

Changed by the Great Transformer

Former lesbian turned evangelist Rosita Martínez is living proof that God's love redeems and restores lives

Rosita Martínez grew up depressed, lonely and confused in a world of crippling contradictions. Ignored by her mother, overprotected by her father and sexually abused by her cousins, she seemed to be right in line with Satan's plan of destruction for her life. But God had His own plan for her, and things are different now for Martínez, a former lesbian turned evangelist. Today she's a product of God's unfailing and unconditional love—and she can't stop talking about it.

Born in 1956 into a Roman Catholic family almost 10 years after her brother, José, Martínez realized early on from her mother's coldness and father's watchful eye that life was going to be anything but predictable.

"I came from two different kinds of parents," says Martínez, who now lives in Casselberry, Fla., pastors a church called In the Wings of Faith in Longwood, Fla., and runs a teaching ministry of the same name. Her mother was very strict, a perfectionist who would supervise Martínez daily as she cleaned her room. "If I didn't do it the way she had in her mind, I had to start all over again."

Her mother couldn't be pleased, she says. Even when Martínez made an A on schoolwork, scoring 3.5 out of 4 points on her notes, her mother always wanted to know why her daughter didn't score 100 percent.

Martínez longed for her mother's acceptance and love but rarely found either. So when she was sexually abused by three of her cousins at age 5 or 6, she didn't feel comfortable confiding in her mother about it. Instead, she locked the

shame and pain away. "What they did to me put a mark into my heart because I was deceived by them," she says.

It didn't help that her mother continuously called her "crazy" because of Martínez's hyper tendencies. "That also put a mark into my heart, because if my mother thinks that of me, then I'm going to behave like she thinks I am," she says.

At the same time, Martínez was often compared with her brother and urged to become more like him—and she wanted to. Martínez loved her brother. "He was my hero," she says. "I wanted to be like my mother, but she was so closed up."

Instead, Martínez became more like her father, who was very loving. Emotionally, he was there for his daughter. But he loved almost to a fault. Because he had been orphaned as a child, he always feared the worst for his children. That's why he didn't even want them to play outside. Though he meant well, his overprotective ways caused Martínez to feel like a "bird in a cage."

Life didn't get any better when Martínez's brother left to join the military. Martínez completely lost her mother emotionally at that point. "My mother was very empty-hearted when I left," recalls José Martínez, who pastors a church in Hollywood, Fla. He says his mother failed to remember she had a daughter to care for. "That hurt my sister a lot."

When the family wasn't able to reach José for a time, they feared he'd been sent straight into Vietnam and was lost or dead. At that time, a new person moved into the Martínezes' neighborhood. He was a Marine—and a Christian—and he agreed to try to find out what happened to José. But his help came with conversation about Jesus, which the family welcomed.

Martínez's mother soon accepted Jesus, and the night that she did, the family finally reached her brother. "It was the first answer to my mom's prayer," Martínez says.

When José returned home, he also turned his life over to Jesus, on Oct. 3, 1969. Rosita also loved Jesus and became involved with her church, but she had a dark secret. Feeling very unfeminine and being rejected by boys, she struggled with her sexual identity. When she heard a voice one day telling her she was a boy, or had the soul of a boy in a girl's body, Martínez believed the lie.

Because of this deception, she would later spend seven years in a relationship, starting at about age 20, with another woman while still in church. Martínez knew her behavior was contradictory to the Bible, and she desperately wanted to confide in her heavenly Father, but she believed He was too untouchable—too perfect to care about her and her problems.

She tried to get deliverance in her own strength but found it impossible. After seven years of living with her secret, Martínez began to pray every night for God's help, and He answered.

Around 1983, she met some Christians who were part of a ministry that helped people who struggled with their sexual identity. They were persistent with Martínez, telling her the Lord revealed to them that they were sent to help her.

For the next three years, she endured an intense healing process. God eventually mended relationships. Even the woman she spent seven years with was delivered as well. "God's love accepted me as I am. He accepted me with all of my problems," Martínez says.

Because of her experience, Martínez understands that some people dealing with homosexuality and lesbianism feel as if God has rejected them. But He hasn't, she says. "God rejects the sin and the behavior, but God loves the sinner," says Martínez, who worked the next 12 years for Librería Morada de Paz, the ministry that helped save her life. In English, it means "abode" or "habitation of peace."

In 1992, after her mother died, Martínez left her home in Puerto Rico. She still worked for Librería Morada de Paz as an evangelist in Miami and then Connecticut. In 1995, she left the ministry to birth In the Wings of Faith Ministries, aiming to make leaders and disciples, then moved to central Florida in 1998.

“I love teaching. That’s my passion,” says Martínez, who’s authored four books in Spanish, including *iSeñor, Sacame de Aquí!* (Lord, Get Me Out of Here!), volumes 1 and 2; and just this year, *Atrévete a Pensar Como Él* (I Dare You to Think Like Him). José says his sister “has a gift of working with people. People feel comforted when she talks to them.”

From 1998 to 2008 Rosita also worked as an associate pastor, before finally pastoring a church through her ministry last year. Because of her powerful testimony, Martínez has been asked over the years to speak both in the U.S. and internationally.

Martínez’s assistant and co-pastor of their church, Maria Eugenia Delgado, says her friend of more than 20 years is a brave woman of God. “She’s a teacher of the Word ... and she’s passionate about helping people. The same way she feels the love of God for her—that’s the way she shows her love.”

Whenever Martínez speaks, writes, preaches, teaches and counsels, her message is clear: God wants a relationship with His children, and His greatest gift was His own Son, Jesus. She believes that no matter what sins a person may be wrestling with, God can help the person overcome them, if he or she is willing to.

She understands what it’s like to struggle, so she can identify with others. “When I see them, I see them with compassion—with love.”

Sarah Stegall is a freelance journalist, skilled Twitter user and tennis fanatic who believes in God’s perfect timing. She

recently took what many call a “leap of faith” and left her small Florida hometown to teach schoolchildren in Israel.

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