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INTERACTIVE E-ZINE | SUMMER 2021

Voices Atende

STORIES OF HOPE AND HEALING

...A COMPLICATED COURAGE

...IT ALL HAPPENED FOR ME NOT AGAINST ME

...A JOURNEY OF HEALING AND BLOSSOMING TO EMBRACE MY TRUE SELF

... MY PAIN IS MY POWER

...ON FORGIVENESS

...THRIVING AFTER SEXUAL ABUSE

ONENESS BY DINA ZISKIN FORTUNE



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WHY AN INTERACTIVE E-ZINE?



The joy and power of an interactive E-zine is that you can explore to your heart's content.

Simply click on an highlighted image or orange link to view a video or read more in depth information.

Click on a photo to get insights on that person or an artist's image to peruse through additional art from that artist.

Listen to the authors' sharing their stories on audio and video. Explore video and see the glory of story through movement. Enjoy additional art or buy a print if you fall in love.

You can now also view many interivews between myself (Claire O'Leary) and the writers who share their stories and insights. Simply click on the orange link in their article or bio.

This month we've added links to some of our Facebook Live interviews. Each of these casual conversations created to build resilience highlight a different aspect of healing or discuss a different type of abuse. They are often deeper insights into the authors articles.

We've also added some great links to helpful books for prevention that you can share with your kids.

Be sure to explore all your options. Take your time...

Explore to your hearts content.

FROM THE EDITOR... GROWTH THROUGH HEALING



Each time I read the articles submitted for Voices Heard I see a theme come through. This time is no different.

Powerful tales of healing, forgiveness, growth and a deeper comprehension of their trauma underlie each of these personal stories.

These articles demonstrate how much we grow and learn from each of our traumas. Though each story is unique, each person has grown in some way through healing, from acknowledging their growth through the healing process to complete forgiveness of themselves and their perpetrator.

Jane Epstein, A Complicated Courage offers a frank discussion about her sibling sexual abuse, which is far more common than I imangined. Dina Ziskin Fortune, It All Happened For Me, Not Against Me shares her insights on healing from her rape. Anna Cley, A Journey Of Healing And Blossoming To Embrace My True Self, shows us how she

healed from her trauma even though she did not remember details. The title of Tanisha Bankston's, article My Pain Is My Power tells all. Her no hold barred story is both painful and powerful.

Alison Eisen, On Forgiveness, shares a delightful meditation that came to through while working with her inner child. Denise Bossarte offers us 2 articles; her story, Thriving After My Sexual Abuse and Yoga: A Self-Healing Practice for Survivors. Both offer personal insights on how she discovered healing practices that help her through her trauma response.

We also have other articles to help build resilience such as It All Started The Day I Chucked My Scale Into The Trash! by our regular contributor Rachel Grant. A new resource for prevention of sexual abuse offers links to helpful books that parents can share with kids from toddlers to teens.

We also have links to healing resources and workshops for survivors.

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JANE EPSTEIN ... A COMPLICATED COURAGE



Ifeel an ungency to finish what Thave started in my life. Why do I want to die? Again? On does somebody inside of me want to die?

The afternoon sunlight was advancing through the vast skylight above my son's curly golden hair; creating a radiant look and emphasizing his vibrant blue eyes. He stood before me and stared at me. I asked, "So nothing else you want to share with me about your day, Buddy?"

He giggled and shrugged, "I don't know."

I gripped his tiny 8-year-old hands and peered into his eyes. He preferred to go back to his video games, but I craved to clutch him and hold him tight and tell him how sorry I am. I have failed him as a mother, and I will break apart his little world.

He drew his hands away and asked, "Can I go now?"

He trotted in to join his older brother in their playroom. I remained seated and glanced around my home with its yellow walls dotted with vibrant art. I tugged at the lumpy oatmeal-colored

carpet beneath my feet and tucked my chin to my chest, and brought my knees up close to my body, curling up as small as I could, and I felt a heavy loss and immense anguish. It was my familiar companion. On the outside, it looks like I have a perfect life. An elegant home in the Bay Area suburbs outside San Francisco, two children, a husband, and even a dog. A stay-at-home mom. All we are missing is the white picket fence.

I will miss this place. The familiar dread rose in my chest. I sensed my death was near, feeling my life growing shorter with the passing of each day. I feel an urgency to finish what I have started in my life. Why do I want to die? Again? Or does somebody inside of me want to die? That's a question l've never thought to ask.

I want to leave my body, but that's different from wanting to die. Why am I such a wreck? My family will pay for my inability to be a proper wife. But I can't be intimate. I can't satisfy him. I feel small, and I sense another mountain, but I'm tired of being in the valley

looking at peaks, figuring out how to ascend them. I need to understand why my life feels out of order. What is wrong with me? I didn't know it, but the answers to the puzzle were revealing themselves. Something deep inside was telling me to scan my past. And like a small child amongst too many toys to choose from, I felt overwhelmed. But each little toy was calling out to me, "Pick me up. Question me. I hold the answers." I need to turn over every painful moment in my life and scrutinize it for answers. Write, Jane, just write. I did not know it, but at that moment, I was facing grief. Again. I had been grieving since I was six years old, and the puzzle was taking shape. But where do I start? Which hurt do I unearth first?

That day I sat in a pool of depression, I gave sobriety and self-reflection a chance, which led me to write my story, and that is where I encountered the answers. I started at the beginning. I googled "sibling sexual abuse," only to find one or two ancient sites, leading me to believe I was alone, but inside I knew better.

From an outsider's perspective, I seemed to have an idyllic childhood. My father was a public school psychologist, and my mom was an elementary school teacher. She taught at a private Christian school, and we would drive to school every day, singing along with Christian hymns on the radio.

Our family ate dinner together, and we went to church every Sunday. I had two older brothers, who helped plan my birthday parties each year. I was the only girl, and my brothers were four and six years older than me, so I often played alone in the basement with my Barbie dolls and dollhouse when my friends down the street were not available. This made me a target.

My parents thought they were doing the right thing when they gave my twelvevear-old brother the responsibility of watching over me. Finally, they had freedom! But something sinister happened in that basement. My oldest brother became curious. and he touched me for the first time. My innocence was lost.

I was sexually molested between the ages of six and 12. I did not know it or understand it, but that formed my beliefs about who I was, how I was supposed to be treated, and what I "deserved." I also learned how to cope by separating my mind from my body, disassociation, which, later in life, would lead to excessive exercise as I tried to reconnect the two again. I tucked the memories away in a very deep place.



And like a small child amongst too many toys to choose from. Ifelt overwhelmed. But each little toy was calling out to me, "Pick me up. Question me. Thold the answers."





As I grew into my teen years, I needed validation to feel that I was desirable. As I grew into my I believed that, for someone to love me or to feel pretty, I had to be promiscuous. I engaged in many transient sexual relationships, too many to count, which led to hurt, selfhatred, depression, and withdrawal from reality. I developed a hatred for men, and I didn't trust many people. After barely graduating

from high school, I went to a business college for court reporting, but I ended up dropping out and becoming a stripper. Stripping filled a few gaps from my childhood. I received attention, felt pretty and in control, and got over a lot of my shyness. But stripping did not remove the pain or resolve my hidden issues. It only masked them.

By this time, my heart had been broken so often that I was fragile and on the verge of wanting to kill the pain with alcohol and drugs. I would repeatedly slap the male patrons if they said or did something that offended me, and it felt good. Deep down, I hoped they would allow me to

lash out at them. There was an anger and rebellion inside me that somehow made me feel superior and justified.

