

Clothed in Forgiveness

For years Kimberly Drake was a stripper in a topless club. Now she understands the plight of women who've been exploited by pornographers and adult-club owners—and she's helping these women find freedom in Christ.

The stage is awash in a kaleidoscope of flashing lights. The sounds of beer and wine glasses clashing, men's voices, and the distinctive pall of cigarette smoke mingled with French perfume fills the mostly darkened rooms of the Déjà Vu Club in Spokane, Washington.

On a busy night as many as 50 or 60 women compete for customers. The exotic dancers sway provocatively to the rhythm of the music. Above its wail are the unmistakable whistles and shouts from deliriously intoxicated clients—mostly white-male patrons: bankers, doctors, businessmen, traveling salesmen, even ministers.

Kimberly Drake, 37, knows the scene well. She was once a stripper in this club, and she knows that there's pain behind the obscene gestures and perverse comments that punctuate the morally stifling atmosphere. The clients' smiles and raucous laughter betray an addiction to pornography. They live out vicarious relationships in this dark underworld.

Many of the men who frequent these clubs have graduated from cheaper thrills: looking at pornography online, purchasing glossy fantasy magazines or watching videos or cable in their homes. Stepping inside a strip club becomes a progressive step in the downward spiral.

The women who work these clubs are a different story. They are much like millions of other women. Beneath the surface most are hurting, carrying emotional baggage from rejection, abuse or insecurity. Without exception, the relief they are looking for—money, love, acceptance—is an illusion, just another bad experience in a life piled high with disappointment.

But there is a way out. After years of addiction to drugs and pornography, Kimberly, a wife and mother of three boys, knows that freedom from shame and sexual perversion can be found in Christ. She talked with Charisma about her life to let others know that only through Christ can a person discover how it feels to be clothed in righteousness.

Desperately Seeking Satisfaction

In the United States, pornography accounts for at least \$56 billion in annual revenue. And the nearly 3,000 strip clubs from coast to coast represent a sizeable percentage of the take. On the Internet, where men can view pornography anonymously, an estimated 75 percent of the hits are searches for porn sites.

Pornography addicts looking for a tangible thrill venture into places like this dark, dirty club where Kimberly used to work. Drug addiction and prostitution flourish here—a tragic next step for young women so desperate to make their quotas that they pull tricks, or engage in sexual contact with customers on the side. The tricks only fuel the dancers' sense of shame, humiliation and hardness.

Although the men know the sexual encounters are illegal, they

seek them out nonetheless. To satisfy the appetites of countless men and to encourage the dancers to earn more money, clubs look the other way. In fact, most clubs boast of private rooms and cushioned lounges where sexual encounters and one-on-one dances occur.

In the shadows of a club men can grab a stripper's buttocks, bite, pinch, hit or grab her—without risk or commitment. How does a woman, no matter what her background, allow herself to get caught up in such a lifestyle?

Stripping wasn't on Kimberly Drake's what-I-want-to-be list as a child. She had everything a young girl could want, except one thing: her father's attention. Instead of investing time in his young daughter's life, he plunged himself into his work, believing, as many men do, that providing for his family's material needs was his most sacred duty.

"I didn't need my dad's money," Kimberly says. "I needed his arms around me."

In a desperate attempt to get noticed, she became an overachiever. She was a Girl Scout, competed on the swim team, took violin lessons, joined the junior symphony and worked after school. "I wanted to be able to measure up," she says. "I never felt that I did."

When she was just 13 years old, Kimberly began seeking what was missing in her life—male attention. "I wanted to matter to someone," she says. "We all need to know we matter and that we are significant."

By the time she was 14, Kimberly was raped by an older boy at the home of a girlfriend. She wanted to be accepted. She wanted to belong. So instead of getting help, she doused her pain in alcohol and more sex.

"My whole need for male affirmation became sexualized," Kimberly says. "Now at 16, I was pregnant." Soon thereafter, she had her first abortion, which added even more weight to an already burdened conscience. To numb the pain, she turned to marijuana.

She convinced herself that she was too young to have a baby. After all, she thought, I have my whole life ahead of me.

In the midst of her increasingly harmful life choices, Kimberly began searching for God. Though she says she was raised in a pseudo-Christian family—one that went to church on Easter and Christmas—she never felt comfortable in church services.

