



guidelines for living

a 5 minute message

January 31, 2018

NAPALM GIRL: THE UNTOLD STORY

And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Luke 23:34

If you ever saw her picture, you surely would remember it for the rest of your life. It gained notoriety in the 1970s as an antiwar icon when a photographer took her picture as she was running naked from a napalm attack in Vietnam.¹ The 9-year old girl whose picture was so riveting became known as the “Napalm Girl,” and the picture appeared in newspapers and magazines around the world. As an adult, writing of the horrible and devastating event, Kim Phuc said, “I had not been targeted. I had simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some 45 years after that dark, hideous day, Kim has recorded the story of her life--the pain, the fear, the hatred, as well as the transformation that eventually purged the anger, bitterness, and resentment toward those who caused her suffering in a recently published book entitled, “Fire Road: The Napalm Girl’s Journey Through the Horrors of War to Faith, Forgiveness, and Peace,” published by Tyndale.

In a *Wall Street Journal* article featuring the book, she explained her transformation saying, “My salvation experience occurred on Christmas Eve. It was 1982. I was attending a special worship service at a small church in Vietnam. The pastor, Ho Hieu Ha, delivered a message many Christians would find familiar: Christmas is not about the gifts we carefully wrap and place under a tree. Rather it is about the gift of Jesus Christ, who was wrapped in human flesh and given to us by God. As the pastor spoke, I knew in my heart that something was shifting inside of me.

“A decade removed from the defining tragedy of my Life, I still desperately needed peace. I had so much hatred and bitterness in my heart. Yet I was ready for love and joy. I wanted to let go of my pain. I wanted to pursue life instead of holding fast to the front of the sanctuary to say ‘yes’ to Jesus Christ².”

As Kim grew in her faith, she realized that just as Jesus prayed on the cross, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,” she also had to forgive those who were responsible for her hideous suffering and give up the “crippling weight of anger, bitterness, and resentment,” in her own words.

¹ Publishers Weekly.com, Dec. 22, 2017

² Kimberley A. Strassel, Wall Street Journal, December 22, 2017, A15.



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For the rest of her life she will require treatment for the burns that covered her arms, back and neck, a constant reminder that we live in an imperfect, broken, world. If ever an individual has reason to hate those who caused her suffering, Kim would be among them.

On one occasion I was in a home where a woman lived who had been imprisoned by the Russians in World War 2, beaten and abused. She survived by eating garbage, warmed over a small fire in the middle of the night. "Do you hate them," I asked her, "for what they did to you?" Pausing for a moment she reflected and replied, "I do not hate them but we must never forget!"

If you struggle with the issue of forgiveness, strive to remember that forgiveness never means, "What you did was OK because it was not OK. It simply means, I give up my right to hurt you because you hurt me." It means you put anger, hatred, and revenge in God's hand who is very capable of righting the score, and if it is not here on earth, there is a day of judgment and a hell where there is eternal separation from God.

Resource reading: Romans 14:10-12