

Wasatch Women *Women to Watch*



Shelley Lubben founded the Pink Cross Foundation to help eradicate porn wherever she can.

Finding redemption

Pain in pornography

by Marcia Armstrong Chidester

Finding redemption by Marcia Armstrong Chidester Shelley Lubben was only 9 years old when she was invited to spend the night at a classmate's house. The invitation seemed innocent enough. But, what happened that night changed Shelley's life forever.

While playing in the pool with her friend and the friend's older brother, Shelley was sexually molested by both of them. That act — and Shelley's accompanying shame and humiliation — became a catalyst that eventually led to years of prostitution and a pornographic film career.

The molestation was only one component of her path to porn. The other, Shelley says, was negligent parenting. During her childhood in California, her mother was uninvolved and uninterested and her father was too busy to care. Shelley's self-esteem plummeted as both family and classmates taunted her about her excess weight and Coke-bottle eyeglasses. Her mother proclaimed her weird.

In high school, Shelley lost the extra pounds and joined the drill team. When the boys noticed her curvaceous figure, she did not turn them away.

"I became the school slut overnight," she says.

By 16, Shelley was an alcoholic. She dyed her hair white, painted her fingernails black and openly defied her parents.

"Every day was filled with fighting and crying," she says. "I was completely out of control."

Her father finally threw her out of the house. To support herself, Shelley became a stripper, then a prostitute. It was a horrible life, she says. There were drugs, sexually transmitted diseases and death threats. Two pregnancies ended in miscarriage. When she finally had her first child, Tiffany, now 20, Shelley did not know the father's identity.

After Tiffany was born, Shelley went back to stripping until a friend encouraged her to act in pornographic movies because there was good money in it.

Shelley Lubben became a porn star.

Although the money was as good as promised — \$1,000 to \$2,000 for an eight-hour shoot — life on the porn set was

degrading and dangerous. And, it was spiritually killing her. "I went through the motions, but I was dead inside," she says.

In despair, she tried to commit suicide by slashing her wrists, driving drunk and overdosing on drugs.

"I begged God for mercy to get me out of it," Shelley says. "I promised, 'If you will save me, I will give you my whole life.'"

Her salvation came in a car crash.

"I was high on drugs, flipped three times and when I landed, didn't have a scratch on me," Shelley says. "When it was over, the song playing in the car was 'Last Chance' by Duran Duran. I knew then that God was talking to me."

God also sent her Garrett, a man who didn't want sex and was unfazed by her gritty past. "He just wanted to be my friend," she says. Eventually, they married and moved to Washington. Eight rocky years followed as Shelley abused alcohol, cocaine and marijuana; suffered an ectopic pregnancy; and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and cervical cancer.

"I looked like a zombie," Shelley recalls. "I felt there was no hope for me."

God came knocking again, this time telling Shelley to go to church. It was at Champions Centre in Tacoma, Wash., that she began to realize her life had value.

Finally, Shelley was living what she calls her "Betty Crocker years," replete with a house, loving husband and three healthy children. She began taking college classes.

Then came another celestial tap at her door. Time to move, God said. The family relocated back to California, even though Shelley initially resisted living so close to the scene of her physical and spiritual downfall.

Once settled in Fresno, her new pastor asked her to share her escape-from-pornography story with people in prison, exposing the lies and myths of glamour that surround the industry. Shelley devoted hours to encouraging the inmates to give up pornography.

In 2004, God made another request of her: Go public on the Web.

The resulting deluge of requests for media interviews turned Shelley into an avid anti-porn activist almost overnight. She was a guest on the "Dr. Phil" television show and appeared in the documentary anti-porn film, "Traffic Control," produced by Provo-based film company Living Biography. Numerous churches and grassroots groups asked her to speak.

Such celebrity had a downside. Shelley strapped the family budget by using money from Garrett's salary to help porn stars quit their jobs. She had to confess her previous life of porn and prostitution to her daughters. Her neighbors found out. "There are very few people who want to be our friends," Shelley says. "We have a lonely life."

But, Shelley, 40, is determined to use her past to eradicate porn wherever she can. She supports The CP80 Foundation, an Orem-based organization that helps parents protect their children from Internet porn.

In January, she organized the Pink Cross Foundation to encourage porn stars to escape the industry. Her organization helps them find reputable jobs, arranges for housing and schooling, pays bills and reunites the girls with their parents. Pink Cross recently formed a partnership with Provo Counseling Center, a facility that specializes in sexual issues, to provide help for girls.

"Right now, we offer, pro bono, \$500 to \$800 of free psychological testing over the phone to understand the girls' personalities, mental health issues, family and sexual histories," said program director Rory Reid.

Reid said his therapists will soon be making trips to California to counsel the girls in their own environment, arrange needed medical help and teach such basic skills as how to write a resume. "We want to set up a network for counseling in their area," Reid said. "Our goal is to empower them."

Shelley is happy that her efforts are paying off. People are listening. Prostitutes and porn actresses are abandoning the sex industry. The addicts she's counseled are realizing the destructive influence that pornography plays in their lives and are giving it up.

"God has provided," Shelley said. "If He can raise up a former porn actress to help others, it's not by accident. He did all this."

For help:

Follow these links and resources for help and more information.

- Shelley Lubben's Pink Cross Foundation, go to www.shelleylubben.com
- UCAP — The Utah Coalition Against Pornography: www.utahcoalition.org
- National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families: www.nationalcoalition.org
- Promoting a Decent Society through Law: www.moralityinmedia.org
- The Lighted Candle Society: www.lightedcandle.org