

Rebuilding

A Marriage

Intimate | E

BROKEN BY PORNOGRAPHY



They were the 'golden couple' – thriving in the Gospel music industry in the USA, wealthy, glamorous, living a life others would have envied... until a secret sin threatened to destroy everything. This is the story of Clay and Renee Crosse.

By Nicki Partridge

It was the summer of 1998 in Memphis, Tennessee. Clay and Renee Crosse were getting ready for church. The house was abuzz with activity as their children - four-year-old Shelby and two-year-old Savannah - fussed over what to wear and how Mummy should do their hair. Later that morning, arriving at the church carpark, Clay leaned over and whispered to his wife, "We need to talk; can you ask your friends to mind the girls?" ...An unusual request, Renee thought.

Throughout the service, Renee couldn't stop thinking about the

urgency in Clay's voice. Her mind reflected back to the past few months when Clay was on the road. *Had he found another woman on tour? Was he having an affair? What could he possibly need to tell her? And why did they need a babysitter?*

In silence they travelled home from church, the tension rising. Sitting in their lounge room that day, Renee on one side of the room, Clay on the other, Clay openly wept as he confessed his secret sin.

Unbeknown to Renee, Clay had been addicted to pornography for the past two years. In fact, Clay had his own stash of tapes hidden in closets around their home - tapes he had been watching whenever he got the inclination or the opportunity. Hunched over like an old man, yet weeping like a child, Clay openly declared his weakness, one that had been with him since the fourth grade.

Renee's mind was spinning. *How could this be happening to them?* Clay was a successful recording artist. He had won numerous awards and received praise around the country. They faithfully attended church each week, had two beautiful girls, a lovely home and all the money they needed. This happened to other people, not them.

As the events of the past started to unravel in Clay's confession, Renee found herself moving from anger to hurt, to disappointment and then resentment. *Was she not pretty enough? Did they not have a good sex life? Did she need to lose weight? What went wrong?* All her childhood insecurities came crashing down around her.

Born into a Christian home in Memphis, Tennessee, Clay Crosse made a commitment to Christ at an early age. As a young man, Clay attended church each week, sang in the choir, went to youth group and hung out with other Christian friends. He took a tough stance on issues such as drugs and alcohol, never realizing something more sinister would seduce him.

He was ten when he had his first exposure to pornography. "I can remember visiting a friend's house and seeing some magazines on the coffee table," recalls Clay.

"Some were mainstream magazines and others were pornography." The inquisitive 10-year-old picked up the pornography and started looking at the pictures. "I'd never seen anything like this before and they fascinated me," said Clay.

A few years later, a friend of Clay's rented a pornographic movie. "In my heart, I knew this was wrong," recalls Clay, "but I never quite realized how dangerous it could be."

What followed was a slippery slope that eventually led Clay to believe that God was okay with pornography so long as it provided a 'safe' release from his growing lust problem.

In 1990, Clay married Renee, a young beautiful Christian girl he had been dating for six years. On their wedding day, Clay stood in front of his home church wearing a white tuxedo waiting for his childhood sweetheart to walk down the aisle.

STATS & INFO RE PORN

The following statistics, from both secular and religious sources, reveal the shocking prevalence of the usage of porn - even amongst women, and throughout the Church - including Pastors and lay leaders. (SOURCE: www.blazinggrace.org)

* At \$12 billion a year, the revenues of the porn industry in the U.S. are bigger than the NFL, NBA and Major League Baseball combined. Worldwide porn sales are reported to be \$57 billion. To put this in perspective, Microsoft, who sells the operating system used on most of the computers in the world (in addition to other software), reported sales of \$36.8 billion in 2004. - *Family Safe Media*

* 60% of all website visits are sexual in nature. - *MSNBC Survey 2000*

* 77% of online visitors to adult content sites are male. Their average age is 41 and they have an annual income of \$60,000. 46% are married. - *Forrester Research Report, 2001*

* The U.S. Customs Service estimates that there are more than 100,000 websites offering child pornography (which are illegal) worldwide. - *Red Herring Magazine, 1/18/02*

* Hollywood currently releases 11,000 adult movies per year - more than 20 times the mainstream movie production. - *LA Times Magazine, 2002.*

* 17% of all women struggle with porn addiction.

