

# Unraveled *roots*

## Chapter 1: Why Am I Here?

**KARIN BARBITO | MELINDA MEANS | LISA ROWE, LCSW**  
**FOREWORD BY KATHY KOCH, PHD, PRESIDENT, CELEBRATE KIDS, INC.**

**Unraveled Roots: Exposing the Hidden Causes of Damaging Behaviors**

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Unless otherwise indicated, all names of people in the stories and examples in this book have been changed. Stories are based on interviews and correspondence with the authors. Specific, identifying details and circumstances have been altered to protect their identities and/or the identities of others referenced in their stories. Accounts have not been verified and are based on the remembrances and perspectives expressed by the persons interviewed.

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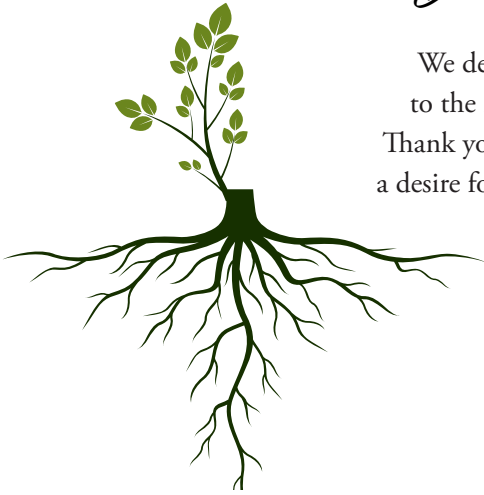
How often have we heard the phrase, “we need to get to the ‘root cause’ of...”? In *Unraveled Roots: Exposing the Hidden Causes of Damaging Behaviors*, Karin, Melinda, and Lisa offer a well-thought-out roadmap – clearly **identifying and defining** four distinct root causes of wounds, and gently guiding the reader through healing and restoration from that woundedness. They write from their own journeys: “Healing comes in layers, and is risky... but as we heal, we become stronger.” We all have wounds and we all need healing. You will have no doubt that they are walking with you and rooting for you on **your** journey to healing, wholeness, freedom, and greater joy. Take this journey with them. It’s worth it, because you’re worth it.

—Karen Garnett, Consultant, Culture of Life Network

Wanting to change and needing to change, but not being able to change, is painful. It’s demoralizing. Hope becomes despair. Confusion. Embarrassment. Anger. Fear. I’m excited you haven’t given up. I know you haven’t because you’re holding this book. I’m proud of you for wanting more for yourself . . . Changes in your beliefs and behaviors are possible, especially when you understand your past. You may be surprised to discover its power. It doesn’t need to be the negative anchor it has perhaps been. With the help provided in these pages, you can reinterpret your past so it doesn’t weigh you down. You can move on and discover new sources of beliefs and attitudes . . . I’m so glad you found this book.

—Kathy Koch, Ph.D., President, Celebrate Kids, Inc.

# *Dedication*



We dedicate this book  
to the roots of our past.  
Thank you for creating in us  
a desire for hope and healing.

# Foreword

Before I traveled as much as I do now, I enjoyed growing African violets. Of course, to enjoy the pink, purple, and white blossoms, I had to take care of the plants by putting them in the right light and watering the soil. I had to pull off and throw away dead blossoms. I also had to pay attention and transfer plants to larger containers when they were no longer growing. This was a sign the roots were crowded. The beauty depended on what I could not see.

Now I only grow ordinary vines in vases full of water. There's no soil to dry up or crowded-out roots. I can have plants and still travel. Usually.

After being away from my home for a month, I got home to discover that several leaves had fallen from one of my vines. Enough water had evaporated and been used by the roots to mean some roots didn't have access to their source of life. Without roots functioning well, part of the vine withered, and leaves died. I was disappointed.

Roots don't just matter in plants. They matter in us. In a plant, the roots anchor the plants and absorb nutrients and moisture. For us, our past serves as an anchor and a significant source of beliefs and attitudes. Our past influences our future.