In 1989, I was "dancing" in Des Moines, lowa, and it was in that environment that I met my knight in shining armor. I was instantly attracted to him and terrified of him at the same time. I went back and forth, feeling like I would die if he hurt me but wanting to risk letting him in. I eventually let him through my thick walls. Mark, my knight, filled in all the gaps of my childhood, the holes in my heart that my father had missed and my abuser had left. Mark was the first person who loved me enough to give me an ultimatum: either quit dancing or lose him. I was terrified. The dancing gave me financial independence, and it fed my starving ego.

We fought about it, but I quit dancing and moved in with him. I went back to business school to finish my degree in court reporting. Mark supported me financially, and he also helped me study. He often came home with boxes from Talbots, a women's clothing store, and helped me learn how to dress because I had been accustomed to dressing to attract the wrong kind of attention.

Mark and I were married in October 1996, and we shared an amazing love story. But even knights are not perfect. I don't know if that love story would have lasted forever. We had our struggles, but we cut them short when he was diagnosed with esophageal cancer in May 2002.

They placed a feeding tube in his stomach, and he began chemotherapy and radiation right away to gear up for upcoming surgery. But on the day the cancer was to be surgically removed, they discovered that it had spread, and they sent us home to plan with hospice.

Two months after the failed surgery, I entered the bedroom, and he had opened the shutters and was sitting in front of the window, enjoying the view and sunshine. It had snowed just a few days before. The snow was still glistening on the ground and clinging to the trees, pure white as if it had freshly fallen. He made the comment that it looked like a painting by the fine artists Currier and Ives. He remained on the side of the bed, taking in the view as I carefully removed his pajama top to begin a sponge bath. I took in his features. He was still my Mark, but bony. He had the body of an older man, but the face of a 45-year-old.

Somewhere in the middle of our relationship, our roles had reversed. In the beginning, he had taken care of me financially. He had picked out my attire, paid for it, and taught me how to wear it. Now I was dressing and caring for him as a mother does her toddler. After years of Mark being my safe haven, I was now his lifeline and protector. After he had raised me from a young girl to a woman, I was now helping him get dressed and feeding him. We had come full circle. I had spent the last few months wanting to protect

teen years, Ineeded validation to feel that Twas desirable. T believed that, for someone to love me or to feel pretty, Thad

to be promiscuous.

him from the cards and letters littered with the words, "Don't give up! Get well soon." They meant well, but Mark was not giving up. His body was.

When Mark died, my heart broke, and I was never the same, but the experience forever changed me for the better. I still have a hole in my heart from his death. I will never fill it. After I had gone through the trauma of illness and death, I thought I had it all figured out. I put all my trust in God. That was my story. I was wrong. God still wanted me to depend on Him. There was more to come.

I remarried, and my husband and I were blessed with two boys. When the boys were approximately one and two, I experienced an episode that triggered flashbacks from my early childhood molestation. I didn't tell anyone about my memories, and I became abnormally angry, depressed, and volatile. I also started struggling in my marriage. Daily life became a struggle to survive. To function, I exercised six days a week. I kept my emotions so tightly wound up inside me that sometimes my chest would ache and my eyes felt like they might burst. I would look up into the sky and beg for God to take me home.

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It's not a big deal. is it? He was my brother. It never went too far, and he apologized. I've dealt with it. He could barely keep his composure, trying not to alarm me, but this is kind of a big deal.

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We had been married for approximately four years when I told my husband that I wanted to go to marriage counseling. In my mind, I had dealt with all of my traumas. I did not realize that I still had a long way to go. When we started, I pointed the finger at my husband, thinking our problems were his issue. But after many years of counseling with still no answer, our marriage counselor turned to me and said, "Jane, your anger does not match the circumstances."

I crossed my legs and tugged on my necklace. "Well, my brother messed with me when I was little.

The counselor leaned forward, tilted his head, and asked, "What do you mean he messed with you?"

I glanced down at the worn green carpet and laced my fingers together. I could feel my husband staring at me. "My brother sexually abused me." I stated it matter of factly. He remained seated and did not move. He tried to conceal his surprise.

I felt a weight on my shoulders. Great, I thought. Now my husband has a reason to blame all our marital problems on me. The counselor asks me questions, gently. How long did this go? How did it start? Have you ever told anyone?

It's not a big deal, is it? He was my brother. It never went too far, and he apologized. I've dealt with it.

He could barely keep his composure, trying not to alarm me, but this is kind of a big deal.

I began to ask him questions. I have had a temper all my life. I thought it was just

part of my make up. All my screaming and anger at Steve and the kids. "Are you sure this is a big deal? Aren't kids curious?"

He reassured me. "Yes, kids are curious. Once or twice. Curiosity does not span six years."

"But I'm guilty. I sought him out....I...even tried toseduce him. I asked for it, so who am I to be fucked up over it?"

"Your body reacts the way it is designed to react. The touch may have felt good. It explains why you became hypersexual. It's what you were taught. It made relationships and sex transactional."

I kept fighting back. "But it was just my brother."

"Yes. It's a complex relationship and situation."

I don't want to go there. I think about my prayers earlier in the morning. God, please don't use my marriage as an example of your healing. Just let me out. **But I see a grain of salt here something to look at. I always felt shame, not worthy of love.**

"Steve loves you."

"But why? I'm a lot of work."

"It's possible you chose someone safe after Mark's death, someone who could pay attention to detail while you sorted out your grief. Steve is loyal."

Maybe there are answers here.

Steve reached out in concern for me and anger at my brother. But it wasn't so simple. I had a narrative in my head: I am not worthy of being loved and supported. I tried to sabotage my marriage. I even went so far as to interview a divorce lawyer, who told me I should try to stick it out until the kids were in first grade. I couldn't. I needed out. As a religious woman, I prayed. No, I cried, and I screamed, "God, what do you want from me? I want a divorce!" Tears streamed down my face as I looked at the ceiling, hoping for an answer. Silence. Then I heard God's voice: "No. I hate divorce." At that moment, I surrendered my marriage over to Him, saying, "Fine. You take it. I can't do it alone."

Forgiveness. Many people have a visceral reaction to that word.

After hearing it over and over for years, I did, too. I don't have to do anything, I thought. But forgiveness slowly came into my heart through a series of steps, way too many to go into here. After nearly six years of counseling, antidepressants, daily prayers, reliance on God, and wonderful, supportive, God-loving people in my life, forgiveness entered. I first forgave that six-year-old girl, the one who did not tell anyone about the sexual abuse. Then I forgave myself, as I had separated the two, but over time, they are becoming one. Then I was moved to write a letter of forgiveness to my older sibling. I sat down at my computer, closed my eyes, and typed the words that came to me. I didn't even proofread the letter before placing it in an envelope and running it down to the mailbox in my bare feet. As I raised the flag on the mailbox, I paused and asked myself, "Are you sure?"

I did not know what forgiveness would do for me. It opened up my heart in all areas of my life. I grew again. I was looking

forward to the future. I was present at every moment possible.

The fog was being lifted, but there was still a lot of work to do. I continued to surrender my marriage to God and made a conscious decision to thank Him every morning for Steve. Our marriage began to heal, and I let him into my heart inch by inch. As I reflected, I could see he had been there for me all along. He was not perfect, and he still isn't, but we became one, a team. I am grateful not only that I heard God speak the day that I wanted to leave, but that I listened to His words and stayed.

This is where I am today, still amid my mess, still growing, still struggling. I don't have it all figured out, and I don't have all the answers, but sharing my story, my secrets, saved my marriage. Sharing my secrets opened my heart and gave him a better understanding of who I am. Human beings crave to be seen and heard. It's universal. So why do we hide our truths?