"I went to a church that preached that I was going to hell. All I could think at the time was, 'Duh, I know that already!' I didn't need to go to church to find out how bad I unworthy I was."

Kimberly decided church was not a place of healing. It brought no solace. It offered no hope. Instead, she felt even more pain. "I never heard the 'full gospel,'" Kimberly says. "I didn't hear about God's grace and mercy."

At 20, Kimberly married Peter Drake, a man she says reminded her of actor Burt Reynolds. "He was handsome, kind and honest," she says. Instead of her knight in shining armor,

however, he led them into bondage to pornography.

One night she woke up to find Peter's side of the bed empty. She stumbled into the living room to find him glued to the Playboy Channel.

At first he was embarrassed; then they began viewing pornography together. Just six months into their marriage, Kimberly and Peter began dabbling with the lethal combination of cocaine and pornography. Yet the more pornography she viewed the more inadequate she felt. She wondered if she could ever compete with the models she saw in the films.

"We would view pornography on cable television and try to duplicate the images and acts we saw," Kimberly says.

"We began to 'act out' what we saw, including sex with multiple partners." She says she went along with bizarre sexual activities because she wanted to be the centerfold of her husband's life. Yet no matter what she did or how she dressed, she never felt she could measure up. As she slid further into her addictive lifestyle, Kimberly could no longer see the harm she was doing to herself. She was becoming callous, desensitized.

Journey Into the Underworld

The Drakes moved to Spokane to escape the drug demon that had begun to consume their lives. Moving to a new town, however, was not the answer. They soon found a new dealer and before long were facing an out-of-control cocaine addiction, job loss and ruined credit. The pressure was mounting with no solutions in sight.

Kimberly found a job as a salesperson at a car dealership. She used her short, skin-tight skirts to get the male attention she so longed for—and it worked. Then one day a seed was planted by a male co-worker. “You are pretty enough to be a stripper,” he told her.

“We were addicted to pornography,” says Kimberly, “so we saw nothing wrong with strip clubs. In fact, we went into the clubs to ‘spice up’ our sex life.”

In December 1994 the Dj Vu Club advertised an “amateur night.” Kimberly entered the amateur stripping contest and won \$50. At 32, it felt good to beat women 10 years her junior. “The owners of the club told me I would make tons of money,” Kimberly says. “They made me feel special. They made me feel pretty.”

It wasn’t until much later that she discovered the same lies were used on all the girls. Like Kimberly, women are enticed into stripping because of emotional scarring or abuse. Many long for the affection their fathers never gave. “I was just another prospect to be used to earn more money for the club,” she says.

A few weeks later, Kimberly was hired by the Dj Vu Club as a showgirl. After years of viewing pornography she felt no shame or hesitation about her new and exciting life. With the blessing and encouragement of her husband, she entered into what she thought would be a glamorous lifelong career as a stripper. It didn’t take long before she realized how wrong that was.

The full-contact lap dances and couch dances often came with side effects—men would hit her, bruise her and even bite her on the genitals. The abuse occurred every night she worked.

In the darkened corridors of the club she saw prostitution, drug use and violence. Her dream to be loved and accepted for who she was suddenly became a nightmare.

Kimberly Drake, the high achieving Girl Scout, became “Kimberly Rose, your favorite librarian” (her stage name). Initially she felt no humiliation. Instead, she saw stripping as a career move. “I felt special for the first time in my life. I had wanted to be the Playmate of the Year.”

Still, before she could go on stage and remove her clothes, Kimberly had to get stoned. In her medicated state she could smother her insecurities and inhibitions.

On an average night she would make \$400, or sometimes as much as \$1,000 on a busy one. On a bad night, however, she made just \$100 after paying her commission to the club.

“I had to pay the club \$60 a night and another \$2 for every dance I performed.” If she was lucky, she would go to the private lounge where a private dance would cost \$5—and last just 30 to 90 seconds.

As a dancer, Kimberly thought she could make a fast buck and become her husband’s greatest fantasy. “I thought I could make enough money to support our drug habit.” But she was wrong.

She thought stripping was her ticket to personal happiness,

that it would undo years of abandonment, rape, abortion, drugs and addiction to pornography. Again, she was wrong.

Meanwhile, her marriage to Peter began to erode. Unless they were high on drugs or intoxicated by pornography, Kimberly and Peter had little in common.

