

County teen says Spiritual Care Consultants saved her life!

By Elaine Gilbert

Contributing Writer

A childhood marred by several separations from her parents and the haunting self-imposed false belief that she was responsible for her baby brother's death were shattering for Emily. The Barry County girl even attempted suicide during one of the dark times in her young life.

Intervening as bright lights in Emily's life were Hastings-based Spiritual Care Consultants (SCC) and her loving grandparents. Emily, not her real name to protect her identity, credits Spiritual Care for saving her life.

At various times from age 7 through 17, Emily has received free consulting services from SCC, a Christian nonprofit organization that helps children go through a healing process from events in their lives that have kept them from living a healthy and joy-filled life.

"Emily is an example of how childhood trauma can affect a person's life," said her SCC consultant, who also wishes to be anonymous for this article. "Healing from trauma is a long process. At Spiritual Care, we just want every kid to reach their God-given potential. We want the kids to know that they are treasures."

The death of Emily's three-month-old baby brother from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome turned her life upside down.

"CPS [Child Protective Services] took my two younger sisters and I from our home," she said, noting that her grandparents took classes to acquire a foster parents license so Emily and her siblings could live with them.

"After my brother died, I was just numb. I didn't cry," Emily said. "I didn't go to school for a month. I was 7 ... I was depressed, and I didn't even know what depression was."

Her grandparents made an appointment for Emily at Spiritual Care Consultants 'where they can make you feel better,' they told her.

"At the time, I can remember I lost all faith in God. I didn't believe because I had prayed, begging God not to take my only brother," Emily said. "That's the one thing He did was take my only brother and managed to take my mom and dad away from me. I still had my siblings, but they were too young to understand what was happening.

"For the longest time I really believed that it [my brother's death] was my fault because I had this vision put inside my head; it was more like a dream that I was the one who woke him up and gave him a bottle and put him back to sleep," she said. "But, what really happened was my sisters and I woke up and my dad was just getting home from his third-shift job ... My dad gave my brother a bottle because he woke up and was crying. My dad put him back to sleep."

"... The next thing I know my dad was telling my sisters and I to go in our bedroom, and he was waking my mom up and she's calling the ambulance and my dad was giving my brother CPR," Emily said.

Recalling her first session at Spiritual Care, Emily remembers being given crayons and paper and told to draw a picture of how she was feeling and then drawing a large hook representing herself and another representing God's hook.

"I was told to put all my problems on God's hook, and He will take them all away from you and the weight will be lifted off your shoulders," she said, noting she was thinking "that's not how life works. You can't just take your problems and give them to somebody else." However, she has learned that God is always willing to carry the burden of your problems.

"I was going [to SCC] twice a week for about three months, then once a week, then every other week

and then once a month. I was slowly getting better. After awhile, when I was about 9 or 10, I thought to myself, I guess God is there. I guess that He does want to help, and He does do what He does for a reason,” Emily said.

During what SCC calls an “inner healing time,” she recalled being touched by the presence of the Lord. “A lot of people today don't understand this type of thing, but the Lord was healing her from her pain,” her consultant said.

“Yes,” Emily agreed. “After going through that, I remember I felt myself relax. I knew that God had been there the whole time [when my baby brother died]. I felt myself get better in that moment. I felt myself heal in that moment.

“After that, I went [to SCC] a couple more times, and then I stopped going for a little bit because my mom and dad got custody of us again. We moved back into the house where my brother had died. We were there for about two years after that. My mom and dad had another baby [boy] in about 2010. They had him in August and in December, two days before Christmas, our house burned down.”

Before the fire, Emily remembers everyone helping to paint her new brother's bedroom.

“I actually felt like a normal child,” Emily said. “We were all so happy. After the fire, we had to go live with my aunt and uncle's for a bit. Then we were taken away [from my parents] again.”

Emily knew she had to go back to SCC “because I felt myself slowly losing myself again. I told my grandma, it was not like we were away from our family because all of us kids were put in the same house, and we were put with my grandparents each time. But it was hard ... We were ripped away again from our parents that we cared about so much.

“I started going back to Spiritual Care, and I felt better,” Emily said.

SCC equips children with tools to help them deal with their emotions and feelings they experience on the inside, her consultant said.

“I think it's important to note in our process that kids and families can come back for what we call a tune-up where they come back in and they get some help for a brief period of time, and then they take off. So they are always with us if they want to come back; it's all about follow-up and case management,” said the consultant.

Continuing to talk of her life experiences, Emily said, “I went from second grade to seventh grade thinking it was my fault that my brother had died. The way my dad put it, the devil inserted this vision in my head to make me doubt myself and my self-worth.

“In seventh grade, it really hit me that my brother had died. I really started thinking it was my fault, so I started cutting myself. Honestly, I don't know why I started doing that. My scars have faded a lot. I have this one scar that reminds me every day of the time I sat in my bathroom, and I was really going to end it all,” said Emily, who was 12 at the time. “I sat in my bathroom and cried and cried. I had the blade to my wrist, and I was going to go down. I had my back up against the bathroom door, and my sister, who was probably 7 at the time, went to walk in the bathroom and my blade slipped so I didn't get the chance to actually do it.”

A student at Emily's school told someone in the office that she was cutting herself, and Emily said she always will be grateful for that student's intervention.