I have become an advocate for other survivors. I share my story publicly and encourage survivors to own their stories by writing them down and sharing them with others. **Don't stay in your story. Own your story with grace. It loses its power, and you get to rewrite a new ending. Someone needs to hear your story. Courage is contagious.** Through my writing practice and podcasts, I have made connections, learned a lot, particularly about SSA, the statistics, the reasons it happens and why it is confusing to victims and families, and I have become an advocate and educator.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane Epstein is a Sibling Sexual Abuse survivor, expert, and advocate, who speaks publicly about and provides guidance and tools for prevention and victim recovery. Jane spent 40 years in a continual state of dissociation, she was in and out of therapy, and despite marrying and being blessed with two children, she became depressed and suicidal. Sobriety and self-reflection led her to write her story, and that is where she encountered the answers. As she began, she googled "sibling sexual abuse," only to find one or two outdated sites, leading her to believe she was alone. Jane shares her story via podcast interviews and a memoir that is in progress to remove the shame for SSA survivors and let them know they are not alone. Jane's passion, work, and life mission are to bring awareness of the staggering statistics of SSA, a largely ignored segment of sexual abuse, and make body safety conversations between parents and children an everyday conversation.

You can learn more about Jane at Complicated Courage Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn: Jane-epstein and Clubhouse: @ janeopieepstein

View our Facebook Live interview around sibling sexual abuse.

DINA ZISKIN FORTUNE ...IT ALL HAPPENED FOR ME NOT AGAINST ME



Oneness by Dina Ziskin Fortune

My name is Dina Ziskin-Fortune and I am sharing my story of the abuse I experienced in the context of date rape at age 16 in two different scenarios from the perspective that this all happened FOR me not AGAINST me. I continue to reflect on it even now.

There is no one to blame, just people playing out their parts. At the time of these events I was hurt not so much physically but emotionally and trust was shattered. I intend to share my story from a compassionate lens. My story has a happy ending.

I have been a sensual being even as early as three years old. I was a cute, thin, free-spirited but sickly child that was over-protected. I just wanted to be free and as soon as I could express it, I did. I trusted people to be nice and respectful yet partying with boys in junior high was the beginning of my sexual education.

In 7th grade, my best friend had me over to hang out. Her two brothers and a friend were there. They were older. I really liked their friend, named Mike. Late at night, when the others were asleep, I made out with Mike in a dark room. At some point he got up. I thought it was him who came back to me. But in fact, they had decided to take turns. I was really really confused. And I really didn't want to make a big deal of it. I just wanted it to go away. And I don't even remember if I said anything to my friend because I just couldn't believe that it happened. Although it wasn't a violent situation, it was very deceptive. So, at the end of it I realized that my good friend's brother, these two boys whom I trusted, took advantage of me.

At age 16, when I went to Hawaii with my mother on vacation I wound up meeting a boy. While my mom was resting, he and I went for a walk and he seemed very nice. I was still trusting because I wanted to believe the best



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Being a young girl who thought she was progressive, I found myself kissing this boy who I didn't really know. And then before I knew it, I was pinned underneath him and clueless as to what to do. This was now the second violation, a moment in which I wondered, "Oh, what's happening here?" I told him NO but he kept going. Admittedly, this part is still a little fuzzy. I do remember just surrendering.

My thoughts were: "I got myself to this point. So, I guess I'll just let him have his way because I don't know what else to do and I don't know how to get him off of me."

••

I got myself to this point. So, Igness Ill just let him have his way because Idon't know what else to do and Idon't know how to get him off of me.



By the time I was in my early 20s, I wound up lonely, vulnerable, and so desperate for attention that I attracted abusive relationships. And then he finished, and I got up. He said something nice to me, as if that was actually something I really wanted to do, but I didn't because now I had just lost my virginity to someone I didn't even know.

I just didn't know how to say NO fervently. I didn't know how to say NO with enough conviction for him to get the picture that I didn't want it.

I was embarrassed and didn't want to admit to my mother what had just happened.

I was ashamed that I'd let it happen. I created a new story for myself that it was okay and everything was gonna be okay so I would forgot about it. By the time I was in my early 20s, I wound up lonely, vulnerable, and so desperate for attention that I attracted abusive relationships. The final straw was when I found myself in such a toxic situation that was so emotionally abusive that I threatened to call INS on him.

In fact after that, I decided I was done with the male gender all together.

A couple years later in 2001, I met a drummer, a man who is now my husband, because at some point, I realized I deserved an amazing guy. I deserved better for myself, I deserved a guy who would love me for who I am.

We were set up on a blind date. And we connected right away. As I sit here after 20 years of being married, I realize I had blocked out so many of those memories of abuse. Due to my commitment to heal and tell my story, I am healing through art.

Three years ago, I started painting again after a long time. I decided to grow and wanted to stop feeling so much like I was a victim. I wanted to stop feeling like a hurt little girl. I wanted to start loving myself unconditionally. So, I set an intention to use art to help me heal.

I want to let you know that my husband has been a saving grace. He is so supportive, real and authentic that I was able to also discover that I wasn't being my true self. I was suppressing so many years of shame. I wasn't really being honest with myself because I had so much suppressed sexual shame. I am so grateful that I ended up marrying a man who will be honest with me as best as he can.



It hasn't always been perfect. We've gone through some trials. I found art to be healing. I set the intention that not only was I going to use art to help heal me but I was also going to use art as a tool to help others heal as well as empower themselves through their own healing.

Recently, I went to a healing and I pulled an oracle card that said "betrayal." That started to bring up memories of betrayals. Then, in another healing event, I received a message reminding me that there was so much to heal from my childhood. And then, I was sitting at my desk at work, and I looked at my phone and I saw a message from a friend, just letting me know about how stressed and overwhelmed she was. I just started to cry. I was reminded of a childhood memory of feeling rejected.

I want to let you know that my husband has been a saving grace. He is so supportive, real and authentic that I was able to also discover that I wasn't being my true self. I was suppressing so many years of shame.



It started to spin out into all these other memories which afterward helped me make sense of why I'm a wounded healer. Because, yes, I did receive wounding. Yet, I am so resilient. And I get to tell my story. I get to tell my story about how I was able to take that pain and breathe a fire onto it and bring light to it, so that I can start to heal.

The abuse left me feeling shameful and not worthy of healthy relationships. I'm so grateful that I had art to help me.

With the help of my angels, my dragons, my fairies, my higher self, I can transmute this pain into love.

I help others through art, communicating and sharing my story because there are so many stories – so many people who have stories of being hurt. I could have kept this story to myself and not shared it. However, I know deep inside that I came into this life with an agreement that I would experience things that would help me get stronger so that I can heal from the pain and then help others.

We heal based on speaking our truth. We heal by expressing ourselves. By dancing and creating, we can heal. When we share our story and know that we are enough, know that we are loved, we can release and move on with our lives knowing that we are victorious and resilient.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dina has been on a healing journey for at least 29 years. Through this process, she discovered her gifts as channeler of Divine wisdom and became an intuitive painter. Adding the most recent layer of the Sophia Dragons, she realized she was channeling these higher frequency energy through her paintings.

Dina channels soul language and activation codes with the use of her voice, drumming, movement and painting. As if this magic was not enough she also taps into the akashic field and assists others with a deeper connection to themselves, creativity, perspective shifts, sovereignty and embodiment.

Dina is certified and attuned in; Celtic Dragon Reiki and Sekkhem empowerment. She uses these key codes to activate and assist others to unlock their own abilities and unique expression.

