continually burning
never again to be crossed...
Engulfed in flames
that, in my mind,
can never be extinguished.

Christine Hagion
Spring 1985

SURVIVOR

*This poem was written specifically for the
Santa Clara County Domestic Violence Council's Clothesline Project.
It tells of a domestic homicide survivor's story
and of the enduring legacy of domestic violence.*

... from a pool of blood
I emerged
my body fractured,
my soul wounded...

you left my motionless carcass, thinking me dead
yet I escaped from your murderous rage
I slipped though your possessive clutches.

You can no longer control me.

The child in me you sought to kill
lives on, victorious

You will never see your daughter.
Never witness her graduation,
never give her away at her wedding,
never look into her eyes and see
the fire within

Never explain to her innocent heart
why you tried to snuff out her life
before it had even begun.....

Christine Hagion Rzepka
Fall 2000

BROKEN

This poem was written for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, 2000

Broken...

your promises
to love, to honor, to cherish
to not hurt
to not hit
...again
to listen

Broken...

my jaw, my knee, my arm, my eardrum, my lip
my heart

Broken...

my trust in you
in others
in myself

Broken...

my dreams
our love
our future

Broken...

my self
my being
my spirit
my will to live

Broken...

by you.

Christine Hagion
Fall 2000

WOUNDED

Until recently, domestic violence was considered only in terms of physical abuse resulting in injury. However, many battered women recount that the verbal abuse they suffered was even more hurtful than the physical blows.

In the words of one survivor, "Sometimes I wished he would just hit me and get it over with. That would have been so much easier than dealing with the ongoing verbal abuse."

Broken bones heal and bruises fade, but words disguised as weapons wound the very soul.

The bodies of the broken ones
lay helpless, trampled
...again
on the battlefield
wincing, bloodied, throbbing with pain
unable to escape
to safety.

Unexploded bombs
of unresolved issues
scattered in plain sight
in the battleground
that has become our home.

Vulnerable to attack
from all sides, at any moment
I retreat, wounded
From the land mine that is your heart.

All this carnage
—so much devastation
by one man, so heavily armoured
wielding a solitary weapon:
your tongue.

Feb. 2004
Christine Hagion Rzepka



Child Abuse



My Constant Companions
On Life, Death, and Hell
If You Really Wanted To

MY CONSTANT COMPANIONS

*For the victims of child abuse and witnesses of domestic violence,
the effects of abuse are far-reaching. This poem was written by the author at age 13,
while in the midst of an abusive home environment,
and tells the tragic story that is so familiar to so many.*

Fear

...a friend that has guided me
Mistrust and Worry
...confidants in my heart.
My constant companions,
enabling me to survive
in a world where tears abound
and hopes fail
—continuously...

Happiness

...an elusive goal
Peace
...a complete stranger
Joy
...an unknown entity
—one which is sought after
yet never found

The blackness of night
is a microcosm of my soul,
where despair and terror reign
in unshakeable mastery
and death is a welcome friend
providing the triumph of surcease.

Christy
1975

IF YOU REALLY WANTED TO

*This poem offers a glimpse back in time, revisiting childhood abuse
and an important lesson that remained unlearned.*

Written in honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, 2005

If you really wanted to
cut my hair,
why couldn't you have used
a pair of scissors
instead of a chainsaw?

If you really wanted to
thank me for the blueberry pie
I made you for your birthday,
Why didn't you give me a compliment
Instead of a bullet?

If you really wanted to
teach me table manners,
why not start with a lesson
in etiquette, instead of
stabbing me with your dinner fork
till my blood mingled with the ketchup?

If you really wanted to
change the circumstances
of our life together,
you should have chosen
to change yourself
instead of our address.

Christine Hagion Rzepka
Sept. 2005

ON LIFE, DEATH, AND HELL

*This poem was written in honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, 2005
and tells of the hellish existence that is the everyday reality for victims of abuse.*

Some people fear hell
—a lake of fire
Separation from God,
a place of eternal torment.