* 1 of 3 visitors to all adult websites are women.

* 42% of surveyed adults indicated that their partner's use of pornography made them feel insecure. - *Marriage Related Research, Mark A. Yarhouse, Psy.D. Christian Counseling Today, 2004 Vol. 12 No. 1.*

* 41% of surveyed adults admitted they felt less attractive due to their partner's pornography use. - *Marriage Related Research, Mark A. Yarhouse, Psy.D. Christian Counseling Today, 2004 Vol. 12 No. 1.*

In a Kinsey Institute survey, respondents were asked "Why do you use porn?"

72% said they used porn to masturbate/for physical release.

69% - to sexually arouse themselves and/or others.

54% - out of curiosity.

43% - "Because I can fantasize about things I would not necessarily want in real life."

38% - "To distract myself."

* In December of 2000, the National Coalition to Protect Children and Families surveyed 5 Christian Campuses to see how the next generation of believers was doing with sexual purity:

48% of males admitted to current porn use.

68% of males said they intentionally viewed a sexually explicit site at the school.

* Roger Charman of *Focus on the Family's Pastoral Ministries* reports that approximately 20% of the calls received on their *Pastoral Care Line* are for help with issues such as pornography and compulsive sexual behavior.

* In a 2000 *Christianity Today* survey, 33% of clergy admitted to having visited a sexually explicit website. Of those who had visited a porn site, 53% had visited such sites "a few times" in the past year, and 18% visit sexually explicit sites between a couple of times a month and more than once a week.

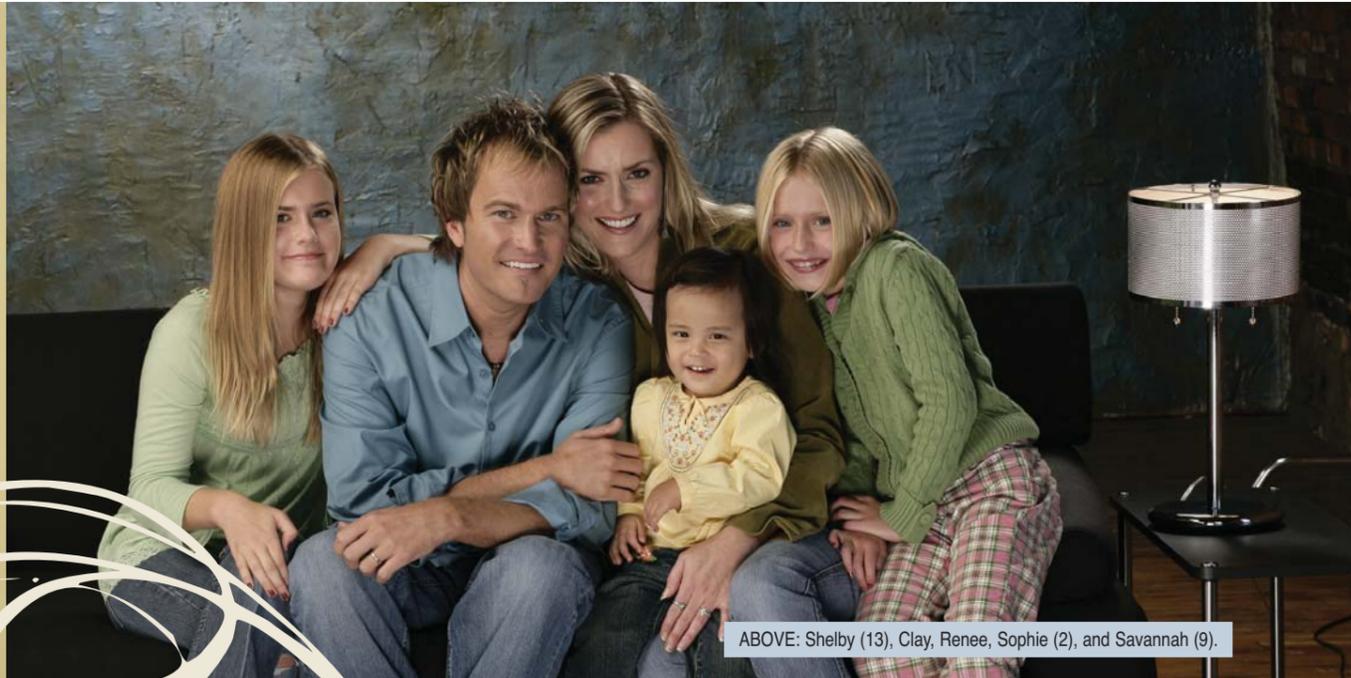
* Out of 81 pastors surveyed (74 males 7 female), 98% had been exposed to porn; 43% intentionally accessed a sexually explicit website. - *National Coalition survey of pastors. Seattle, April 2000.*