I'm so glad you found this book. Changes in your beliefs and behaviors are possible, especially when you understand your past. You may be surprised to discover its power. It doesn't need to be the negative anchor it has perhaps been. With the help provided in these pages, you can reinterpret your past so it doesn't weigh you down. You can move on and discover new sources of beliefs and attitudes.

For 30 years, I've been teaching and writing about the role our roots have on our fruit. Today does influence tomorrow. Childhood influences adulthood.

Who we are now has something to do with who we used to be. Absolutely! I have often talked about the need to kill the spider (the cause of our behavior) rather than just sweeping away the web (the behavior). This unraveled roots analogy is much stronger. No one is afraid of roots.

Have you been frustrated that change comes slowly or doesn't last? Perhaps, as I have often done, you have simply dusted the spider webs from the windowsill only to wake up the next day to discover they're back. Maybe you have pulled dead blossoms from plants thinking you'd never have to do that again.

If we want a beautiful life, we must dig deep. We must understand and accurately interpret our roots. Our history can't be changed, but we can learn to change what we think about it.

The truths here will help you untangle your thoughts about your past and the people and events that caused you to become who you are. Unraveling your roots will make your past clear. Your new understandings will change your perspective about yourself and those people and events from your past. Now your present and future can be different.

Wanting to change and needing to change, but not being able to change, is painful. It's demoralizing. Hope becomes despair. Confusion. Embarrassment. Anger. Fear. I'm excited you haven't given up. I know you haven't because you're holding this book. I'm proud of you for wanting more for yourself.

When I met Karin, Melinda, and Lisa, we quickly bonded. We finished each other's sentences as we discovered how closely aligned our beliefs were. These gifted women love well. They are trustworthy. They're committed to the God of the Bible. Their concerns for you and our culture inspire me. I'm proud to endorse their resource. I'll do everything I can to publicize it because there are too many people controlled by their past and they don't even know it. Digging up our roots and being planted in healthier soil of accurate understandings changes us.

I'm not surprised God uses a tree and roots analogy when sharing about

people who trust in God in Jeremiah 17:7-8. Ultimately, this is what I pray for you. As you continue to journey in the life you have, may you choose to trust more in God. He will help you see your past accurately and with compassion. He will help you learn new beliefs, behaviors, and strategies going forward. I pray, because we learn to trust God, we are each “like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

**Kathy Koch, Ph.D.**

Founder and President, Celebrate Kids, Inc.

Co-founder, Ignite the Family

# Warning Label

*Reading this book is risky.* It's important for you to know that before you begin this journey. Walking out a new path, making different choices, is rarely safe or predictable. But nothing truly worth pursuing is without risk.

Our tendency can be to cling to well-worn patterns, mindsets, or behaviors even if they cause us pain. There's a strange sense of comfort in the familiar. At least we know what to expect. The outcomes of new choices can seem uncertain and far away. We may be afraid of how other people will react. They're often comfortable with our patterns, too. Healing rocks the boat. It shakes the tree.

Healing means exposure. We have to make ourselves vulnerable. Wounds can't be healed unless we begin to reveal them to trusted, loving people. Some wounds are so deeply buried beneath the surface that we don't even realize they are there. They lie dormant until something or someone pokes at the wound. And suddenly we're reliving an experience, a rejection, a season of difficulty that happened so long ago we may have forgotten it. Yet, the pain that unexpectedly rises to the surface is as real as if it had just occurred yesterday.

As I began writing this book, I thought of you and prayed often as I considered how challenging *reading* and processing this book could be *for you*.

But I didn't consider how difficult and painful *writing* this book would be *for me*. The famous poet Robert Frost once said, "No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader." In other words, the writer has to go to deep, painful places if he or she expects to inspire the reader to do the same. Tears come from a tender, vulnerable place that can't be easily accessed.

As I wrote, interviewed, and researched for this book, I had "a-ha" moments about the roots of some of my own choices, feelings, and behaviors. It

brought me to a deeper level of healing, self-acceptance, and forgiveness and grace for others. It was simultaneously painful and freeing. I was grateful for those moments.

