



Interview with Debbie – a rape victim of Robert Power

By Ines Aubert

First published in the lifespark newsletter, January 2011

Preface – Robert Power, death row inmate in Florida

After having committed a long row of various crimes in different states, Robert Power was arrested in 1987 and later given a death sentence. In his last three weeks on the streets, he raped five girls and a young woman. The last rape victim, a girl of 12 years named Angeli, was killed during the rape.

Through lifespark, Ines became Robert's pen pal three years ago, and they soon began a very intense and lively discussion about all kinds of topics. Robert talked in detail about his former life and about his crimes. In prison, he became a Christian and wished to apologize to all of his victims. Unfortunately, Robert didn't manage to find an official person who would help him to locate and address them. It is almost impossible to find victims as a private person. Restorative Justice tried to help, but it was too late. So, Robert's wish remained unfulfilled until his death.

Together with Robert, Ines wrote many dialogues and texts because both wanted to share their thoughts and show the public that people can change, and that it is possible to be friends with a person who committed such heinous crimes.

Robert died of cancer on December 3, and the same day an article about him appeared in the Floridian newspaper, Orlando Sentinel.

In the comment section below the article in the online version of the newspaper, readers posted comments. The comments were mostly mean, but some writers were obviously familiar with the case and even knew Angeli's family.

After reading this, Ines posted a short comment, as well, saying she had been a pen pal of Robert and that he had wanted to apologize to his victims.

Debbie, one of his victims, then wrote a reply and explained she had forgiven Robert. Ines read this and asked her to please get in contact with her. She left a trace so that Debbie and other people could find the article she had written with Robert

<http://www.lifespark.org/download/reports-interviews/the-big-challenge-aubert.pdf>
and also her e-mail address in the "contact us" section of the lifespark homepage.

Debbie did so, and on December 8, five days after Robert's death, she contacted Ines by e-mail. Since then, they have remained in contact.

The interview

Debbie, it appears to be a wonder that I found you and I'm very happy that you agreed to be interviewed. Before we begin with the interview, can you tell us how you feel about the past four weeks?

These past four weeks have been surreal. When I received the call on December 3, 2010 that Robert Power was deceased, it started out a day like any other day, but would soon become like a day I had never experienced nor ever thought I would this side of heaven.

It was 7:43 in the morning and my first class was due to start at 8:00 am. I am in community college; aspiring to be a faith-based counselor. Time stood still in that moment, and I can assure you my reaction was certainly not one that I expected (at one time I would have broken out in song and dance and celebrated). As I listened to the pre-recorded message that would spur on the events to come, I shed a tear. I did not heave or sob, but simply shed a tear for a life that once was. The tear was a gift from the Lord to prove to me once and for all that I have truly forgiven Robert (despite the many attempts of Satan to prove otherwise) for all the havoc he wreaked in our lives. At that moment, I said a prayer and asked God to reveal to me whether or not he was saved.

You see, prior to this day, I had tried several times to reach out to him to let him know that I forgave him, and that he could also receive the ultimate gift of forgiveness from Jesus himself. Each attempt resulted in a closed door.

I was out of time Friday as I had to get to work, but I continued my search on Monday in my free time. It was exactly three days later, December 6 that I not only found the proof that he was saved, but also a letter of apology to his victims when I read the article "The Big Challenge". On that day, God reminded me that He is in control and that His timing is everything. I was upset about not being able to let Robert know of my forgiveness, but then the Lord reminded me of this scripture in John 12:24 which says that unless the seed falls to the ground and dies it will not produce fruit. I believe that many will be healed from his death and this powerful story of forgiveness.

Wow, Debbie! That was the most fulminating beginning of an interview I've ever made! It was a surreal time for me, too. Talking to you is something I had long been wishing for. I wish to talk to all of Robert's victims, but in an article which appeared around the time of the trial which I had bought from the Orlando Sentinel archive, you were quoted saying you wanted to become a counselor. So I had the hope to at least find you because counseling people always also means informing the public and wanting to be heard.