But hell, for me, is not
an aftermath of life;
a destination after death.
Hell is the here and now
a never-ending trauma
not a place, but a lifestyle.

Hell is waking up each morning
wishing that you had not.
Hell is praying every minute
for the moment that life ends.
Hell is waiting for help
that never comes.
Hell is hoping for a helping hand
that will not stab me in the back.

Hell is telling the story
that no one wants to hear
to someone who doesn't listen,
and couldn't care less anyway.

Christine Hagion Rzepka
Sept. 2005



Excavation
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Tears in a Bottle
For My Guardian Angel
Warrior of Peace

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Christine Hagion Rzepka
Sept. 2005

EXCAVATION

*This poem was inspired by the rescuers at Ground Zero, Sept. 11, 2001,
yet it was written to depict the devastation of abuse upon one's life,
and the necessity to be rescued from it.*

From underneath the rubble
You heard
the final gasps,
struggling for pained breath
the death whispers
calling my name.
I could not cry out for help
And yet
You heard my cry.

Beneath the crushing weight
of immense boulders of pain,
the debris of false hope
and wrong choices,
my lifeless body lay,
unable to extract itself.
My soul, murdered;
my heart
deprived of strength
unable to muster the courage
to beat again.
My hand, gone blue:
outstretched in surrender
reaching out for deliverance
laying open, toward the heavens.

Surveying the damage
You walked amidst
The destruction of the temple
and saw, and bore witness to
the cadavers of the broken ones.
Carefully, so as not to topple
large fragments
of the demolished structure,
You reached out to save me.

The fires of hell burning around me,
acid smoke, choking the life
out of my throat—
Death, so certain
The ultimate escape
from pain.

Latter rain
falling from heaven
cleansing, reviving...

Digging
with your own bare hands,
You uncovered me
from rocks of despair
and fallen I-beams of shame.

Completely obliterated
—the temple built by my own hand
The structure in which I once trusted.
Not one brick
was left atop another;
Only the cornerstone remained
unchanged.

Toiling through the day
You worked diligently to recover me;
sweat dripping from Your brow,
calling out my name
telling me to have no fear.

But hope had died
when you reached me.
My heart, gone silent
As my life blood flowed into the dust.

As Hercules, You lifted me
bloodied and broken,
 cradling me in Your strength
and breathed into me
the breath of life.
Binding up my wounds
 With Your healing touch,
You led me out of my destruction
 into the light of day.

As I look back upon
Your daring rescue, I
Am once again humbled
 Awe-struck;
My mouth agape in wonder,
in gratitude.

I owe my life to You
 and will never forget
each breath
 that I have been given
 came at the cost
of Your sacrifice.

Christine Hagion Rzepka
Fall, 2003

A PRISONER, RELEASED

*Venturing from the mindset of a victim to one of a survivor is likened in this poem
to being released from solitary confinement in a prison.*

Shackled and chained
to a wall of despair
unable to escape
judgment
for past sins:
wrongs I'd done
as well as those committed against me
-a legacy of wickedness and evil.

Day after hopeless day
in darkness
confined to a solitary existence
a void
in which there was no light.

The smell of death,
the stench of rotting flesh
ever wafting in the dampness
amidst the other lonely souls
in the dungeon
we crafted ourselves.

Blinding light
pierces the blackness
clanking loudly, the chains fall
breaking the deafening silence.

Released from a life sentence,
Freedom beckons me
to come toward the Light.

My limbs now able to run, unfettered
to Him, who purchased my pardon
at an astounding price.

Christine Hagion Rzepka
Fall, 2003

(Rom. 8:24; Rom. 7:5, 11; Eph. 2:12, 13; Rom. 8:1, 2; Eph. 5:14, 8; Rom. 5:18)

THIEF

Of all the tasks involved in seeking healing, forgiveness is perhaps the most difficult. Our human nature demands retribution and seeks justice; but often, there is no justice to be found. It is only when we are willing to lay down our claim for vengeance that true healing can begin, for until that time, we are ever tied to victimhood. Forgiveness breaks that tie with our past, and ushers us into the light of freedom.