But about midway through the writing process, something happened that *shook my core*. The project unexpectedly went in a different direction that suddenly brought back memories of a very painful experience from my past—an experience that triggered deep wounds of rejection in me. Suddenly, I felt like I was being forced to go back to that place. And I didn't think I could. I certainly didn't want to. That place made me feel like I wasn't valuable, like I wasn't important. It made me feel like who I was and what I had to offer wasn't “enough.”

For weeks, I had been putting my heart—pieces of who I am—on page after page. As I was writing one day, I raised my fingers off the keyboard. Suddenly, I thought: *I can't write one more word. What I'm doing isn't enough. And if this isn't enough—if who I am isn't enough—then I don't have anything else to offer.* I was certain that my role in this book was done.

That deep root of rejection didn't grow overnight. It was planted in me early and through a variety of sources and experiences. That's usually the case, isn't it?

Growing up, my family seemed normal, stable, and loving. My mother's quirky, fun personality kept life interesting. But so often I longed for her to be dependable and in control. I resented her undependability and emotional instability. It wasn't until I was an adult that she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. All I knew growing up was that something seemed “off.” Although I knew I was loved, a sense of loneliness marked my childhood. I felt an emotional distance with my mom that I couldn't seem to bridge no matter how hard I tried.

Extended family relationships were also complicated. My aunt and uncle raised my mother after my grandmother died suddenly. Until the day my mother passed away, my aunt never let my mom forget all the sacrifices she had made to raise her. It was a relationship characterized by guilt and manip-



ulation. It was as if my aunt had convinced my mom that connecting with her own children was an act of disloyalty.

For different reasons, neither of my parents was willing or able to make the necessary emotional break from the people who raised them in order to be fully emotionally invested in each other and their children.

The turmoil and dysfunction in my home made me feel uncomfortable and out of control. I coped by trying to be the “good girl.” Performance and people pleasing became my “drugs” of choice. I was looking to fill that deep need for stability, value, love, and acceptance.

As I got older, I gradually began to connect the dots behind some of my mother’s behaviors and emotional disconnection. My grandparents married young; and my grandmother became pregnant right away. Under financial and family pressures, she chose abortion. My mom was born a few years later, but my grandparents divorced shortly after. When my mom was six, her mother, at the age of 26, died suddenly from a complication after surgery. My mother had only sporadic contact with her dad throughout her growing up years.

My mom brought all those wounds and feelings of abandonment, combined with an untreated mental illness, into her marriage and family. She was lonely, too. She wanted to connect with us, but I don’t think she knew how.

After I got married, I found myself repeating so many of the same patterns I witnessed growing up. They just looked a little different. Parenting and healthy connection with my children were infinitely harder than I ever dreamed they would be. My marriage hit a long, difficult season. I longed for a happy family, to make things better, but I didn’t know how. Everything I tried seemed to fail. Suddenly, my compassion for my mother began to grow by leaps and bounds. She did the best she could with the tools and level of healing she had—which wasn’t much. I realized that she truly did *want* to connect more closely with me. Her own wounds, unresolved issues, and upbringing prevented her from knowing how.

My mom and I weren’t so different after all.

Finally, gradually, I began to let go of *my* efforts to try to feel loved, to fix my life, and my family. And God began to patiently and lovingly show me a better way. New choices. New patterns. Ones that fit the way He made me. Healing comes in layers. We will never fully “arrive” on this healing journey. But as we make healthier choices, we get stronger. The pain of the past isn’t gone, but it just doesn’t define us anymore.

That painful experience from my past? I’m a different person now. I felt God speak to my heart: *You aren’t who you were then. You don’t have to react the same way. It can be different this time. You don’t have to be afraid.*

Healing *is* risky. But you are valuable enough to take the gamble. Read on.

**—Melinda Means**

# How to Use This Book

Because exploring old memories and past wounds will likely be difficult and painful at times, we highly recommend taking the journey through *Unraveled Roots* in a small group setting with a trained facilitator. However, if that is not possible, we encourage you to consider asking a trusted friend, counselor, or church leader to come alongside as you explore your past and discover a new healing path.