They became increasingly distant. Still, they continued to have sex every day. "It was the only way I could go to work and pretend everything was OK between us," Kimberly says.

Then on April 20, 1997, Kimberly's mother was visiting from Seattle. She suggested they find a church so they could attend an Easter service together.

As the service progressed Kimberly and Peter felt the unmistakable nudging of the Holy Spirit. When the minister gave an altar call, they went forward along with their oldest son. Their journey toward wholeness had begun.

"At first," Kimberly says, "I was afraid to tell anybody what I did for a living. I didn't leave my job immediately. It took three months before the Holy Spirit spoke very directly to my heart. When I finally told my pastor what I did he said, 'It is not my job to change you; it is not my job to judge you or make you feel guilty.' But he did say, 'God loves you too much to have you live this way.'"

Like Jesus did when He encountered the woman caught in adultery, the pastor encouraged Kimberly to go and sin no more.

Today, Peter, Kimberly and their three sons—Adam, 15; Daniel, 13; and Erik, 7—attend Valleybrook Community Church. Their pastor, 33-year-old Justin Norris, believes God performs miracles as His people fulfill their ministries.

“Lost people matter to God,” Norris says. “And people who are lost act like it. We should not have any expectations that unbelievers will act like believers. I want people to know that God loves them right where they are.”

“My church loved me right into eternity,” Kimberly says. “They loved me just the way I was. They were the physical representation of Jesus’ heart. They helped disciple me into a relationship with Jesus. They showed an authentic love for Jesus. They didn’t just tell me about religion, but they demonstrated what it was like to be a Christian.”

Half of Norris’ congregation are people who came to Christ through the direct witness of someone within the church—a healthy sign of genuine church growth. Still, Norris, a strong advocate of what he calls “intentional discipleship,” helped mentor Kimberly through the early stages of her new walk of faith.

“Most people can change their lifestyles,” Norris says, “but Kimberly has been willing to let God capture her heart. The character changes have been painful. Yet she has faced these and overcome them.”

Three months after the Easter service, the Holy Spirit spoke to Kimberly in what she calls “a not-so-still-voice.” It was time for her to make a permanent break from the Déjà Vu Club. Though the Drakes had little money, Kimberly told the owners

she was leaving.

The last night she worked at the club she chased customers out, telling them to go home to their wives and families. It was a turning point.

Today, Kimberly Drake is the executive director of Spokane's Citizens for Community Values, an agency whose sole purpose is to bring sexual health and wholeness back into communities.

"We live in a sex-saturated society," she says. "It tells us that intimacy is exclusively physical. We need to realize that our physical relationships are a result of the relational. This is what leads to emotional, intellectual and spiritual intimacy."

She says Christian men need to understand that their wives and daughters need to know they matter. "If you touch your wife emotionally," Kimberly says, "she will know she matters."

"No one starts out in life saying, 'I want to work in a strip club,'" she explains. "It is a world of false intimacy—a world where so-called intimacy comes without risks."

Today, she says, she has seen God's goodness at work both in her life and her family's.

"My children have seen healing. My husband has seen healing," she says.

The old Kimberly Rose is evidence of the greatest miracle of

all—God’s transforming power. She is living proof that God desires—and is able—to make a new creation in Christ.

OVERCOMING Addiction to Pornography

Men and women bound by pornography often feel trapped. But there is a way out.

The Internet has made it possible for Christian men to access hard-core pornography in the privacy of their homes. Men who might never consider stepping inside a strip club or visiting a triple-X theater can, with the click of a mouse, enter a world of sensual stimulation that is every bit as addictive as drugs or alcohol.

It is just as destructive too. Pornography creates unrealistic expectations within men that cannot legitimately be fulfilled—even within the context of marriage.

Many Christian men still equate sex with love. Yet sexual sin is rarely about not having enough sex.

Rather, it is about distorting sex. Even some ministers erroneously believe healing sexual relationships can be accomplished by encouraging wives to purchase sexy lingerie.

The truth is, Christian women are not to blame when their husbands choose to view pornography. They are victims of a culture that says fidelity is boring and that there are no consequences.

Christian women whose husbands are addicted to pornography wrestle with fear that they are not good enough and live in pain caused by their husband's mental adultery. Their lives are constantly filled with embarrassment, rejection, betrayal and grief.

