

SURVIVOR SPOTLIGHT:

Abigail's Story

Abigail is 16 years-old. Like many 16 year-old girls she loves checking out cool coffee shops, spending time with her friends, and taking pictures. However, if you look beyond her sweet smile and contagious laugh you will find someone who lives full and loves hard. Look deeper and you will see how extraordinary she is, not because of the exploitation or abuse that she has endured, but because of how time, after time, she chooses to find joy in the face of hardship and adversity. Once you spend time with Abigail, you quickly recognize that she is not a victim, but instead the embodiment of a survivor. She has not withered or crumbled when confronted with difficult circumstances. Instead, she stands strong and walks with hope and assurance that God, in His perfect timing, is slowly but surely unveiling His purpose for her.

We first met Abigail a couple of years ago when she was 14 years-old. Shortly after, she joined the Present Age family and began receiving survivor support services. "When I first met her, she was so sweet, but it was clear that she had been hurt before. She was far more reserved and, as a result of the trauma she had experienced, she was making self-destructive decisions. She probably would not have made it, had she continued down the path she was on," a Present Age staff member close to Abigail said. However, God had different plans for Abigail, plans to grow, strengthen, and heal her.

As Abigail journeyed through our survivor support program, we saw God cultivate and grow her confidence in herself and her dreams. "Before, she was just trying to get by, but now, she actually understands that she has so much more potential than she ever knew before. She has given herself permission to want more for herself and to dream of things she once believed were impossible," a Present Age staff member said. Throughout her experience with Present Age, we not only witnessed Abigail establish goals for herself, but we saw her chase after those goals and accomplish things that she did not think she was capable of.

One of those goals was to become a photographer. During her time in our survivor support program, Abigail developed a deep love for photography. She especially loves taking photos of people and flowers. However, because she did not have a camera, she simply took pictures with her phone.

Upon graduating from our survivor support program, we were thrilled to present Abigail with her very own professional Nikon camera. She responded by saying the following:

"I will never be able to express my love and appreciation for you all in words, for it is way too much for the English dictionary to handle. Thank you, thank you, thank you for everything! Not just the materialistic things you have given me, but the things I will carry with me for the rest of my life: the importance of self-love, forgiveness, compassion, gratitude, and so much more. Thank you for all the little things that you have done for me over the years like taking me to coffee and simply listening to me when I needed to talk. I will be forever grateful for everything you have done to help me get back on my feet after I got knocked down by this cruel world. You have shown me that this world can be beautiful, and that it's not all bad. Because of this you all will always hold a special place in my heart."

Today, Abigail's life is not necessarily perfect or easy. There are still hardships that she must work through. However, she is not the same girl she was two years ago. She has grown into a warrior: emboldened with joy, filled with kindness, and wise beyond her years. She pushes onward and is made stronger not despite her hardships, but as a result of them. A Present Age staff member said, "I am so excited to see how her joy and her story impacts other people, because it's undoubtedly going to. I cannot wait to hear stories from people who know Jesus better because of what she has said."