In a group setting, please be aware that everything that is shared should be kept strictly confidential and within the group. Your time together needs to feel safe so conversation can be positive, honest, and free flowing.

Throughout this book, you will find a discussion section called “Unravel the Root: Truth Story.” These are real-life stories that relate to the root we are examining in each chapter. Through these stories, we walk you through the process of recognizing parallels of dysfunction in your own story and how to replace the lies and behaviors that stemmed from that root with truth and healthier choices.

Each of us has our own story. Some of our stories and wounds can seem more difficult or extreme than others. We invite and encourage you to refrain from judgments about others’ experiences. No one should feel that their story is not important or that their wounds are not significant simply because they don’t seem to be as intense as someone else’s. Because of our temperaments and other factors, a seemingly less traumatic experience in someone else’s life could actually be far more damaging than it seems.

**Please be aware that we use the term “parent” throughout the book to encompass the person or persons who raised you, whether that is a guardian, grandparent, foster parent, or others.**

You were on our minds long before this book was written, and as each chapter and story were formed. May your journey through *Unraveled Roots* lead you to health and healing.

For more information about finding or forming an *Unraveled Roots* group, please email [info@unraveledroots.com](mailto:info@unraveledroots.com).

## Chapter One

# Why Am I Here?

Every child has dreams. They are often secret hopes and wishes that he or she never verbalizes except maybe to a teddy bear or a trusted friend in a late night giggle session. When you're a child, the sky's the limit. Anything seems possible. Dreams are the things that fairy tales are made of.

No little girl ever dreams of becoming a prostitute, but she does.

No little boy ever dreams of beating his wife, but he does.

No man or woman ever dreams of one day aborting their child, but they do.

So many of us find ourselves living a life we never dreamed. Sometimes those childhood dreams get snuffed out through a single terrible, violent act or at such a young age that we struggle to remember them. For others of us, they are gradually, but heartbreakingly, extinguished through many disappointments and traumas over many years.

You want life to be different, but have no idea how to change it. You may doubt that change is even possible. But you're here because you're tired of the cycle. Tired of finding yourself in the same place over and over again. Life feels like a continuous and lonely battle; and you feel like you're losing the fight. In fact, you're not sure that you have any fight left in you. We're here to tell you this: *You are not alone.* You didn't arrive here overnight. And there is a reason you are in this place.



You are not alone.  
You didn't arrive here overnight. And there is a reason you are in this place.

Imagine a gardener who is growing a tree. In time, the tree begins to blossom and fruit begins to grow. One day, the gardener notices the fruit has spots

and feels mushy. She bites into it and it doesn't taste good. She cuts off the bad fruit, hoping better fruit will grow. She pays special attention to the fruit and treats it with a variety of methods. She thinks that will solve the problem. However, when she goes out a few days later, new fruit has grown that is just as unhealthy as the fruit she'd tried so hard to get rid of. And the fruit she "treated" only continues to look worse. She begins to believe that growing good fruit is hopeless.

The "fruit" in our lives—the behaviors and choices we make—are often a reflection of deeper issues that lie beneath the surface. We can't see them, so we often focus on the fruit, but we always seem to experience the same bitter harvest: You may have tried hard to stay clean, but can't seem to break free from your addiction. Maybe you've left an abusive relationship, only to choose another man who abuses you. Or perhaps you vowed to never have another abortion, only to find yourself pregnant again and making the same choice.

The problem that is visible to the eye is always caused by what lies beneath the surface.



Here's what we often miss: The problem that is visible to the eye is always caused by what lies beneath the surface. Unhealthy and damaging fruit comes from diseased roots. *The roots feed the tree.* If the gardener tries to make the fruit better without treat-

ing the roots, she will be perpetually frustrated and the tree will grow sicker and sicker. Once the root problems are identified and addressed, the tree will gradually begin to produce good fruit.

## Fruit from the family tree

Long before you ever found yourself in this place—long before you were even born—the seeds were planted. The roots had been steadily growing beneath the surface just waiting to tangle you up. We can usually find the "why" behind our choices and behavior when we take a careful and detailed examination of the generations before us.