* In his book, *Men's Secret Wars*, Patrick Means reveals a confidential survey of evangelical pastors and church lay leaders. 64% of these Christian leaders confirm that they are struggling with sexual addiction or sexual compulsion including, but not limited to, use of pornography, compulsive masturbation, or other secret sexual activity.

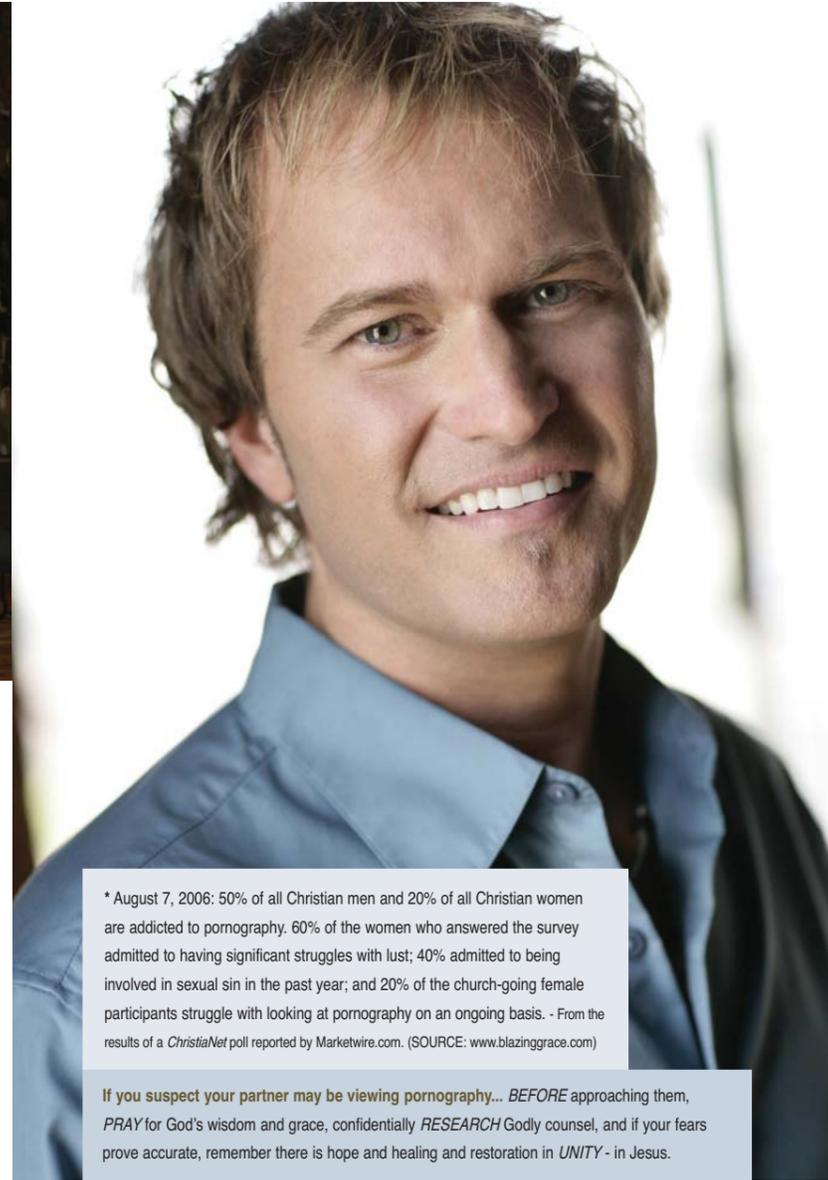
* 34% of female readers of *Today's Christian Woman's* online newsletter admitted to intentionally accessing Internet porn in a recent poll.