As an activation artist, her intention is to serve clients and the collective with authenticity. Every session is personalized and can include intuitive card reading, painted light code, spoken soul language and shamanic singing and drumming.

You can find Dina on <u>Facebook</u>, and Instagram as <u>soul butterflyrising</u> or <u>butterflydragheart</u>.

You can also email her.

With the help of my angels, my dragors, my fairies, my higher self. I can transmute this pain into love.

ANNA CLEY ...A JOURNEY OF HEALING AND BLOSSOMING TO EMBRACE MY TRUE SELF



Deer, by Anna Cley, Pastel

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I am now proud to say that I went from shadow to light.

From dissociated to reconnected

The journey to my true self took many years to unfold.

After my light was tamed at an early age, it was a dark and painful path before I was able to rediscover the joy of the present moment and to free myself. I went through what I call a few cycles of life to get to where I am today. But I am now proud to say that I went from shadow to light in this process.

My healing journey started in my early twenties with a strong desire to feel better. I needed to understand why I

was feeling and behaving in ways that were not aligned with how I wanted to feel and behave. It sometimes felt as if I was possessed by another self. I use the word "possess" here intentionally, because I did not identify with what I was feeling. In fact, I even recall not feeling aligned with my body, as if I was walking next to it, but not in it.

I remember a few instances of anger arising where I was dissociated from myself: I would see myself angry from above my body or next to my body versus feeling and behaving angry. Anger was occasional though, and never came without good reason.

But I knew when it happened that my reaction was completely out of proportion, and in such instances I should have just walked away.

If the anger remained occasional, feelings of sadness and disconnection were a part of my daily routine. My mind was invaded by deep and painful suicidal thoughts on a regular basis. Here again, I use "invaded" intentionally because there was a complete disconnection between what I was feeling and what I was living. I could not understand such contrast and why I felt so depressed and sad when overall everything seemed to be ok in my life. In fact, I was unable to connect emotionally with the fun other people around me had. I hated these feelings that left me puzzled. There was too much of a gap between my emotions and behaviors and the little girl I once was - hopeful, optimistic and passionate.

I felt a strong need to dig into myself to get to the root of this. So I impatiently waited to finish my studies and to get my first job so that I could afford therapy. When I finally started my work at 23 as an aerospace engineer for the French space agency, I also committed to a weekly, sometimes bi-weekly, psychoanalysis in Paris.

Step 1: The desire to feel better.

I did not know what to expect when I entered the office of this mysterious man, known for his prolific career as a Lacanian psychoanalyst and also known for his strong political opinions. His name was recommended, among others, by my stepfather, and I had no idea he was a celebrity when I first called him.

Once we settled on a fee and a schedule, the strange experience of lying on a

Step 2: Revisiting my past.

The return of buried memories was a brutal and strange experience because they were only short glimpses of my childhood and even though very powerful, always incomplete. It was also strange because when the memories returned, it was as if they'd been there all along, but I was simply unable to acknowledge them before. Such memories left me with unsolved puzzles, as I could only remember fragments of my own story.

couch and sharing all sorts of thoughts started. It was guite the challenging work. I could speak about anything, and I had to speak since I paid for my session. Speaking, however, was not my forte then and I struggled to decide on what to say. Most of the time, I would just share about my work or personal life, sometimes my nightmares.

Surprisingly, in between the sessions, my mind started to unlock some memories of my childhood. It would happen randomly and in the most unexpected moments. In fact, the worst scenario was when it happened at work, and that happened a few times. As I worked on my computer in a shared office at the French space agency, a buried memory would suddenly resurface, hitting me in the face with indescribable violence. I had to hold my tears as much as I could on my way to the bathroom to hide myself. I would then cry for a long time as silently as possible so no one would notice.

Before starting therapy, I must stress that I did remember very well a lot of the emotional abuse I had undergone under the authority of my father. But when the fragments of memories came back, a word I had never used before arose: incest.

Surprisingly, in between the sessions. my mind started to unlock some memories of my childhood. It would happen randomly and in the most unexpected moments.



Anna around 18 months of age

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He just kept repeating "you won't tell your mom, right?" "You will forget, you won't tell your mom?"

My work in psychoanalysis brought back some violent memories. They included remembering the extreme shock of seeing my father in my sister's bedroom when I was 8. I froze in front of the open door and dissociated.

I recalled witnessing this moment as if from outside myself. I asked: "What are you doing, dad?". My presence surprised him as I was supposed to wait for his good night kiss in my own bed. He shouted at me to go back to my room. I couldn't recall much more. I only remembered that on one occasion shortly after that night, my father - who usually did not want to spend time with me-showed interest in what I was doing and in my drawings. It was so unusual

and I so needed his love and attention that I felt very unsettled, wondering if it was ok that I felt happy about his newfound interest. At the same time I was also on edge, anticipating what I had come to know of him, sudden explosions of anger.

My mother and sister were out. As we walked toward my bedroom so that I could show him my drawings, he burst into tears. I had never seen him like this and it broke my little girl's heart. I tried to comfort him and asked "What is it dad?". He just kept repeating "you won't tell your mom, right?" "You will forget, you won't tell your mom?". I replied "yes, of course". I had no idea what he was talking about then. When such memories returned in my early twenties, I started to understand what his request and tears were about.

Another memory that came up during psychoanalysis was of a specific moment of my childhood, sitting in the back of the car when I was 10. I was very proud of myself because I was able to remember anything I wanted and to FORGET anything I wanted. I had consciously chosen to forget things, repeating to my own mind: "forget, forget, forget". And it worked. I forgot really well. A lot of things. Things that to this day, I cannot remember.

But my broken memory brought back a little more. While in therapy, I also remembered my grandmother (my father's mother) telling me when I was very little (I was shorter than the washing machine):

"You're a big girl now, you know how to keep a secret, right?"

So much responsibility given to a toddler... She was an adult and I was a quiet and obedient little girl. I nodded yes. I knew something not so good was coming but what else could I say or do? She took me to the bathroom and molested me.

After I shared the word "incest" with my therapist, the permanent suicidal thoughts stopped harassing me for the first time in over 10 years. The angry impulses stopped as well.

The return of such memories was very disruptive in my life. I asked my therapist if it was possible to heal without remembering. I was really tired of spending so much time on myself and being so depressed because of my past. All I wanted was a happy and meaningful existence. He replied that about 25% of people do not remember. Ever. And I could heal without remembering.

I ended my therapy there and got involved instead with a charity, volunteering in hospitals on Sundays to

light.

bring joy and entertainment to children stuck in their hospital beds. That was the beginning of step 3.

Step 3: Reconnecting with my own

One year after stopping therapy and starting volunteer work, I left my job as an engineer and resumed my musical studies, entering then a second career as an opera singer. The years that followed, I tried to find my place in the world, professionally in the opera field, and emotionally in a committed relationship.

But at 29, I was very unsatisfied with my personal accomplishments and disappointed in myself. My dark thoughts were not tied to my past anymore, I was going through a deep personal crisis. I felt as if there was nothing left for me on Earth and perhaps it was time to stop. I think it was a desperate conversation with my mother that got me back on track. Instead of dying now, I should try something new and travel. I had nothing to lose in fact.

Step 4: Burning the boat

So there, I left everything behind and arrived in Canada with a suitcase and a backpack. For me that was step 4: burning the boat.

Through my travels I reconnected to the flow of life and to the essence of myself. That became possible because I had no expectations anymore. I was. And I was alive, again. Or, perhaps, for the very first time. I took the opportunity to rewrite my story on a new continent. In fact, I started to introduce myself as Anna, my middle name, instead of Claudie, my first name.

