

# SURVIVOR SPOTLIGHT:

## Lorena's Story

In June of 2017, a few members of the Present Age Direct Services team entered the home of a girl who would soon become an integral part of our program. Upon walking through the doors of this typical American house, they found a modern American family, and a fourteen-year-old girl with a story that was anything but average. Although her sweet, timid smile and innocent giggle would never give it away, this beautiful child had been through unspeakable trauma and undeniable exploitation. She may not have worn her scars on her body, but it was clear that they were engrained in her heart. This is Lorena's\* Story.



Shortly after that first meeting, Lorena began receiving services from Present Age Ministries. Since joining our program she has shown up for practically every meeting, counseling session, and activity. However, while she has been physically present for every event, she has not necessarily been emotionally or spiritually present – there has been something missing.

“Lorena has been one of the most consistent and active girls to ever participate in our Direct Services program. With that being said, at times, it has been difficult to determine how we can best serve her because she is constantly holding back. She will speak when she is spoken to, she will answer every question, but she never delves deeper. She is never rude, nor disrespectful, but her guard is always up,” one Present Age staff member said. “Still, we must remember that her trust has been continuously exploited. She puts up these walls and defenses to protect herself because every time she has been vulnerable in the past, she has been hurt and abused. Still, this faulty process of protection has merely numbed her pain and shut everyone else out, even those who want to help her.”

Like many of us, Lorena is tightly grasping on to all the heartache and hurt she has experienced. She hides her brokenness from the world, afraid that if anyone gets too close they will see her for who she really is. However, God fully sees the brokenness in her heart, for there is no way she can hide it from Him. He wept every time she cried, and every time she was abused His heart broke for her. He sees her, and He loves her for exactly who she is, for in His eyes she is pure, and blameless, and whole.

When asked which verse of the Bible came to mind when she thought of Lorena, one Present Age staff member said Isaiah 43:1-2.

*“But now, this is what the Lord says – he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, and the flames shall not consume you.”*

“This makes me think of Lorena because it not only showcases the redemptive work that Jesus does within our hearts, but it also illustrates His personal pursuit of us. Regardless of what is going on in Lorena's world she is God's number one priority, His masterpiece, His beloved daughter for whom He adores,” the Present Age staff member said.

God chases after each lost sheep. No matter how far we wander, He pursues us until we return home and run into His outstretched arms. Our goal at Present Age Ministries is to mirror this all-encompassing and faithful love with each girl that walks through our doors. We will journey with her through every curve, bend, and bump in the road, regardless of how long it takes because we know that she is worth it.

After months of hard work and perseverance, we are starting to see radical transformation and breakthrough in Lorena's life. She has started actively engaging with her counselor and sharing more with the Present Age team involved in her care. Her self-image and self-worth are also being revolutionized, as she has recently shared that she wants to have a better perception of herself and that she wants to work on building up her self-confidence. In addition, she was baptized in October of 2017, and she recently started attending church with her family and getting involved in the youth group there. The Lord has put a new hunger to seek Him in her heart.

“There is a genuine excitement about Jesus in her that is totally different than anything I have ever seen in her before. She is beginning to attack the lies that she believes about herself and is now replacing them with the truth that God calls out in her,” a Present Age staff member said.

In many ways, the girls we work with every day at Present Age are no different from any other individual in the Charlotte area. They struggle to know their worth and to trust in God's goodness. They long for love, hope, and redemption. Lorena's story is yet another illustration of God's relentless, persistent, unyielding pursuit of each and every one of us.

“When I think of Lorena, I think of a budding flower. She is not yet in full bloom, but the bud has sprouted. She is delicate, unassuming, and humble but all the while growing in strength and dignity. I can't wait to see how God is going to continue to move in her,” a Present Age staff member said.\*

\* Lorena is **NOT** the real name of the survivor in this story, it is a pseudonym.