* In March of 2002 Rick Warren's (author of *The Purpose Driven Life*) Pastors.com website conducted a survey on porn use of 1351 pastors: 54% of the pastors had viewed Internet pornography within the last year, and 30% of these had visited within the last 30 days.

* 47% of families said pornography is a problem in their home. - *Focus on the Family Poll, October 1, 2003.*



ABOVE: Shelby (13), Clay, Renee, Sophie (2), and Savannah (9).



* August 7, 2006: 50% of all Christian men and 20% of all Christian women are addicted to pornography. 60% of the women who answered the survey admitted to having significant struggles with lust; 40% admitted to being involved in sexual sin in the past year; and 20% of the church-going female participants struggle with looking at pornography on an ongoing basis. - From the results of a ChristiaNet poll reported by Marketwire.com. (SOURCE: www.blazinggrace.com)

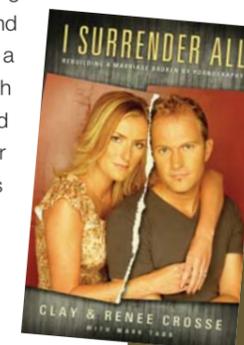
If you suspect your partner may be viewing pornography... BEFORE approaching them, PRAY for God's wisdom and grace, confidentially RESEARCH Godly counsel, and if your fears prove accurate, remember there is hope and healing and restoration in UNITY - in Jesus.

For more information on pornography, deliverance from sexual addiction, and help for spouses of pornography users, here are a few of the online resources available:

- www.blazinggrace.org
- www.firesofdarkness.com
- www.sexaddict.com
- www.xxxchurch.com
- www.pureonline.com
- www.christiananswers.net
- www.pureintimacy.org

"I'll never forget one day after I had been praying", she continues. "The next thing I knew, Clay was calling me from an airport excited about a title for a new song. That to me was power - I had prayed and asked God to go before my husband and give him pure thoughts instead of impure thoughts - his phone call was proof that God was working."

Rebuilding their broken marriage hasn't been easy, Renee confesses. In their honest and compelling autobiography, 'I Surrender All,' Clay and Renee openly talk of pursuing God in a fresh way, praying through the tough times, devouring the Word of God and making wise decisions concerning their lifestyle. Both Clay and Renee also stress the importance of being accountable to each other and allowing grace and forgiveness to permeate their home.



Clay & Renee's book - 'I Surrender All - Rebuilding A Marriage Broken By Pornography'.

And the question they often get asked is: How can you give yourself in the bedroom after Clay violated his wedding vows? "It wasn't easy to 'carry on as usual' admits Renee, "but I knew withholding from my husband would be counterproductive." Instead, she made a decision to walk in forgiveness. Time, effort and God's grace have led the Crosses to a more intimate place than ever before.

So how is their marriage and family today? "Our relationship is much better than anything we ever had in our six years of dating or in our first eight years of marriage. Today we are closer and more in love than we ever thought possible," says Renee. For the most part this is due to a 180° shift in their commitment to Christ. As a family they read the Bible regularly, pray for each other, screen their entertainment choices, and serve at their local church which they believe to be the key activities that have kept the family grounded. There's even a recent edition to the Crosse household: a 21-month-old baby girl they adopted from China - a decision birthed after they had been praying about the issue of compassion.

In addition to running a busy growing household, a successful music ministry and writing their first book, in 2002 Clay and Renee also established a ministry called *HolyHomes*, which challenges Christian families to live godly lives. Through their seminars, one-on-one counselling and conferences, Clay and Renee are able to share their transformational story with thousands. "*HolyHomes is our ministry to encourage Christian homes to be different,*" says Clay. "*To not fall in line with the divorce rate, which in America is about fifty percent, and to use this thing called 'faith'... to overcome whatever comes their way.*"

"When we speak nationally, we ask couples to recommit their homes and their lives to Christ, to get their eyes and minds back onto the Word of God, to rebuild with prayer... because a praying family will see revival and finally experience the revival that we have had in our home," declares Clay with conviction."