After Ishared the word "incest" with my therapist, the permanent suicidal thoughts stopped harassing me for the first time in over 10 years. The angry impulses stopped as well.



I chose a professional name, dropping my father's last name. Over seven years ago, I became Anna Cley. In America, I felt free to be myself for the very first time. My past, my story were and still are part of myself. They made me who I am. But when I left France, I also left behind a lot of limiting beliefs. My journey was not about healing anymore, it was about blossoming and allowing my true self to arise.

We tend to forget we come into this world with a very unique light, a very unique existence, and that in our very own essence, we must not allow others' dictates. desires, or expectations to blow out our flame.

My flame is strong, happy and loving. It did not always feel that way, but as I reflect back, this has been my real flame all along, whether I believed it or not.

The trauma I went through still expresses today in some minor forms. I sometimes forget about situations, events I went to, and even occasionally, individuals I've met, who welcome me like they know me, but who I think I'm meeting for the first time. In fact, when it happens, I need to be reminded with great detail of the situation. Then, after a little while, the memory slowly resurfaces. It's interesting to me that it never affected my work and my ability to multitask. It really only shows up in the most random ways in my personal life. I guess that in efforts to ensure my protection and survival, my brain molded itself to forget some personal events, even non-threatening ones. I am now able to find humor in these situations and I'm lucky to have a husband who does not take offense easily.

Step 5: Sharing my light with others

Sharing my personal story, as I am now doing more and more, is not easy. But I feel it's important that I do so for all those who, like me, don't have a full story to tell because they lost their memories. It is hard, if not impossible, to share with others an incomplete story. I know this personally. I also know the denial of all those you start sharing your story with, questioning the reality of what happened and what you feel. It hits hard. You may not remember what happened, and still be in the dark, but know that your pain is heard and understood by all those - too many who have gone through this as well. Most importantly, know that you can heal, love, be loved, and be and become fully yourself.

My book, The Journey of the Heart, was birthed in my own story, but it is a universal story of healing and blossoming. A tale of fiction, I wrote it to encourage others to take the leap of faith toward their true self. I needed to complete and share this with the world because I believe that making the world a better place starts with everyone's own fulfillment and happiness.

We all have the ability to rewrite our story, today, tomorrow, at any time. The journey never ends as we are shapeshifting beings in a shape-shifting world, and that's the beauty of it. Every year brings me more joy than the previous one because I am healed, I am free and I listen to my heart. As I entered my third career as a transformative artist, and now, about to become a mom (my baby gives me the cutest kicks as I'm writing this), I hope that sharing my story will allow you to feel more free to create, to explore, to try and to love more. You are the light. Be the light that you are.

I felt free to be myself for the very first time. My past, my story were and still are part of myself. They made me who Tam. But when Ileft France, I also left behind a lot of limiting beliefs.

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Photographer, Joseph Fraia @jrfstudio

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna Cley is a transformative artist, author, opera singer, and artistic director who is passionate about growth, empowerment and transcendence. She believes that individuals who overcome their limiting beliefs and dare to follow their heart can find true happiness and freedom, allowing them to care more for others and to make the world a better place.

A native of France, Anna Cley has performed on the stage of Carnegie Hall and in the title role of Carmen, after a successful career in rocket science. She is the founding President of the nonprofit Vocalise seeking to empower those who experienced trauma.

Celebrating the universal statement that our own truth is the best treasure of all, The Journey of the Heart is a philosophical tale of courage, freedom and love for children and adults alike, and a beautiful reminder that no matter into what circumstances we're born, our future is ours to write.

To learn more about her work, visit annacley.com. To learn about The Journey of the Heart, visit thejourneyoftheheart.com

View our Facebook Live together.

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TANISHA BANKSTON ...MY PAIN IS MY POWER



Every time I share my story, I am healing.

I am a mother of three children, a survivor of rape, incest, childhood sexual abuse, trauma, and domestic violence. I have suffered from anxiety, depression, PTSD, nightmares, and flashbacks.

I was raped at the age of 5 or 6 and wasn't believed. I went into a shell and

lost my inner voice and never came out. I felt my brain when it did a shift.

My mom said she wasn't allowed to come in the room with me. I was a child. She said I had to re learn how to walk again. My mom also said I was taken to a special hospital. I remember going to this place and looking out of a window with a gown on. I could see myself looking out of the window. It was like my soul had left my body. I went into a shell and never came out.

I had to re-learn how to walk again. I asked my mom "Why wasn't the man locked up?" She told me that the hospital and police said they didn't have enough evidence.

Were my words not enough? Was the fact that I had to re-learn how to walk not enough?

I was failed by my family and the system because I told my family what happened to me.

My mom neglected us as kids. There were a lot of days that my brothers, sister and I didn't have any food to eat. She would always leave us home while she went out and chased men. My mom had some serious problems. She used to drink all the time. There were days we would see our mom getting beaten by men. She would fight back, but it traumatized me as a child, seeing the things that my mom went through.

I failed kindergarten because I had missed over 60 day of school. I had a hard time focusing in school.

My brothers, sister, and I were all taken from my mom and separated from each other at a young age. I then was adopted by my aunt.

I thought I would be in a safer environment but I was wrong. One of my aunt's boyfriends manipulated me into having sex with him when I was only 10 years old and he was in his 30's. He did it for years up until he died. When I was 11 years old, one of the neighborhood men manipulated me into having sex and he ruptured my anus. He also had sex with me for years.

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Were my words not

enough? Was the

fact that I had to

not enough?

release how to walk

At 13 years old, my cousin's husband manipulated me into having sex and got me pregnant. I became a teen mom at the tender age of 14. I didn't know anything about raising a baby. I was never raised by my mom or my aunt. My dad didn't raise me either. I had basically raised myself.

When I was 14, I was again manipulated to have sex by another neighborhood man and entered into a domestic violence relationship with him. I became pregnant at 17. I was a teen mom of 2 children, wounded, beaten, and broken. I escaped at the age of 23.

All my life I've prayed to be healed, delivered, and set free and God did that in September 2020.

I have been introduced to supportive groups on Facebook. I started posting and sharing my life story. People started reaching out to me, asking me to speak on their podcast and radio stations. I was glad to do so, but was also nervous. I first spoke on July 3, 2020 on a radio talk show called NAASCA which stands for National Association Adult Survivors of Child Abuse. I finally found my inner voice.

I started speaking even more and sharing my story. The more I spoke the more confident I became. I was later asked to become a domestic violence advocate. I was honored to do so.

I am coming out of my shell. I am getting closer to God. I am a Licensed Insurance Agent for Primerica, and a certified pharmacy technician. I blog and journal.

I want to meet new people and grow and expand my business. I want to just live and have a normal life. I just want to be happy.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tanisha Bankston is a mother of 3 and survivor of rape, incest, domestic violence, and childhood sexual abuse. Author of <u>My Pain is</u> <u>My Power</u> and a speaker, she has been a guest speaker at A Mental Health Break, Wounded Women Project, Your Voices of Hope, Re-Discover Me, Let's Talk About It, and Ask a Sex Abuse Survivor.

Tanisha shares her story and wrote her book to help others heal from sexual abuse. She prays that they too will break their silence and come out of their shell so they can hatch into the beautiful butterflies they were meant to be.

You can reach Tanisha on Facebook and Instagram.

View our <u>Facebook Live</u> where Tanisha shares her story and insights around her healing.

ALISON EISEN ...ON FORGIVENESS



My inner child showed up in a meditation on May 29th. She was at the beach and drew a large heart in the sand, placing beautiful purple flowers along the outline.