In just a few minutes,
you changed my life
—completely.

You stole from me
my virginity
my innocence
my dignity
—and left me to wallow
in tears of shame and loss.

I was given a life sentence
to a prison of fear and guilt
for the crime you committed.
But I was granted clemency—
my shame and pain
washed away.

That which you defiled
has now been cleansed.
The fear that once encompassed me,
broken off,
like chains about my feet.

Amazing
that such freedom
would be found from release—
from vengeful thoughts
and secret wishes of harm
...for retribution.

The blood that cleansed me
flowed also for the thief
who hung next to my Lord
on the day of propitiation.

Condemned to death,
he was granted mercy
by the God of Justice
who pleads for the innocent,
as well as for the guilty.

He bled also for another thief—
you, my rapist
and, at the foot of the cross
we both stand, redeemed.

Christine Hagion Rzepka
May 2005

TEARS IN A BOTTLE

*Hard as it may be to believe, there comes a time in one's healing process
where the pain of the past becomes only a distant memory.*

You have seen every tear I've cried
watched it crawl down my swollen, bruised cheek
listened quietly, attentively
as I poured out my heart to You.

Each teardrop You have captured
in a bottle
bottle after bottle, stored up
—an entire bottling plant
under Your stewardship.

You heard every desperate whisper
each vain plea for release
...seemingly unanswered
until the appointed time
when my Light had come
and the darkness had to flee—
now Your glory has risen upon me.

Yet there remains a day coming
when every tear shall be wiped away
by Your tender, scarred hands
and each bottle that You have reserved
will be melted in the flames
of Your all-consuming fire;
each teardrop transformed
into a tiny grain of sand
on the beaches of eternity.

Christine Hagion Rzepka
Oct. 2005

[Psa. 34:15, 18; 40:31; 56:8; 142:1, 2; 145:18; Isa. 60:1; Heb. 10:29; Rev. 7:17; 21:4]

FOR MY GUARDIAN ANGEL

*Even those who have endured the most horrendous abuse can recall
times of suffering that could have been much worse.*

*Once in a place of safety and healing, many are able to see —
some, for the first time —that by the mercy of One greater than ourselves,
we had been spared from a worse evil than that which had befallen us.*

Valiant one,
shining bright, like lightning
powerful and mighty—
forever on guard
watchful over me.

How many times
has your repose been interrupted?
I have lost count...

Your finger in the barrel
of the Saturday Night Special;
your heavenly body
spread out
as a safety net
to catch me
at the bottom of the stairs;
your hands, snatching me away:
—from the path of the knife
—from the blades of the garbage disposal
—from the whirl of the power tools
—from the orbit of the vehicles
—from the power of the pills
—from the strong hands
that sought to crush me
—from the cold, from the hunger,
from the pain
—from the custody of the enemy.

Though I was in danger
on your watch
no harm befell me;
you became my body armor
flanking me on the left and on the right;
it did not come near to me—
your skillful moves
deflecting each fatal blow.

Courageous soldier
in the valley of the shadow
of death
you marched alongside of me
in lock-step formation,
calling out a cadence I did not know
but instinctively followed nonetheless.

What medals of honor can I bestow
in recognition of your faithful service?
I can give only honor and gratitude.
somehow, “thank you”
doesn’t seem quite enough.

Christine Hagion Rzepka
Oct. 2005

[Psa. 23:4; 33:18-20; 34:7; 44:5-7; 91:7; 145:19b, 20a; Heb. 1:14]

A WARRIOR OF PEACE

Some former victims of abuse remain bitter and wounded: many of these go on to lives of isolation and withdrawal; some become perpetrators themselves. Yet there are also many who have survived abuse in various forms and have instead aggressively sought and obtained healing. Of these, there are a few who have chosen (or feel called) to re-enter the arena of abuse in order to rescue others caught in the same trap.

Baking in the sun
amidst the valley, scattered about
my dry bones lay
on the desert floor,
bleached white, lifeless.

Suddenly, a powerful gust of air
as of a rushing mighty wind
swirls about
bony fragments, reconnected;
solitary bones rejoined
the skeleton formed by Your hand
has come to life.