It kind of shocked me to find in the comment section below the newspaper article about Robert a person who named herself "forgiven", and who spoke about forgiving Robert in the midst of many mean comments about him. Can I call him "Casper" in the interview, Debbie? He was never "Robert" for me.

Four questions run through my mind after reading your answer.

1. Do you think it is necessary to tell our readers what exactly happened to you when Casper kidnapped you and your sister and raped you? You were 16 and 12 years old at that time. He sent me a document that described what he did, and it was most sickening to read for me. Never should anything like that happen to any girl or woman!

2. How did you manage to forgive Casper? What were the important steps in that journey?

3. Who called you on December 3? Somebody seemed to have kept track of your phone number and that gives me hope that this office could be helpful in finding other victims as well.

What do you think about trying to let them know that Casper wanted to apologize?

4. How did your attempts to reach out to Casper and let him know you forgave him result in a closed door?

Ines, yes, we can call him Casper. (How did he come up with that name anyway?)

1. I'm not sure what details need to be revealed. I certainly would not want to be graphic. You are right: there are some things that even the jury shouldn't have had to hear. I am not afraid to talk about these things, and I believe that I will have to tell people whom I try to help in the future certain details so they know that I've been where they are now. Would it help if I did a synopsis of that night and you decide what is best (leaving out the gory details, of course)?

2. Forgiveness was the key to my healing. When the incident with Casper occurred, I was attending a small private Christian school. I had actually just finished my first week of my senior year (I was going to graduate a year early). We were mandated to go to church as long as we went there. I was not a Christian at the time, but was well-indoctrinated in the faith. While I was being raped, I cried out to God and said you get me out of this and whatever you want I will do. I guess you could say I was throwing God a "Hail Mary", as so many of us do in dire circumstances. Well, I believe that prayer saved my life.

A few months later, I was sitting in church and the Holy Spirit tapped me on the shoulder and reminded me of my promise; I call this "God calling my bluff." I walked the aisle and said a prayer and really meant it, but like the Bible says, when persecution came, I ran.

You see, my Christian counselor at the time told me if I didn't forgive him right then and there that I would burn in hell. That was a little too much for me to take. I hadn't even testified against him in court yet.

So I did what I was best at doing, and that was running. I never ran from God, but I ran from the people of God and all of their "foolish nonsense." Needless to say, I never committed my life to Him and very quickly the ways of the world engulfed me.

It wasn't until December 27, 2004 that I quit running from the Lord and the purpose (helping others) that He had for me, and gave my life 100% to Jesus: everything that I was and am and will ever be.

I decided to play by His rules and that ultimately led to forgiveness. I don't remember the exact date that I forgave. I actually had to forgive over and over to make sure that I truly had. I would take it back to the Lord and remind Him that I forgave Casper and ask Him to soften my heart that much more. I prayed for him and even asked others that I met along the way to do the same.

4. It was about three months later that I went to my pastors in Baton Rouge and asked them if they could send their prison minister to Casper and tell him that I forgave him and witness to him in the hopes that he would receive the ultimate forgiveness that I had received from the ultimate forgiver, Jesus. They were not too keen on the idea so I let it go.

Another time when Satan was trying to convince me that I hadn't forgiven him, I contacted VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday – a website that helps people keep track of inmates. They contact victims when there is an escape or any kind of change in their status), and I told them of my forgiveness and my desire to let this man know about Jesus. They politely told me that this was not a good idea that Casper could either try to hurt me again, or attempt to use me to try and get him off the charges somehow.

The final time I tried, only to have the door slammed in my face, was about two years ago. I went to my new pastor in Mississippi and shared my testimony and asked if she thought that I should provide him with a copy of my testimony through a third-party. She told me that God knew my heart, and that just knowing I was willing to do this was enough.

3. Years ago before I forgave Casper, I found VINE. It was through them that I learned about Robert's death. My original intent (I'm happy to say that it is no longer the case) was when I got the call that they would be executing him, I would take a week off from work and get drunk on the steps of the prison that would end his life, and I would celebrate as they put to death the most evil person I had ever come in contact with.