She then climbed inside with a purple flower on her heart as she began to make sand angels. She asked for her perpetrator to come forward. She saw a man, thin with brown hair come towards her. Although she didn't see his facial features, she knew him well As she stood up she handed him the purple flower. He took her hand and they walked to the waves. He picked her up and she knew in this moment



Watch as Alison completes her meditation for forgiving herself.

she was complete. She had forgiven him completely. Later that same day my inner child came forth in a second meditation. She met me with a purple flower and asked me if I had forgiven myself.

A couple weeks later while facilitating a sound healing at the beach. I was speaking to a friend about the meditation from my inner child.

My inner child announced "this is a healing" as I drew a heart in the sand.

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He picked her up and she knew in this moment she was complete. She had forgiven him completely.

Envisioning the purple flowers around me and one at my heart, I began to make sand angels. I got up and shared the story to my friend who was recording.

It felt so cathartic to express it all verbally. Something very special was washing over me, forgiveness of myself.

I continue to ask my my body to let go of the trauma and forgive myself more and more every day, one day soon feeling complete, as my little girl did in my meditation at the beach.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alison Eisen's main focus is on intentional healing and teaching her clients the tools to help heal themselves through the modalities of meditation, mindfulness, life coaching, yin & kundalini yoga, reiki, intuitive healing, sound and positive thinking. Alison has a passion for energy work as her tool box is ever expanding.

The many demands of motherhood and being a mom of four led Alison to a mindfully inspired life. She became a certified mindfulness & meditation teacher from the McLean meditation institute in Sedona in August, 2017, as well as a mindful@ work trainer in January, 2018. Alison teaches yin yoga and is a certified kundalini yoga instructor. She is also a certified reiki master, intuitive healer, life coach and sound healer. Additionally, she began her masters studies in art therapy and holds her MA in children's psychology & school counseling from Marymount university, in Arlington, VA.

You can learn more about Alison at her website.

Watch our Facebook Live together where you can learn more of Ali's story and her meditation.

DENISE BOSSARTE ...THRIVING AFTER MY SEXUAL ABUSE



Denise and her grandfather

From the outside my childhood looked normal, even enviable.

We lived on 13 acres outside the city limits with a creek running through the edge of our property. My father was a successful ear, nose, and throat doctor and my mother owned her own well-respected Labrador Retriever dog kennel, traveling internationally to show her dogs and judge in dog shows. My sister and I had the delightful tasks of playing with puppies and riding ponies. I did well in school, was active in Girl Scouts, and took piano lessons.

Every summer my sister and I and our cousins would spend time at my grandparents' at their modern log cabin on the Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri fishing, swimming, boating, and skiing. And every summer, my grandfather would sexually abuse me.

When I share with people that I was sexually abused, one of the first things they may ask is "When did it start?" Followed by "How long did it go on?" The first question is difficult for me to answer. Like many survivors of trauma, I don't have access to a lot of memories about the abuse. The ones I have are graphic and sharp and terrifying. So I can't tell you when the abuse started, only that I was less than waist-high to my grandfather. And the answer to the second question is: when he died of complications of prostate cancer when I was a freshman in high school. (Fast karma, anyone?)

My parents noticed a shift in my personality when the abuse started.

I was never a gregarious child, but I was curious, open, loving, and enjoyed being around adults. After the abuse started, that all changed. I closed down, became extremely introverted, preferring to be by myself and not engage with people like I used to. I later learned that my older cousin noticed the personality changes and realized that our grandfather had "gotten" me, too, but she was scared to tell anyone. First miss of having someone help me and stop the abuse. Back in the 1970's there wasn't very much known publicly about incest and childhood abuse. There also wasn't the focus on child psychology—certainly not in our medium sized rural town. So my parents did what they could and took me to their couples therapist. I can laugh about it now (painfully), appreciating they were doing the best they could with what they had, but boy it did nothing for me.

I was given an adult psychological written evaluation which just pissed me off. I was a smart kid, and I could tell that the test was trying to figure out what was "wrong" with me. It had questions that repeated, guestions about hearing voices, about talking to Jesus, all kinds of questions that seemed off to me. I'm not sure I even finished the test, but by the time I got back in front of the therapist I refused to speak with him or answer any of his questions. My stubbornness and anger got the better of me. And the therapist was not trained in dealing with children and missed the opportunity to find out what was going on with me. Second miss of having someone help me and stop the abuse.

So I spent years trying to never be alone with my grandfather, avoiding him whenever possible. Years trying to be invisible whenever he was around me in the early mornings or late nights, when everyone else was asleep.

He never verbally threatened me that I recall, but he was a 6'4" ex-military man, extremely smart, controlling, and manipulative. I was terrified of him,

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grandfoarents' at their modern log cabin on the Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri fishing, swimming, boating, and skiing. And every summer, my grandfather would sexually abuse me.

Every summer my

sister and Tand

our consins would

spend time at my



Denise, at the age when the abuse might have started.

and I knew that there would be hell to pay if I ever told anyone about what he was doing to me.

I spent those years feeling like an outsider, that I was different somehow. I was ashamed of who I was and I felt completely inadequate socially. I felt isolated and alone even if I was recognized as a good student and respected by my peers.

When I was a freshman in high school, my grandfather got sick with prostate cancer that spread to his lungs, and he died fairly soon after the diagnosis despite treatments. I was struggling a bit in school during his illness, but things got worse after he died. I guess my mind decided that it was "safe" for me to start remembering the abuse and it all came out for me. Flashbacks, body memories, nightmares, overwhelming anxiety, shame, and despair—I thought I was going crazy.

My grades dropped from straight A's to some B's. One of my teachers actually berated me for my lack of dedication and diligence to my school work rather than asking me what was going on in my life that was impacting my work. That reinforced for me that people were not truly concerned about me and what



Ispert those years feeling like an outsider, that I was different somehow. I was ashamed of who I was and I felt completely inadequate socially.

might be going on for me, just what outward appearances I could present. Third miss of having someone help me with the abuse.

I spent the rest of my high school years immersed in my classes, band, and girls' basketball. I kept myself so busy I didn't have time to dwell on, let alone even deal with, the impacts of the abuse. From the outside, it appeared that I was successful at everything I tried. It should have looked that way, because I became a perfectionist pushing myself to do everything 100% right!

When I got to college, I continued the pattern of focusing 100% of attention on my my classes, avoiding most social gatherings and interactions due to my feelings of "differentness" and inadequacy in relating to other people.

As a junior, I started dating a graduate student. I shared my abuse history with him. He was a recovering alcoholic and attended AA meetings and he encouraged me to get help. With his support, I went to the counseling center at the college and, after a couple of tries, connected with a female counselor who was able to start helping me. She got me into a small, therapist facilitated women's group for survivors. Also with my boyfriend's support, I started attending Survivors of Incest Anonymous (SIA) meetings.

For the first time, I was actually meeting and talking with other survivors! The women's group was great because there were women at various points in

their healing journey. I could see myself in them, my story in their stories, and I found inspiration from the women further along in their healing.

And the SIA meetings were a real revelation because the meetings included both men and women survivors of all ages. One man who was abused by his mother was the age of my grandfather when he abused me. And here he was in the meeting sharing his wounds and the trauma the sexual abuse had on him!

I made a lot of progress in learning to admit to and deal with the abuse during college. But then I went to graduate school in biological research and reverted to my old patterns of full immersion in school work. Granted, there wasn't much time for things outside of classes and working in a research lab, but I used the pressures of school as an excuse to stop dealing with my past.

