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Dana Hamilton And I'm from Lexington North Carolina

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So growing up, ah, I went through like a lot of domestic violence. At 7 I lost my father.

He was

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an alcoholic slash addict. He had an accident, and he took his last physical breath in my arms at 7.

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My father was very abusive. Very physically abusive, not sexually. So, he abused me and my

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mother like, just like traumatically. Holding a gun to my mom's head. Knife to her throat.

Things

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like that. And then, after he passed away, it seems like every couple of years I went through

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another traumatic event. Based on decisions that you know, my mother made you know about

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whoever she was dating at the time, or whatever. Or, in one of the instances it was a babysitter

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sexually abused me like two years after that. And it continued on. A couple of years

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after that I was abused in the church. So, a Deacon sexually abused me within the church

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when I was probably around 14-15 years old. So even with that you would have thought like "OK",

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you would have thought like, "I'm done with God." You know "I'm not even going to participate in

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this whole God thing." Couple years later I was raped. There was a lot of like sexual

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abuse on top of the domestic violence growing up. And then my mom remarried in my later teens,

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to another man that was also like, very physically abusive. Pretty much my whole upbringing was some

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type of abuse. Like physical, or sexual, or you know.. and all those ways too just kind of play

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into how you see yourself. And a lot of people struggle with that. They struggle with
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like who am I? Like what am I going to do when, when you're grown and you look back
at those
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things and you haven't worked for those things, it's really hard. For me, I think that's why
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sought the church. I was like trying to figure out who I was. Trying to heal from some of
that
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trauma. Then when you come into the church and that church is being almost as
traumatic as every
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body else you've seen in your life, you're like what the heck? You know what I mean? So
here I am
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trusting a particular church. Spending time with people within the church and there was.
Deacon
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that I looked up to a lot, kind of a a father figure. Cause I really never had a true father.
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At that time I still didn't understand who God was my father. So the Deacon took
advantage of
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it. So here I am looking up to him thinking he's the best thing since sliced bread, and we
end up
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in the woods together at a park, and definitely he lost all my respect at that point. I held
that in
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and kept that in for a long time. And when I did get to leaders in the church at 14 or 15,
they
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looked at me like I was crazy. And they didn't do anything about it. So, even after that, I
took a
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year or two off. You know, from the whole God experience. But then it's like God kept
calling
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me back. Like "That's no, not me Dana, like don't, you know, you have to continue to
press forward."
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You know I found myself in like different churches after that you know. And it, most of
them were

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charismatic or nondenominational or what not. I had never been brought up in anything else. So,

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that's kinda just what I experienced. Kinda what I, you know, gravitated towards.

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Um, but everyone was the same, and like boxes for days. If you don't fit this, then you can't

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come here. Of if you don't fit that, then you can't even join here. Or you can join here and

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we accept you but you can't sing here. (laughs) You know like, so there's all these limitations

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that I know God doesn't put on us. So, and I ventured out of the church.

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Pretty much said "screw it, I'm out." And left the quote unquote church, you know. Uh,

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really realized that church really didn't even know who they were- how could they know who I

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am or try to lead me in the right way? So um I kinda just after a few years of being in

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church, or so-called church back then, and just seeing how people were treated, you

know,

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for me it didn't resonate with me. I was like, you know, we can talk about this Jesus guy that

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was really good to everybody but you guys aren't representing that. I think for me, I had to just

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you know, step outside of that and figure out who God was to me. And then who I was personally as

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an individual. Everybody wanted to put you in a box, you know, you either fit this or you don't

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fit that, you have short hair you're this. If you look like that or you dress like that you're this.

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And none of that ever resonated with me. I'm like, well I don't feel like I'm that and I

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don't feel like I'm this. I just kinda feel like I'm Dana. Through that period of time,

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just being away from all of the chatter and all of the noise. And everybody trying to pull you left

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right and make you fit this and make you fit over here and try to squeeze you in this box-

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I finally realized like hey, this is a faith walk between me and God, and this is my walk. You know

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what I mean? It isn't going to look like everybody else's walk. And that's ok. At some point I just

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and to really just see God and say God, "like who do you say that I am? Who did you call me to be?"

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Through that, God truly freed be. Like, freed me. I am so free now. Like so free to just be me. Um,

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there is no labels with me. Like when people ask me like, hey how I identify, I hate that! I

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don't identify as anything. I'm just Dana. That's all I want to be is just Dana. I'm God's child.

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I don't fit a box. Uh I wear whatever clothes... I might wear men's clothes, I might where

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female's clothes.. I might just do a little bit of whatever I want to do. And that's ok, because it's

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ok to be different and be peculiar. Matter of fact God asks us to be peculiar. You know now, I just

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try to take that same freedom that God's given me and not just pass that on to other people like me,

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but to people who are not like me. You know what I mean? And I think people have um kind of started

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adopting a little bit of that culture of the people that I'm kind of involved with around me.

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So I run the U_Matter2 Movement. Um, started it in Lexington last year, 2019, May of 2019.

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I started the U Matter 2 Movement and we just knew that we wanted to make an impact in the community.

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To bring the community together in Lexington. To push to have unity in Lexington. Not just when

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it comes to LGBTQ or whatever but all races. Just basically making Lexington a more welcoming place.

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And then that kind of lead us into Salisbury. I work in Salisbury so I've been in Salisbury

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for a little over, about a year and a half now. Made huge connections in Salisbury with people.

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Connected to so many people around here. They also know about the Movement. So,

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when we start adopting a culture of unity, then we start realizing that there's some pretty amazing people in our communities. You know, pretty amazing people that we can turn

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to and ask for help. You know that maybe we wouldn't asked for help. We didn't know who they really were. You know what I mean? A lot of times we just look at the outside

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shell, and we don't really try to take a moment to get to know someone for who they are. So we

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showed up at Salisbury Pride last year. Really had an awesome time there. We were asked to come back later that evening to the drag show and like talk about the

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Movement. So,

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we're talking about God. in the middle of a drag show. You know what I mean? And I think that's

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where I think God show up. I do. I think God is right there in the middle of all that.

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We put limitations on God. But I think God can be wherever he wants to be and God can do whatever he

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wants to do in each and every one of us. I try to take all that, you know, law enforcement.

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I spent 10 years in law enforcement. I walked away from my career to pursue outreach.

Because

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I was very limited in what I could do with a badge on. And did really well at that for a long time

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and rose up in the ranks and things like that kind of stuff. So it was the hardest thing I

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ever did to walk away from that. But we are helping people beyond taking them to jail.

Or

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just having a 2-minute conversation with them in the back of a patrol car. And then also trying to

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use like, like what I went through growing up to just.. 'cause a lot of people are keeping all that

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inside. Like a lot of people sit around with a lot of pain, a lot of trauma, a lot of hurt. A lot of

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people do just like what I did, they run to the church for help. And the the church doesn't help

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them either. The Church makes them feel sometimes more broken than they were before they got there.

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When you've lived your whole life like just trying to navigate your faith. And trying to navigate

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people. And how people are treated and all this kind of stuff. You know,

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it becomes more of a mission. It's not about yourself. You know, it's really not.

English