My parents also received a letter in the mail, but I got the call that morning as soon as it happened. I do believe that these people could help in reaching other victims. I can also relate to these victims and not wanting to be found. I was terrified for many years that Casper would keep his promise and kill us even if he had to get someone else to do it. Even now as I unveil my identity, "I" in my mind take a risk.

I'm not sure if VINE would be willing to help. They are so engrossed in the victims that I don't think they could see the possibility of an apology as healing.

OOPS! I kind of answered the forgiveness question with the doors slammed answer. Sorry, this is my first interview and I'm extremely new to this. I am just pouring out all of this information hoping that it takes shape and form as we proceed. I haven't written for a very long time, and it is like a beautiful liquid pouring fourth on the paper. Thank you for convincing me that I need

to do this. I can't imagine how you ever embarked on this journey. You chose it; I was thrust into it.

When you said you were shocked to see "Forgiven" out there amidst all of the "hate mail", I just wanted to let you know that was a very bold thing I did and I felt like God was saying, "you don't expect me to do all the work; you have to take a chance if you want the answers."

That being said, I probably never would have posted a thing if NOT for your previous post of being a pen pal. When I posted that "Forgiven" alias, I tried to be sensitive to the obvious pain that others were experiencing. I could genuinely feel their pain. I also wanted to come to your defense, and felt that revealing myself as a victim gave me a right to do so.

Oh, I didn't mean to suggest you should call him "Casper", too. You can go on calling him "Robert Power". I think it would match reality and the two sides of this man that existed. "Casper" was his prison nickname. I don't know why he received that name.

Don't worry about a probable lack of order in your answers, Debbie. I marked the paragraphs with the numbers of my questions, so it's easy to find your answers to my four questions.

I suggest that we don't elaborate the crime in this interview.

What I find incredible is the fact that several people kept you back from reaching out to Casper. I wish that many people would read this interview and understand that a contact between an offender and a victim could bring healing.

Debbie, you made me smile a little with what you wrote about God talking to you. First he "tapped you on the shoulder" and then he even said to you: "You don't expect me to do all the work..." I guess he did right and you can stand up for yourself.

I was very moved to read that you "wanted to come to my defense" in that online comment section of the newspaper. Isn't that a twisted world when the victim comes to the defense of the offender's friend?

Yes, you were bold to write the comment you wrote, and it has brought only good. In fact, you didn't let God do all the work.

What do you think about me having been a close friend of a man you once considered "the most evil person you had ever come in contact with"?

It makes total sense for you to call him Casper, the man that he became, and I call him Robert Power, the only man I ever knew him to be. It tells of two people that knew one man in two different phases of his life: these are perfect bookends.

When I first thought of the prospect that Robert had a pen pal, I thought of these "nut jobs" that fall in love with prison inmates. Although I had forgiven him, I couldn't see how or why someone would want to call him a friend. Even now as I sit and write this, I can't wrap my brain around being his friend, but I was never given that opportunity either.

We as humans are very curious creatures, so I decided to investigate. I followed the bread crumbs that you left and prayed for God to reveal the truth. As Christians, we are to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves.

The human part of me, my mind, will, and emotions were saying, "How can this be?"; the spiritual side of me was saying, "With man this is impossible, but with God ALL things are possible."

The first thing I read was the interview, "The Big Challenge" that you did with Casper. When I came to the part about him being a Christian, a smile came over my face, and when I read the letter of apology, tears streamed down my face. I was overjoyed to have come to know that Robert would indeed be in heaven with me.

I even slapped God a high five and said, "You go God!"

I can honestly say there was a bounce in my step again.

I realize that the start of this answer was a bit harsh, but that was in fact my first reaction. As I began to correspond with you and ask questions and hear your answers that you had children and that you grappled with the idea of being able to forgive knowing what he did, I then saw a different side of Robert through you. I saw that for you two to spend so much time together to enable him to reach his victims for no other reason than to say I'm sorry is huge.

Honestly, this is really just nothing short of a miracle. If anyone thinks that God is NOT still in the miracle working business, we are living proof that shows otherwise.

