

What readers have said about *The Single Parent Years*

“Oh, the joy at how you have grown in your love and trust in the Lord as He has led you and kept you and guided and comforted you through thick and thin! Surely a redemption story giving praise and glory to our amazing God, our loving heavenly Father who has been with you through it all.” — JS

“Reading from Kate’s diary and letters to friends, I ended up laughing out loud, being encouraged, relating to the so many parenting issues. Reading about the struggles and the accomplishments encouraged me in my faith and walk with Christ.” — CC

“The children’s antics provide plenty of light-hearted moments, while the honest reflections offer a deeply relatable and insightful look at everyday life. Kate’s growing faith and sense of community shine throughout, reminding readers that the past does not have to define the future. Both inspiring and entertaining, this book leaves a lasting impression of resilience, resourcefulness, and enduring hope.” — KM

EXCLUSIVE LEGACY

The Single Parent Years

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1989–2007

KATE SCARLETT

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Dedicated to my five precious children: Joanna, Gerry, Nicholas, Julian and Benjamin. The fact I was in such emotional pain for many years took a toll on you all because you didn't understand and were helpless. But God is faithful. Despite the odds, you have turned out to be well-adjusted adults, and I am proud of you all.

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The Story So Far...

In the first instalment of my trilogical memoir, I describe the reality of growing up in the Exclusive Brethren Church, a strictly controlled, legalistic sect. In the year of my birth, the sect's universal leader decreed separation from the 'world', triggering a slow descent into cult territory that radically altered the lives of its members, including ours and our extended family, some of whom we were cut off from, seemingly forever.

Throughout my school years, I increasingly realised that I was different from my classmates, having to be excluded from many of life's normal activities, and burdened by expectations I never really understood. Our family lived in complete subservience to the church's doctrines, and we were unquestioningly obedient. As a naïve teen, I was pressured into marrying a boy I barely knew, whilst being separated from my parents when they were 'shut up' under what seemed like petty circumstances.

Needing to move from Auckland to Nelson (his hometown), I struggled with not knowing anyone and my marriage became increasingly rocky. I felt so isolated whilst attempting to raise my growing family with the church's forbidding environment overshadowing every aspect of my life. My solace

could be found in one thing – music.

In my mid-twenties, after falling foul of the local church and its harsh standards and un-family-friendly disciplines, we were excommunicated several times. When the strain could no longer be endured by my husband, he abandoned me, leaving me to learn how to live independently while raising five children. My fight to reclaim my life can be read from this point on.

ONE

Open Brethren To The Rescue!

After Alex left, my initial emotion was overwhelming relief. For the first time in years, there was no conflict in our home. It can be common for parents to stay together ‘for the children’s sake’, but in our case, that was creating more harm. Single parenting isn’t ideal, but one stable parent is better than the kind of situation my children had been exposed to. I didn’t blame Alex; he was just as much a distressing casualty of the Exclusive Brethren (EB) church system as I was. We didn’t hear from him for some time, but I heard through the grapevine he’d moved in with another harrier club family in town.

The temptation to run away was always present. Moving had been the first thing on my mind back in 1985 when we were excommunicated for the final time, and the topic surfaced again after Alex left. Living just down the road from the main EB meeting hall, and with EB neighbours around the corner, it was all too close for comfort. I just wanted to run off and hide. However, I eventually came to be thankful God didn’t allow it. By having to stay put, I was forced to deal with it until I reached a stage where it didn’t bother me anymore – which wouldn’t have happened if I’d moved away.



Isel Park, January 1989 – my first photo as a single mum [Photo credit: Ernie Hardman]

However, even though it was a relief to be free of the abuse, I struggled to cope. The local health nurse – based at the primary school – somehow became aware of the change in my circumstances and got in touch. She was such a blessing! She arranged for a Christmas hamper to be delivered to our home, with gifts for the children also included. We were overwhelmed by the kind gesture as we'd never received anything like that before. She also put me in touch with an organisation called Birthright, whose focus was helping single-parent families practically as well as financially. Without her input, I wouldn't have known this type of assistance was available. A Birthright Officer then called round – a bright, bubbly Christian lady and a single parent herself – and spent time with me, discussing my needs. This lady became a close friend and was a tremendous help, allowing me to talk freely. And talk I did. Now that I had permission to do so, years of suppressed emotions began to spill out. One of her daughters was the same age as Jo, and the two girls became great pals. We became regular visitors to her house for meals. Kay also told me that one of the men on the staff ran a boy's club for lads

between the ages of 9 and 12 from single-parent homes, and she thought it would suit Gerry.

