



Amber Jewell with her husband, Mike, and two of their children, Colton and Ember.

Hope and Healing

Amber Jewell is a survivor of horrific child abuse. She talks about it to help others find hope and heal from hardship. Here's her story

Amber Jewell is living a life she couldn't have imagined when she was a little girl who spent much of her life locked in a room. She now has a wonderful husband who adores her and three awesome children, counting the college student who claimed Amber and her husband as his parents.

She's helping children as a social worker and has her own private therapy practice. She serves as board chairperson of the Successful Survivors Foundation, and her first book, "Finding Hope: The 12 Keys to Healing Hardship, Hurt & Sorrow," was released in August 2021. To know Amber, with her positive, hope-filled attitude and her plentiful puns and jokes, it is difficult to envision all that she's gone through.

Amber's parents divorced when she was about a year old. Amber's mother left the state, so she lived with her mentally unstable father. By the time Amber was 8, her father had been married and divorced five times. Unfortunately, he kept choosing wives who were equally unstable. There was always conflict and chaos in the home.

Amber found refuge at school throughout the week and at the church she attended on Sundays with her grandmother. The rest of her time was spent either locked in a tiny room or locked out of the house—that is, until she was 12.

When she was 12 years old, something happened that changed Amber. She made a friend. A girl her age moved in next door and befriended her. For the first time in her life, Amber felt

truly accepted by someone. It's not that the people at church weren't nice to her—they were. But this was different. This was her friend, who wanted to spend time with her.

One day, her father heard her laughing and talking outside, and he brought her back in for her usual punishment. "You're having too much fun. You know you're not allowed to laugh," he said. He locked her in her tiny room—without food, without a bathroom, and without any contact with the outside world. Or so he thought. That night, Amber worked up the courage to break free of her prison.

Until that night, Amber's home life had consisted of being the scapegoat of the family. Her father had married a woman who had children, so there were six kids in the home. All but Amber lived a seemingly normal life. They ate meals together, they watched TV together, and they lived life as though there wasn't a young girl locked in a room down the hall. Everyone knew that Amber wasn't allowed to eat the same food as the rest of the family, and that she wasn't allowed out of that room, even to use the bathroom, unless her father let her out. She wasn't even allowed to use the same soap in the shower as the rest of the family. Even when she was allowed to take a shower, someone was assigned to watch her to make sure she didn't use the family soap.

Amber had never considered breaking out of the room. She knew the consequences would be horrific if she tried. But that night was different. She thought that if she made it to her

friend's house, she'd be able to live there and never be hurt again. Nobody got hurt at her friend's house.

Amber very quietly opened the window, just high enough to be able to squeeze out. She ran as fast as she could to her friend's house. However, instead of letting her stay, her friend's mother put her in the car and drove her to the police station. Amber was scared. She didn't know what was going to happen to her. She knew her dad would be furious, and she knew that her big, bold move hadn't turned out the way she had hoped it would. That was Amber's entry into the foster care system.

Amber's years in foster care were rough. She was placed in a group home with five other teenagers. She was sexually molested by one of the other teens, and intimidated by another, who openly worshipped Satan. When she told her social worker what happened, she was moved to the home of an older couple and their 28-year-old son, all of whom suffered from severe depression. The couple had lost their daughter years before but had never recovered from their loss. Amber felt safer there than she ever had, but there were issues that led to her being sent to live with her mother.

Amber had no memory of her mother, but she hoped that living with her would be the fresh start she had hoped for. It wasn't long before Amber realized that it wasn't going to be the warm reunion she'd imagined.

Her mother had remarried and had two other children. She struggled with mental illness, and she identified

with a religion other than Christianity, so she didn't like that Amber was a Christian. Amber's mother was abusive, but this time, Amber decided not to say or do anything about what was going on in the home. It seemed that every time the truth came out, she was the one who had to move. One day, Amber's mother pushed her sister out of a window, and the police were called. The truth came out without Amber saying a word. Still, she was moved again.

Her social worker sent her back to the family that suffered from depression. At least she was returning to something known, rather than unknown, which had never worked out well for her. These foster parents wanted to adopt Amber, but they insisted on calling her by the name of the daughter they'd lost.

Amber was grateful for a relatively safe place to live, but she knew that she didn't want to be there forever. Their son would have depression-related outbursts and threaten to harm himself and everyone in the home. The foster father watched porn with the other foster girls in the home, and the foster mother would threaten to commit suicide from the depths of her depression.

One day, as her foster father was dropping her off at her after-school job, Amber finally told him that she didn't want to be adopted. He began screaming at her and berating her. He accused her of ruining everyone's life. By the time she walked into her job, she was sobbing uncontrollably. This time, it wasn't Amber who spoke out; it was her boss who called her social worker.

By the time Amber was removed from that home, she was mentally and physically exhausted from so many crisis responses over years of abandonment, neglect, and abuse. She knew that she wished to be wanted as a permanent member of someone's family—but for who she was, not as a replacement for a deceased daughter. So, Amber made the bold move of asking people she knew if they would be willing to adopt her.

It wasn't long before Amber's Sunday school teacher took her aside

and said that she and her husband and children wanted to invite Amber to join their family permanently. Amber was ecstatic. Finally, she would have a safe, trustworthy, kind, gentle family who chose her to be their daughter.

What none of them knew at the time was that the process of adoption wouldn't be easy. Despite all the substantial evidence of abandonment by her mother, and abuse by her father, Amber's father and mother still had parental rights, and they weren't about to give them up easily. Thankfully, Amber's new parents refused to give up. They were determined to have Amber as their own daughter, so they petitioned the court, wrote letters to the judge, and eventually succeeded in adopting Amber into their family. Home at last!