The more I come to know you, the happier I am that he had friends like you who were there for him. If not for your tenacity and the gift that God gave you of being able to see a person through the eyes of Christ, then we would not be having this conversation. I would have known that he died, and would have still been praying and asking God to reveal whether he was saved. You are a direct answer to my prayer, and it would seem Robert's prayers, as well.

You appeared like a miracle in my life, as well, so we both feel the same.

Now that we elaborated a little upon our connection, let me go back 23 years in my next question: Can you tell me a little about the impact the rape had on you and on your family's life both at the time it happened and in all the years following?

I hope that my sister Cindy will one day be ready, as well. Mom has mixed feelings because of how this has affected Cindy. She knows about the interview, and she has forgiven Robert. She is excited about the possibility of helping other victims heal through our story. It breaks her heart to see the downward spiral that her baby is on. Daddy has also forgiven Robert.

After Robert was through with us, he tied us up with our clothing and gagged us with toilet paper. He told us that we weren't tied very tight and that we could go home in thirty minutes. He instructed us to go home and take a shower, and if our parents woke up we were to say that a big black man took us. Before leaving that night, Robert said something so profound which has stuck with me ever since. He said, "You two have just been through a really horrific ordeal, but you are lucky that you have each other. I want you to stay that way forever." At that moment, I felt something similar must have happened to him, but he was alone.

When we got home, we woke our parents, terrified that he was watching and was going to make good on his promise to kill us for telling. The police came and took us to the hospital for tests and then to the precinct for questioning.

The first major change was that neither my sister nor I would go back to the house that we called “home” for five years. We were terrified of the memories this house now held. For about the first month, we were shuffled from house to house staying with different families in our church until our parents could rent an apartment. Sadly, they couldn’t afford the mortgage and the rent, and they lost the house.

My Dad had to deal with the fact that while he was sleeping, a man came in and robbed him of his girls. That is a hard pill to swallow for any man, especially one who was in the military for almost thirty years.

Mom had the toughest part in dealing with not only one, but two of her daughters acting like rabid animals for years to follow. She was very strong, and whenever we would act out she would tell us, “Stop that! Every time you act out, you are letting him win.” She did not want Robert to have any more control over our lives.

Robert terrorized our community. The police put in overtime trying to crack this case. They were even looking during their off time, too. Whenever they would arrest someone fitting his description, they would put him in a holding cell and come to our school or home and show us pictures to see if we could identify him. They would come to school sometimes two and three times a day.

I suffered from flashbacks. Any time anyone would touch my throat or wrists, I would turn and see Robert and not the actual person that touched me.

I have spent many years depressed to the point of not being able to get out of bed. I always worked and I guess I looked like I had it together, but inside I was a mess. It was not until I got saved in December of 2004 that I was finally free from all of this horror.

Your answer shows so clearly the trauma the rape caused to all of your family members and even to the whole community. You not wanting to even call “home” your house anymore, you having been depressed for many years, your father feeling that he had not protected his girls enough and your mother having to deal with two daughters who behaved like “rabid animals”. Your community terrorized... I wonder if anything remained the same?

I know that we are not supposed to live in our past. I don’t live there anymore. A few years ago, I asked God to give me amnesia, because I didn’t want to remember those things anymore. He said to me, “Debbie, I can give you amnesia and I will do that for you, but then all of this that you’ve been through will be in vain. I will use you to help others.” I believe that is my calling in life. In His word, God says He will take what Satan meant for evil and use it for His good. Just like Jesus laid down His life for us, I am in a sense laying down mine for others.

Some people say that for the victims to talk about what they went through is harmful for them. Is it harmful for you now?

You know I think that EVERYTHING is hard for victims. Forgiveness has set me free! Talking about what Robert did to me and how it has affected me is not harmful for me. For others perhaps it is, but I don't see myself as a victim anymore. I do still have the ability to empathize with those that suffer in similar ways.

I hope that you will go on helping other people to understand and to share your story. Thank you very much for answering my questions, Debbie. I wish you all the best and much success in all you do.