It wasn't until after graduate school, when I was living in Florida with my fiancé, that I began to reconnect with my healing journey. I started therapy again to help deal with the challenges of my upcoming marriage. I also started looking into yoga because we wanted to start a family and I had read that doing yoga while you were pregnant was a great thing for the baby and mother. Little did I know how impactful yoga would be in my healing!

I was able to find a yoga studio where I felt comfortable, having let my intuition guide me as I visited different locations in the area. The beginner courses were taught by a man, which was a bit intimidating for me, but I was committed to doing this practice. I found myself having difficulty with certain poses that left me feeling exposed and vulnerable—I definitely



Denise Bossarte, Focus, Pour Painting, 8x10_Acrylic

did not like doing them! But I was afraid of "standing out" if I didn't do the poses. Plus the type of yoga I was practicing was alignment based and often the teacher would do physical adjustments with students to help them get into the proper form of the pose. This also proved a challenge for me.

Eventually I sat down with the teacher and explained to him what I was experiencing. It turned

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them, my story in their

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out his sister was abused by their father so he understood my struggles (this "small world" effect is not surprising given the statistics on abuse).

We worked out alternatives to the poses that were unsettling for me and agreed there would be no adjustments until I was comfortable with them. Slowly I grew in my confidence and ease with the practice until I was able to take advantage of all the poses and was able to accept adjustments from the teacher.

Yoga was transformational for me in helping to work through all the stored emotions in my body and to help me reconnect with my body. I'd learned to hate myself and my body, even blamed it for betraying me with the abuse. I'd treated my body like a machine to be pushed to the limit and used basically as a tool for getting things done, but there was no appreciation or self-care involved. Yoga taught me to begin to release the past physical experiences and their



Experience a walking meditation with Denise. You can watch it on her YouTube channel "Thriving After."

associated memories and to learn to see my body as something precious to be paid attention to and nurtured.

After several years of living in Florida we moved to Atlanta, and I became a member of a meditation center. Through yoga I had also discovered meditation and had been listening to a couple of teachers' guided meditation practices. But I wanted to learn in person how to do meditation. The center offered a way to join a community of practitioners and to attend in person training.

Meditation gave me the opportunity to work with my mind.

I had been hearing my grandfather's voice in my head for years telling me how worthless and unlovable I was. That I deserved everything he had done to me. And to combat that and try to gain some control in my life, I had developed a perfectionist voice.

A voice who would criticize me for any deviation from being the best in every waking moment, which obviously was impossible to accomplish! Meditation helped me see these two voices as not the true authentic "me" and to start to release them.

I learned how to find myself in those moments of stillness and peace. I learned how to work with my mind to turn it into an ally instead of my worst enemy.

Over time I started finding other activities that nurtured me and supported my healing journey. I took a Contemplative Photography class at the mediation center and fell in love with it. While in graduate school I had played around with a camera my father had handed down to me, and enjoyed being out in nature taking pictures. But I had never pursued photography as a serious hobby. But this **Contemplative Photography class really** spoke to my soul and it became one of my regular healing practices. So much so that I became certified to teach for two of the levels of practice!

The abuse robbed me of my childhood and crushed the curious, expressive child I'd been. I found that doing photography and exploring other forms of art let me tap into that creative energy again and allowed me to play and enjoy the experience of expressing myself. It also was a way to process through some of the difficult emotions around the abuse and to heal my inner child that had been so neglected, the one I was so ashamed of because of the abuse.

Over time I have discovered my love of pour painting, gelatin printing, mixed media, and collage art, to name a few. I have become a trained facilitator for SoulCollage[®]. I teach photography, SoulCollage[®], and art workshops which give me great joy in helping other people connect with their creativity. And soon Claire O'Leary and I will be kicking off a SoulCollage® workshop and group for fellow survivors!

My healing journey has not been planned or scripted. There was no blueprint available when I started my healing journey.

I've worked over the years to discover what activities. practices and experiences nourish me, sustain me, build my resilience and continue to propel me on my winding, ever evolving, healing path.

A few years ago, when I learned about Dr. Larry Nassar's abuse of the female gymnasts—so many girls and women over so many years—I realized that my story of healing was one I could share with other survivors, like these women, to help them heal. So I put my story to paper and published it in April 2021.

Ilearned how to find myself in those moments of stillness and peace.

My award-winning self-help book, Thriving After Sexual Abuse: Break Your Bondage to Your Past and Live and Life You Love is the book I wished I'd had when starting my healing journey. In it I share my story as inspiration for other male and female survivors and encourage them to explore a variety of healing practices and to consider several important topics (like who to tell) through journaling exercises.

Whether someone is just starting their healing journey, or is already well on their healing journey, this book offers ideas and inspiration for survivors to discover what they can do for themselves to heal. It is also a great resource for supporters of survivors, including family, friends, and mental health professionals.

My hope is that through my voice, my story, and my healing experience, I can help other survivors move to a place of thriving in their lives!

View our Facebook Live around healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Denise Bossarte is an awardwinning poet, writer, photographer, and artist. A certified meditation facilitator she is also a contemplative arts teacher. As an IT professional, she works for a large urban school district. Denise holds a BA in chemistry, an MS in computer science, and a PhD in developmental neuroscience. She is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

Denise spent her adulthood healing herself from the traumatic impact the sexual abuse had on her life. She is not a mental health professional. She is a Thriver who has traveled a healing journey and shares personal, guided experiences for readers to find and engage in their own journey to healing, and becoming Thrivers. As an unpublished manuscript, Thriving After Sexual Abuse was a guarterfinalist in the 2019 BookLife Prize Nonfiction Contest, Self-Help Category.

Whether writing about overcoming trauma in her nonfiction work or recasting her real-life experiences into award-winning dark urban fantasy in four novels-Glamorous, Beginnings, Return, and **Readings**—Denise tackles the dark side of things with courage, fearlessness, and compassion.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN CRISIS...

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER AND NEEDS MEDICAL ATTENTION, CALL 911.

NATIONAL

RAINN Hotline: 800.656.HOPE (4673) Live Chat 24/7 Crisis Text Line: Text "START" to 741741 Website

National Domestic Violence Hotline: Select "chat now" Or call 1-800-799-7233 (If you're not alone text LOVEIS to 22522) Website

Giving voice to your story helps you heal. Seeing it and hearing it helps others heal as well.

Voices Heard is the interactive e-Zine that empowers sexual abuse survivors to shatter their long held silence through storytelling, and expressive arts.

Submit art, video, poetry or a personal story for a future edition.

COLORADO

CCASA Hotline: 800.799.SAFE (7233) Website

Advocate Safehouse Hotline: 970.285.0209

Response Hotline: 970.925.7233 Website

Colorado Crisis Services:

844.493.TALK (8255) Text TALK to 38255 4 pm – 1 2 am, 7 days a week

ARE YOU READY TO **SHARE YOUR STORY?**

SHARE YOUR STORY

...for you ... for them

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JOIN THE MOVEMENT

IT ALL STARTED THE DAY I CHUCKED MY SCALE INTO THE TRASH!

Then one day it hit me,

I am hitting the reset

acceptance meter every

button on my self-

dann time Istepon

that scale!

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By Rachel Grant



For most of my life, I felt as though each day was a constant battle with food. Feeling guilty and wrong for eating one thing (ice cream), feeling like a winner if I ate another (salad).

I was absolutely uncomfortable in my own skin, worried about my

weight, constantly monitoring what I was eating.

I'd make some progress and then throw it all away by eating everything in sight.

Despite any reassurance from my lovers that I was beautiful, I couldn't absorb it. I refused to believe it.

In fact, all during this time of my life, the scale was my only real judge. If I hopped on and the number was down, I felt great.

