

A Hug Put the Gun Away

Rick Garmon's daughter, Katie, was date-raped in 2002 when she was 18 years old and a freshman in college. Too humiliated to speak about what had happened to anyone – even her family – Katie switched schools and attempted to move on with her life.

Over the next 14 months, Katie withdrew from her family and friends. She developed an eating disorder and began losing weight. Finally confronted by her mother, Katie confessed the truth. A year of fervent prayer and therapy finally helped Katie to overcome the pain and return to a normal life.

Meantime, Katie's father was battling the desire to avenge his daughter's rape. He even developed a plan to kill the man who had so deeply wounded his daughter. He, too, pulled away from everyone as he plotted out how he would drive through the college campus, sit in the parking lot with his rifle until the rapist walked by, and then shoot him.

One weekend when Katie was home, he retreated from her pain by going to the basement to clean his gun. His son, Thomas, came downstairs and asked, "Whatcha doin', Dad? Can I help ya clean? You goin' huntin'?"

The father didn't respond. When he looked at Thomas, the boy's eyes brimmed with tears.

"He knows. Dear God," Garmon thought. "I think my son knows my plan."

"Come here, boy. Give your daddy a hug," Garmon said. When Thomas wrapped his arms around him, the father realized that the boy's love was somehow stronger than his hatred. "His hug began to crumble my rage like a sledgehammer breaking a wall," the father said. "Chip by chip."

Locking the gun in the cabinet, Garmon made a choice to forgive the man who had harmed his daughter. "God, I gotta let go of this hate. It's killing me," he said.

As Katie began to feel free about telling the truth, she began to open up about her experience, even giving her testimony to a youth group. The more she talked, the healthier she became. She is smiling again – and now married to a man who loves and respects her.

The story of Rick and Katie Garmon is powerful, and illustrative of the destructive force of hate.

Is there someone in your life you need to forgive?

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).

– Beecher Hunter