When men, women or children look at pornography, they are locking images in the brain that don't go away. Cable television and the Internet make it simple for men or children to pollute their minds, giving Satan a stronghold that can unravel marriages or distort relationships later in life.

Today, more than 50 percent of all teens have visited Web sites containing pornography. Many young people use computers at public libraries or a friend's home, or they simply log on when their parents aren't around.

At the root of an addiction to pornography is a relational dysfunction. The long-term consequence of filling our minds with pornographic images is unfaithfulness.

According to Jim Cordell, a private counselor and lay minister with Life Center Foursquare Church in Spokane, Washington, many men create relationships in their own minds that no human can fulfill. He says he is counseling more Christian men than ever before about such expectations.

"These men often fear rejection and want risk-free relationships," Cordell says. Increasingly, men are willing to take their addiction to pornography to the next level—a physical affair.

A typical addict is someone who was exposed to pornographic

images in childhood through a parent, extended family member or friend. Most are men in their 30s and 40s who have been unable to hide their addiction. The healing process for those caught in the destructive grip of pornography includes four key elements:

1. Community intervention, preferably in small groups for discussion and accountability
2. Healthy relationships with individuals who will provide added mentoring and accountability
3. Counseling to deal with the bad seeds Satan has planted
4. Removal of temptations to avoid falling into pornography's trap again.

What should a Christian woman do if she discovers her husband has a problem with pornography? First, encourage him to get counseling to understand why his addiction has developed. Second, set boundaries in the home.

"If a person understands the relational roots of pornography," Cordell says, "it is easier to resolve the hurts and allow God to provide healing."

Resources for Finding Freedom

There are dozens of resources and organizations available to help men and women break free from pornography's grip. Here are a few:

National Coalition for the Protection of Children Families

800 Compton Road, Suite 9224

Cincinnati, OH 45231

(513) 521-6227

ncpcf@

Victim Helpline: (800) 583-2964

The National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families seeks to empower concerned citizens and community leaders to: (1) increase public awareness about the availability and harm of pornography, particularly in the lives of children; (2) support the enactment and enforcement, within the Constitution, of limitations on pornography; and (3) offer assistance to people harmed by pornography.

Citizens for Community Values

P.O. Box 13036

Spokane, WA 99213-3036

(509) 921-2748

Citizens for Community Values seeks to help protect children from the harmful effects of pornography by making it more

difficult to obtain. They also: (1) increase public awareness about the prevalence of sexual abuse and sexually oriented materials, highlighting its harmful effects; (2) support enforcement of limitations on pornography; and (3) offer assistance to people whose lives have been hurt by sexual abuse and pornography. Kimberly Drake, the executive director, speaks at churches and community events nationwide.

Harvest USA

P0 Box 11469

Philadelphia, PA 19111

(215) 342-7114 Phone

info@

Harvest USA exists to bring the clarity of God's Word and the power of Jesus Christ to bear on the issues of homosexuality, pornography and other sexual addictions. They do this by: (1) equipping men and women who want to be free; (2) providing spiritual support to families and friends affected by these issues; and (3) educating church leadership and laity relating to these critical issues in our day.

Other resources:

* An Affair of the Mind by Laurie Hall (Focus on the Family)

- * Door of Hope by Jan Frank (Thomas Nelson)
- * When Good Men Are Tempted by Bill Perkins (Zondervan)
- * Holy Sex by Terry Wier (Whitaker House)
- * Sexual Healing by David Kyle Foster (Mastering Life Ministries)
- * False Intimacy by Dr. Harry Schaumburg (NavPress)
- * Finding Freedom From the Shame of the Past by Mike Fehlauer (Creation House)
- * Imprisoned by Secrets of the Heart by Patricia Harris (Whitaker House)
- * His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage by Willard F. Harley Jr. (Revell)
- * Kids Online: Protecting Your Children in Cyberspace by Donna Rice Hughes (Revell)
- * Going Online @ Home by Ken Reaves (Broadman & Holman)

Resources for Finding Freedom

Don S. Otis is the president of Creative Resources, a Christian communications and publicity agency located in Sandpoint, Idaho. He is the author of Teach Your Children Well

(Revell) and Trickle-Down Morality (Chosen).