As the wind whirls,
joints and muscles materialized
where before there had been nothing.
You added skin and hair—
What a marvelous miracle!
—You breathed into me
life, strength, wisdom, and power.

From desolation, You brought about
a mighty army.
Entrusting and instructing me,
You gave me a sword, a shield, a
breastplate, a helmet
and gave me the courage
to do battle with the demons of my past.

Once a helpless victim,
Defeated and dead
—yet not forsaken—
You raised me up to be Your soldier
A warrior of peace;
rescuing and defending
those who have been taken captive
by the enemy, at his will;
returning and restoring them
to wholeness
by the unparalleled power
of Your spoken Word.

Christine Hagion Rzepka
Oct. 2005

[Ez. 37:1-10; Eph. 6:16-17; Heb. 13:5b; II Tim. 2:25, 26; Psa. 119:25]



About the Author

Christine Hagion Rzepka is a survivor of child abuse and attempted incest. In her adolescence, she was a witness to the domestic violence directed toward her mother by her stepfather. When she was 15, she was raped by her stepbrother, resulting in a miscarriage. At age 16, she entered the foster care system after a suicide attempt, resulting from her brother's attempts to murder her.

Later, as an adult, Christine fell in love and married a man who became abusive. Within months, he had dislocated her jaw, broken her wrist, and injured both her knees to keep her from running away from him. One night in a murderous rage, after beating her for hours, he strangled her and left her for dead – but she didn't die. She regained consciousness hours later and fled to a battered women's shelter, five months pregnant, with black eyes and multiple broken bones.

Knowing that her abuser would not be content to let her go, and believing his threats to hunt her down and kill her if she ever left him, Christine changed her name to protect her own identity and that of her unborn child. She relocated several hundreds of miles away for her safety and even had reconstructive surgery to repair the damage to her face, which had the happy consequence of also changing her appearance.

Her child miraculously survived the attempted murder. Christine has worked hard to rebuild her life and struggled for 10 years to put herself through school as a working single mother, earning both her bachelor's and master's degrees. Christine is remarried, and now enjoys a loving, nonviolent family relationship with her husband and her two adult daughters.

Christine has worked with victims of abuse for over 20 years, and founded a nonprofit organization, The Ripple Effect, in 1998 to focus on the prevention of domestic violence. Christine served two terms as a commissioner on Santa Clara County's Domestic Violence Council. She continues to serve on the Family/Domestic Violence Prevention Advisory Board for the City of San José, as she has since its inception. Recognizing the need for a faith-based intervention for abuse victims, she began The Lazarus Project in 2001 to minister to Christian victims and survivors of abuse. She is an ordained minister through the Association of Evangelical Gospel Assemblies and serves as a lay pastor at GateWay City Church. Christine is a graduate of Impact School of Ministry, and is pursuing her doctorate at Trinity Theological Seminary.

Christine began writing poetry about her abuse experience to aid her in the process of healing. She later discovered, in sharing her poems, that others found healing through them as well. The Poetry of Abuse collection has since been shared with other domestic violence agencies nationally and is used by educational programs around the world to create awareness of abuse and the ability to heal from it.

Christine is available to speak at workshops, conferences and church retreats.
Call (408) 225-2381 for booking information.



Have these poems helped you in your healing process?
Are you using these poems to help bring awareness to your community?

Christine would love to hear from you!

Readers are encouraged to write the author at:

The Ripple Effect
PO Box 36106
San Jose CA 95158

*May God richly bless you,
and may you learn to live a life free from abuse!*

The Poetry of Abuse Collection
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by The Ripple Effect

The use of any of the poems in the *Poetry of Abuse* Collection is encouraged by individuals and non-profits for educational purposes in order to promote awareness of the devastating impact of domestic violence. However, authors desiring to use these poems for inclusion in a book or article for profit should contact the author for permission.

For more information on The Ripple Effect, visit www.the-ripple-effect.info.

To arrange an interview, workshop, or conference presentation by the author, contact (408) 225-2381.