One verse of scripture remains close to the Crosses' heart: "As far as I am concerned, God turned into good, what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today, so I could save the lives of many people. (Genesis 50:20) The Crosse family is certainly living proof of this.

Writer's note: To suggest that Clay and Renee's book is simply about pornography and the issues stemming from it would be understating its impact and potential influence. Clay and Renee's story challenged us as a family to re-focus on our relationship with God, to not accept the standards of this world in terms of what we allow into our home, and to not allow the material blessings we currently enjoy surpass the immeasurable riches found only in Christ. We too desire a holy home.

Clay stood mesmerized by his beautiful bride, vowing in his heart that things would be different, that he would no longer need pornography and that as a couple they would shine for God.

Over the next eight years of their marriage, Clay and Renee worked hard to build his growing career in Gospel music. His first single 'I Surrender All' climbed to the top of the gospel music charts and the *Gospel Music Association* named him 'Artist Of The Year' in 1995. Riding high, he became the recipient of three Dove Awards and had a string of hit songs.

At the peak of his fame, Clay was making enough money to afford his family the luxury lifestyle many would only dream about. Seduced by what the world had to offer, they bought a huge home, nice cars, and designer clothes. In their free time, they spent thousands of dollars on renting movies or going to the cinema. "It was a time when we were into ourselves," explains Clay in his southern drawl. "I was a normal human being, I had won lots of award, I was on the cover of magazines... and instead of being grounded and thinking, 'God, this is amazing,' I loved every minute of it."

Renee also admits to being captivated by the trappings of success; describing a life with few boundaries, a self-centered approach towards God, too much free time and no moral filter on their entertainment choices as elements contributing to their demise. Sadly, the Crosses' selfish lifestyle was about to have devastating consequences.

In 1997, after a concert tour in Savannah, Clay struggled to recover from a sinus infection that was threatening to ruin his voice and his career. Numerous visits to throat specialists couldn't pinpoint the problem. In desperation, Clay went to see Chris Beatty, one of the most respected voice coaches in Nashville who unashamedly quizzed Clay about his walk with God and his marriage. The floodgates opened with Clay revealing his addiction to pornography. After prayer and counsel, Clay prepared himself for one of the hardest days of his life - telling his wife.

"When Clay first confessed his sin to me, I felt everything a normal woman would feel - anger, hurt and disappointment," said Renee "I wondered how I didn't pick up on the warning signs; the graphic and loose talk, aggression in the bedroom and at times,

inappropriate comments about other women." Renee excused this as typical male behaviour. "I had no idea this was going on."

Discovering her husband's weakness devastated the unsuspecting Renee. Did she ever think of walking out? "It was his broken-ness that kept me there," admits Renee. "I see many women whose husbands are into this type of material and they are not repentant - they don't see it as a problem. Clay was genuinely broken before God and asking me to forgive him."

Fuelled by a determination to save her marriage, she persevered through the hard times, although she does admit to being on an emotional rollercoaster for some time. "I was angry at first, which then shifted to 'It's my fault! If I looked like this or that, he wouldn't have looked at pornography,'" recalls Renee. "I would ask Clay continually, 'Did I do something wrong?' Clay just kept saying to me, 'No! It's not your fault. It is my problem.' We do tend to blame ourselves and this could not be further from the truth."

In the months following Clay's confession, Renee also admits to being tormented by mistrust and fear. "I had forgiven Clay on that Sunday," says Renee, "but walking in that forgiveness and rebuilding the trust took time. Every time Clay went away, I'd be thinking, 'Who is he sitting next to on the plane? What will happen to him if he sees soft core pornography at the airport newsagent?' I called him often. The whole time he was gone I was in knots wondering what he was up to."

It wasn't until Renee read the acclaimed book, 'The Power of a Praying Wife,' that she experienced some peace. According to Renee, when thoughts of doubt and mistrust crept into her mind, she would pray for Clay. A scripture she often quoted was Proverbs 22:3: 'A prudent man sees evil and hides from it.' "I would pray, 'God, Clay's in an airport this weekend, please show him that you are the Lord of all, and when he sees something that he shouldn't, let him see scripture before him that will protect him,'" admits Renee.