The young man in question turned up at my house one day and introduced himself. His name was Dan, and there was something very appealing about him. He radiated a quiet joy and peace, and we connected immediately. Like Kay, this gentle young man allowed me to speak frankly and was very reassuring. That first encounter with Dan altered the course of my life in ways I could have never expected or dreamed of. He even prayed with me, which was such an amazing new experience. It was arranged that Gerry would join his club, and I was thrilled my son would have such a trustworthy role model in his life.

Dan attended a small fellowship in town called Rutherford Street Chapel (RSC). It turned out that several people from the chapel were involved with Birthright, including another man called Leo. Dan and Leo had both grown up without fathers, and so they'd dedicated themselves to helping other boys who lacked a father's input. After that first session with me, Dan went back to his congregation and told them he'd met a single mum with five children who'd come out of the EB church and needed support. That wonderful little church started praying for me, although I was unaware of it at the time. Dan continued to call in; in fact, he'd always drop Gerry off last and then come in to talk for a while. On one memorable occasion, we didn't finish our conversation until 4am! I'd never been able to freely confide in a man like that before and it bemused me. Dan was quiet and reserved and didn't say much, but when he did, it was worth listening to. He became my first, real male friend, and even though he was several years younger than me, he was old and wise beyond his years due to the fact that he'd had to step up to be man of the house after his father died when he was just 11. Due to my own background, I was young for my age and only just starting to grow up, so we were pretty much on the same level. He gave me and my children some much-needed love and support when, for most people, it would have been easier to turn and walk away – we were quite mixed up and not coping very well with our situation. Gerry became special to him, and Dan told me several years later that of all the boys he'd dealt with, Gerry had been the

easiest and never caused trouble like the others. Dan was instrumental in helping Gerry come out of his shell.

For the first time in my life, I was experiencing what it was like to be loved unconditionally, even though I was quite unlovable at times. On one occasion when Dan was present, 11-year-old Jo had thrown a ‘wobbly’ and was screaming at me, and I was responding in a similar manner out of sheer frustration. There was plenty of door-slamming, heated accusations and tears, and I ended up going to my bedroom and shutting myself in for a while to try and clear my head. I was so humiliated that it had happened in front of Dan, I felt I could never look him in the eye again. When I came out half an hour later, I was amazed to find him still in my kitchen, doing the dishes. I thought he would have long since scarpered.

I asked him, ‘How come you still put up with us even though we are so lousy sometimes?’

He replied, ‘What kind of a friend would I be if I only stood by you when things were good?’

That was my first lesson in what true friendship was all about – taking the less pleasant aspects along with the good. I’d grown up with the theme tune that I’d probably never amount to much, and it wasn’t until I met Dan that I began to have some self-worth. He was a great encourager, and in those early days when I felt like giving up (several times a week), he’d say, ‘You’ll make it! I believe in you, Kathy, and you’re doing okay.’ Until then, I’d never had anyone tell me that they believed in me or my potential, so I never really believed in myself. It was something I needed to hear, and I began to blossom after that.

Despite the unfavourable circumstances, our lives began to take on the rhythm of a more ‘normal’ type of life than what we’d been used to. For the first time in my life, I was free to be myself, to indulge in my love of music, to make certain life choices without feeling guilty, and free to choose my friends. In addition to Boy’s Club, Gerry also started with Cubs at a local scout hall. There were music lessons, cricket and soccer games. The Cubs and sports had previously been off limits. I attended an assertiveness course for women to learn how to stand up for myself, and continued my involvement