Throughout this workbook, we will be leading you through a process of examining your choices and behaviors and relating them to the generations before you. Many ancestry websites provide a *genealogy*—revealing more about *who* is in your family tree. However, we are going to go much deeper than the “who.” We will focus on helping you identify hidden patterns, behaviors, and significant events from past generations that may be impacting you today. For example, our father abandons us, so we find ourselves settling for a verbally or physically abusive boyfriend because we subconsciously feel that if our father doesn’t want to be with us, he must not love us. If that’s the case, we believe nobody else will love us either. So we go with whoever shows interest in us, even if it’s hurtful or damaging.

Maybe we were sexually abused as a child and find ourselves choosing men who also use and abuse us. Or, we may have grown up in an outwardly healthy-looking family. But behind closed doors, that “healthy”



We need awareness to be able to begin to make different, healthier choices.

mother or father was emotionally distant and/or verbally abusive, making it much more difficult for us to feel loved and form healthy relationships.

The bottom line is that we are often groomed from childhood for the behaviors and choices we are now making. We weren’t equipped to make different choices. Sometimes the ones who set us up for this dysfunctional path did so consciously, but often, they are simply acting out of their own tangled roots. We all have choices. This *does not* absolve them of all responsibility for their choices, but it does help to explain them. However, regardless of what our parents did or didn’t do, harboring resentment and bitterness towards them keeps us paralyzed in the past. As we begin to recognize our own mistakes, we have the opportunity to make healthier choices. We may not have had power to change what happened to us as a child, but we do have power over how we act and react as an adult.

We need awareness to be able to begin to make different, healthier choices. Unhealthy patterns of behavior are often deeply ingrained and seem normal to us. We don’t even realize they are damaging. Until we get to the root of our patterns, we will stay in the dark to the truth and continue to make the

same poor choices. It is when our eyes are opened that we can begin to forge a new, life-giving path.

## **There is a reason why you are here**

There *is* a reason you are in this place of hurt and struggle. But there's also a reason you are in *this* place, reading *this* book during *this* time in your life, hoping and searching for an answer and a solution. You did not come here by accident. Yes, our upbringing and experiences have groomed us and normalized and solidified behaviors and unhealthy choices. But it's never too late to walk a new path. We are inviting you to take this journey with us. We encourage you to open your mind and heart to new possibilities—to dare to dream a little again.

Throughout this journey, we hope to answer the question, “Why am I *here*?” in more ways than one. As we've discussed, our goal is to open your eyes to the generational patterns that led you to this place so you can begin to make healthy choices. We want to help you discover the “why” behind your “what.” But we also desire to open your eyes to the truth that you are here on this earth for a very important purpose. In fact, each of us was uniquely created with a purpose only we can fulfill. We want to partner with you as you discover, grow, and walk out your purpose.

Over the next four chapters, we will be exploring common “roots” of damaging choices. You may have heard of them, but never connected them to your own behaviors and circumstances. We may be redefining root issues in ways that you have never considered before. Or, perhaps you may not have even known one or more of these issues could lead to unhealthy behaviors. However, if none of these roots seem to fit your personal situation or experience, write your thoughts down and be sure to bring them up with your mentor, in your small group, or privately with your leader, if you feel that is more appropriate and comfortable for you.

As you read this book, you may begin to think of others who could benefit from this information. Even if you don't personally relate to all the roots



mentioned, this book may help you to be a more compassionate friend. It may help you to better understand others in your life.

Throughout the book, we will be walking you through “Truth Stories.” These are real-life stories that help illustrate the four roots that we are exploring. Through reading and examining others’ experiences, you may begin to understand more about how your past shaped you and set you up for the choices you are now making. The goal is never to go back and assign blame. That is not productive and does nothing to move you forward. The goal is to go back and look at what shaped you so you can learn from it, understand the “why” behind those choices, start the forgiveness and healing process, and pass down a healthier legacy to your children.

We are privileged to walk alongside you in this healing journey.

We are glad you are *here*. You are not alone.



He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Psalms 147:3 (NIV)