“I got suspended for a week and wasn't allowed to come back [to school] until I had proof that I sought out help. That's when my grandma called Spiritual Care again,” she said.

Emily and her siblings had been removed from their home again and were back at her grandparents because “both my parents were on drugs. My mom had been caught making a meth lab in our garage while my dad was out of town for work. Emily's mom was pregnant again and the children stayed at their grandparents another three months after another baby brother was born in Feb. 2012.

"I had hit rock bottom. In my head, I thought, where am I supposed to go from here? I'm at the bottom. I cannot be more thankful for my grandpa (who is now deceased) because he told me every day, 'You can only go up from the bottom,'" Emily said as tears ran down her cheeks. "He said, 'you can choose to get help and be a better person or you can choose to stay at rock bottom and become worse than you are and go through the other side and become a bad person.'

"My grandpa saying that really helped me because when I went back to Spiritual Care, I got the 'I Am' statements, and I repeated them in my head everyday: "I am strong; I am healed; I am not broken ..."

SCC also gave Emily a notebook and was told to write in it every day to keep track of how each day went for her, how she felt and what she was going to do to make herself better. She started going to SCC twice each week and talked to her consultant about what she had written in the notebook.

"I finally got better," she said.

A key component to getting rid of the false guilt about her first brother's death was the close relationship she had with her father.

"My dad was my best friend. We would sit and talk at night."

During one of those conversations, Emily asked her dad to tell her about her deceased baby brother when he was alive. She also apologized to him. He asked her why she was apologizing, and she explained to him that the baby's death was her fault because "if I hadn't put him in the crib with a bottle and if I wouldn't have put him right to sleep, he wouldn't have died."

Her dad told her, 'You didn't do any of that. It wasn't your fault.' That's when he told me that the devil put something in my head to make me feel it was my fault. I felt normal again."

Still concerned about Emily, her grandparents and father had Emily tested by a physician to find out if she was still depressed.

"I was diagnosed with critical severe depression, and I was told that I was probably never going to heal from it - that I would have it for the rest of my life because I had such traumatic experiences as a kid," Emily said.

"Spiritual Care helped me a lot. If I hadn't gone, I'd probably either be dead or in a mental hospital right now," she said. "It's sad to say, but I sometimes still have the thoughts: Would somebody notice if I ended it all; how long would it take them to know if I was at the edge getting ready to fall?"

"I wouldn't be here without Spiritual Care. I wouldn't be 17 years old, working two jobs, paying for everything by myself and not relying on anybody. I hit the bottom, and then I did what my grandpa said, and I went up. I didn't want to become like my parents and rely on drugs to live and like drugs more than I liked my kids. I did not want to be that person," Emily said.

She wants everyone to know that SCC "is a place where you can go that is not therapy, and there's not someone trying to put you on medications to make you feel better. You are not going to be judged and God is going to help you."

In April of this year, Emily went back to SCC for another tune-up.

"I found myself slipping back into my old ways," she said. "I was getting depressed really fast, so I called Spiritual Care ... It's hard. Depression is a thing that is real, and a lot of people suffer from it. I'm one of those people, but I know there is a way to get better, and I seek help for myself every time that I need it.

"I am OK today. I feel content ... I'm happy. If I had waited to get help, I wouldn't be happy. I struggle with self-confidence, but every single day I use my 'I am' statements and tell myself I am beautiful, strong, independent and loved. I write it [my feelings] down in my journal and then read them to my consultant," Emily said.

"Being able to tell somebody who is not family makes me feel better because my family, I feel, would

pity me almost. I don't want people's pity or want them to feel sad for me. I'm not upset for myself. I'm doing super amazing right now despite the fact that I needed help," she said.

Her consultant noted, "This is why investing in them when they are young is so important. She is going to turn out to be a whole different person. She has been told that she is breaking barriers in her family because she didn't want to follow. She would be a different person if she had never gone through SCC's healing process. She's more healthy and able to go out into the world and fill the potential that God has for her. She has been equipped with tools to help her the rest of her life. She will probably teach them to her own kids."

Emily is looking forward to graduating from high school next year, and she plans to join the U.S. Air Force and wants to study both diesel mechanics (an interest sparked by her dad) and social work in college.

"I want to be able to help children who are in places where they may be abused or hurt or being taken advantage. I want to be able to help kids because I know what it is like to need help. I want to be able to be there and help children who need help," she said.

In the future, Emily wants to be a foster parent, instead of having her own kids, "because there are still people in this world struggling to find love. There are still kids who are 16 or 17 and don't know what it feels like to be loved because they've lived their whole lives in the street or in the system because their parents gave them up. I want to be able to go and help children who don't know what love feels like," she said.

Emily's story is just one of many, said her consultant. That's why SCC is launching a fundraiser in June to benefit its children's fund. Last month, a record 98 children received free services from SCC. The monthly average is 85 children.

Events from the past are dealt with in a way children understand through SCC's "Heart of Healing" process. In addition, "New Pathways," which are new ways of thinking tools, are introduced to help children remain in a place of wellness in their spirits, souls and bodies.

Besides seeing children in its office in the Family Tree Medical building in Hastings, SCC also works directly in the Maple Valley and Delton Kellogg school districts.

SCC also provides consulting services to adults.

All services are free because of generous donations from businesses, foundations and individuals.