She's helping children as a social worker and has her own private therapy practice.

Unfortunately, Amber's troubles were far from over. Her new mom, Kim, noticed that sometimes in conversation, Amber would just "zone out." She wouldn't respond and would just stare into space. Eventually, Amber would "snap back" and be OK. When this happened, Amber reported not being able to hear, speak, or move. She said those "feelings" had been coming and going for as long as she could remember.

Kim took Amber to the doctor, who referred her to a neurologist. The doctors ran a few tests, and it was determined that Amber was experiencing seizures as a result of severe brain injury from physical abuse when she was very young. Brain surgery was recommended to try to stop the seizures.

All at once, Amber's life changed. Since she was just starting college four hours away from her new family,

Amber was put on strong medications to prevent seizures, which had severe side effects. Her driver's license was revoked, along with her newfound feeling of independence.

Unfortunately, the medications didn't prevent all the seizures. Just when Amber thought that all the painful experiences of her life were behind her, she embarked on another scary journey. This time, it was for brain surgery, followed by all the therapy that would be required to learn how to walk and talk again—and all of this in her first year of college.

During this time, her high school sweetheart—now her husband, Mike—would drive four hours to visit her. Sometimes, he would then drive four hours so she could visit her new family, then drive four hours back to her college, and then drive another four hours home. What a guy!

Amber did the hard work of learning to walk and talk again while finishing her bachelor's degree. Mike went to the police academy and became a law enforcement officer. She and Mike got married. Amber went on to graduate school for her master's degree in social work. They had a son, and then they became foster and adoptive parents to their little girl. Along the way, they acquired a grown son, too. Mike and Amber claimed him as family in much the same way that Kim, the Sunday school teacher, and her family, had claimed Amber. If anyone knows the significance of loving someone into wholeness, it is Amber.

Through it all, Amber learned what she calls the 12 keys to healing from hardship, hurt, and sorrow. In addition to her formal education, Amber learned from her life experiences the things that cannot be taught in a classroom. She shares them in her new book, "Finding Hope: The 12 Keys to Healing Hardship, Hurt & Sorrow," as well as in her keynote addresses, in her YouTube videos, and in the workshops and webinars she teaches. Amber's American success, her life of peace, joy, faith, and love, was birthed on a foundation of hope, something she shares generously with everyone within her influence. ■

Q&A

What challenges or hardships have you faced and overcome?

I think life, as a whole, is challenging, but that is not to imply that I feel a challenge is necessarily bad. Rather, challenges can help us learn and grow into more well-rounded, experienced people. That is certainly true for me.

Entering foster care at 12 years old was certainly a challenge for me. I feel like that transition was when I was the most bombarded with emotions and confusion. In simple terms, foster children have it tough. My journey through foster care was no exception. When things went wrong, I was moved from each home with what felt like no explanation, so it felt like the fault was mine.

All of my experiences with abandonment, neglect, abuse, and foster care inform my work with child and adult victims of mistreatment. I can truly empathize and still provide the objective truth that shines the light on the path of hope for those who have been victimized by others.

Give some examples of the kinds of good things you do for others.

Right in line with my desire to positively influence the lives of others is my service and work as board chairperson of the Successful Survivors Foundation, a national, non-profit, educational organization. I hold tight to the mission and vision of equipping survivors of any kind of trauma with the skills to create successful lives. I highly value the organizational vision of a world free of abuse or neglect!

While this is a volunteer job at this time, it is also a ministry for me. In the hopes of it being a career in the future, I am excited for the idea of doing what I love and loving what I do! Though all of these are interconnected, I love the opportunity to share encouragement and hope through church and ministry groups.

It is a joy of mine to reach Christians who are hurting. I feel, too often, that



the world tries to convince us that faith should equal happiness, which is a very disappointing and false expectation. God showed me, through my journey, that life, even when it is rough, is far more bearable with Him in my life and heart than it—and I—would be without Him.

I love being alive! Thus, I am able to delicately blend my experience and knowledge of life, emotions, trauma, parenting, challenges, and so much more, in the context of positively influencing individuals and society. I passionately feel it is a knowledge that must be shared to equip people to learn and apply skills of healthy living, relationships, and parenting. I have high hopes of creating ripple effects through great people and systems.

What are your favorite quotes?

“Life is tough but SO ARE YOU!” and “Little moments make big impacts.”

I also hold Paul’s declaration, in the Bible, of joy through challenges: “For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance. For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be

bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die” (Philippians 1:19–20).

Is there a specific book that has inspired you?

There are two that stand out—the Holy Bible, of course! And “Walk Two Moons,” by Sharon Creech. I read that book when I lived with my dad, and it made a lasting impression on me about challenges in life and the power of perspectives.

Tell us something you’ve created.

My new book, “Finding Hope: The 12 Keys to Healing Hardship, Hurt & Sorrow,” released by Hatherleigh on August 31, 2021. I also created my website and social media pages. I enjoy putting out hope-filled posts to encourage others.

Tell us something that your family enjoys doing together.

Our family loves animals, so we enjoy visiting zoos. We also love four-wheeling. Our kids enjoy being outside: in water, and sports activities. We enjoy spending time with God and identifying what we are thankful for. One of our favorite things to do is to spend time laughing with family, and we enjoy watching beautiful sunsets.

If you wish to give others your best piece of advice, share it here.

You matter! I know that statement can seem so simple, and yet be so complicated in our trying world. We all have an impact on the lives of others, in some way, somehow. We each have the power to influence the trajectory of lives—our own and others!

Many people mattered in my life: in moments they may never have known. I hope that I wisely do the same for others. And I pray that everyone recognizes how essential they are to those around them. ■