If I hopped on and the number was up, I felt like shit. And I got on that scale every day to determine how I should feel, to be validated (or invalidated).

Then one day it hit me, "I am hitting the reset button on my self-acceptance meter every damn time I step on that scale!"

I realized that I had fallen into a terrible trap of looking to external information for validation and acceptance (I did it with a scale, maybe you do it with people, money, career) and this was keeping me disempowered.

Enough was enough!

I chucked that scale in the trash and never looked back!

I finally understood that what I was doing was too painful and too exhausting, because the weight is ever changing, the wrinkles and gray hairs staking their claim, the money comes and goes (and so do people).

If loving ourselves is tied to such transitory things -- well, the outcome is a total and complete lack of self-love.

I had to learn how to have standards for myself without tying it to my value or worth or self-acceptance.

"I am beautiful AND curvy."

(gone is the either/or inner struggle)

Notice how I don't say,	" it	fla	m	I,
or if I do,	or	if	I	achieve
"				

As a result, I've come to see that selfacceptance is a declaration of value that stands, is unmovable, is absolutely independent of anything external.

Now, maybe you don't need to shift your relationship with your body or food (or

What do you need to toss out in order to make space for YOU?



maybe you do), but you'd really like to experience a transformational shift out of an old version of yourself that is no longer serving you?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel is the owner and founder of Rachel Grant Coaching and is a Sexual Abuse Recovery Coach. Rachel holds a Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology and is the author of **Beyond Surviving: The** Final Stage in Recovery from Sexual Abuse and Overcome the Fear of Abandonment. You can download both free on her website.

survivors of She works with childhood sexual abuse help them let go of the pain of abuse and finally feel normal.

Her program, **Beyond Surviving**, is specifically designed to change the way we think about and heal from abuse. she has successfully used this program to help her clients break free from the past and move on with their lives.

Reach Rachel here or on Facebook.

Listen to Rachel's Facebook Live interview about ...

I had to learn how to have standards for myself without tying it to my value or worth or self-acceptance.

Iam beautiful and curvey.

YOGA: A SELF-HEALING PRACTICE FOR SURVIVORS

By Denise Bosarte



I wasn't in any way - thinking that yoga could provide healing to my transa wounds. I didn't even think about my transma when T wentlooking for a yoga studio.

Mohamed Hassan /Pixabay

My yoga practice has been a pivotal part of my healing journey from childhood sexual abuse by mv grandfather.

I first started a yoga when my husband and I decided to start a family. With my type-A personality, I researched what would be good things to do for your body when getting pregnant. I found out that doing yoga during your pregnancy was one positive activity for mother and baby, so I decided to start before we got pregnant!

I wasn't in any way thinking that yoga could provide healing to my trauma wounds. I didn't even think about my trauma when I went looking for a yoga studio. I was just looking for a place where I felt comfortable and thought I would enjoy taking classes.

I landed at a studio which my intuition told me was a good (safe) place. And I started going to classes twice a week.

The instructor was a middle-aged man, and it was a little intimidating to be in a lyengar yoga class with a male teacher where it was common for students to be physically adjusted by the teacher to help them get into the poses correctly.

What was very surprising to me was how vulnerable I felt in certain poses. I felt exposed and unsafe. But I didn't want to stand out by not doing the poses like everyone else, or by refusing the assistance of the teacher.

I finally sat down with the teacher and told him about my background and the challenges I was finding with the physical adjustments and the various poses. Knowing the statistics around abuse, it was not surprising to learn that his sister had been abused by his father. He really understood what I was dealing with and we made the decision together on how to handle adjustments-there would be noneand alternative poses to those that made me uncomfortable.

After that, my experience yoga class was in transformational!

Abuse survivors will often disassociate from their bodies during their abuse. It is not necessarily a conscious choice, but it is a safe way to get through what is happening; disconnecting and leaving your body to avoid having to acknowledge your vulnerability and helplessness. To keep you protected, your body becomes a separate "thing" from the true you.

Because of the abuse, I grew to hate my body. I felt it had betrayed me. I treated it as a machine that I could run ragged, push to the limit, and never give any care or concern about when I needed to get done what I needed to get done.

Yoga helped me to recognize where I had "memories" stored in my body. These were areas charged with unreleased emotions and physical sensations from my abuse. Yoga postures helped to open these areas and release what was stored there since the trauma events.



Gary Skirrow/Pixabay

Yoga helped me understand how to be IN my body, to inhabit and be present in my body.

It helped me to understand where my body was in space, how to relate to my body and how to care for my body. And how to actually start to learn to love my body which I had NEVER done before.

Yoga showed me how to be the one making decisions on what happened with my body and how I was going to treat my body.

We've come so far since I first started yoga. There is so much more understanding about the impact of abuse and PTSD in general, and their impacts on our bodies. Trauma Informed/Sensitive yoga has been developed to specifically support survivors of trauma and help them benefit from a yoga practice. Yoga teachers can now be certified in this specific form of yoga. It's a wonderful resource!

Abuse survivors will often disassociate from their bodies during their abuse.

Resources for yoga:

Yoga Journal has a description of the different types of yoga that are available to help you explore what type of yoga is right for you.

The Yoga Journal also has an online directory to help you find yoga studios, classes, events, and retreats by name or zip code.

There are also numerous yoga teachers who provide on-line classes through their websites and on Youtube.com. You can search for yoga classes that you can do in the comfort of your own home!

What type of yoga you practice is not important. Gifting yourself with selfcare by getting on the mat on a regular basis is the key!

Note: before beginning any new physical activity, please consult with your physician.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Denise Bossarte is an awardwinning poet, writer, photographer, and artist. A certified meditation facilitator she is also a contemplative arts teacher. As an IT professional, she works for a large urban school district. Denise holds a BA in chemistry, an MS in computer science, and a PhD in developmental neuroscience. She is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

Denise spent her adulthood healing herself from the traumatic impact the sexual abuse had on her life. She is not a mental health professional. She is a Thriver who has traveled a healing journey and shares personal, guided experiences for readers to find and engage in their own journey to healing, and becoming Thrivers. As an unpublished manuscript, Thriving After Sexual Abuse was a guarterfinalist in the 2019 BookLife Prize Nonfiction Contest, Self-Help Category.

Whether writing about overcoming trauma in her nonfiction work or recasting her real-life experiences into award-winning dark urban fantasy in four novels—Glamorous, Beginnings, Return, and Readings— Denise tackles the dark side of things with courage, fearlessness, and compassion.

LOOKING FOR A FUN AND EASY ART **PROCESS THAT ANYONE CAN DO?**

SoulCollage[®] is a creative and intuitive process that allows us to get to know ourselves better, and to deepen our relationship with ourselves, with the people who support us, and with the wider realms of the spirit. It is a powerful process for personal growth, development, and integration. It uses images as a way to connect with the deeper parts of the self.

> Tuesdays, October 5, 12, 19, 26 6 – 8 pm CDT on Zoom

Bring your intuition and imagination and join us for this fun and insightful class in October! Note: This class will be made up solely of participants who are survivors of abuse. Although the class will not focus on abuse topics directly, it will be a safe place for survivors to share and explore whatever arises during the SoulCollage® experience.





Learn More

The Survivor Nest Project

- Gather with 10 survivors September 17-19 in the Boston, **MA area** for a healing weekend.
- Be professionally photographed by artist and author Debbie Baxter in a giant life sized nest. Feel nurtured and held while in the nest.
- Receive additional support from Donna Jenson, longtime advocate and survivor from her nonprofit, Time to Tell.
- Be part of a healing arts exhibition in April 2022 during Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

RESOURCES: PREVENTION OF SEXUAL ABUSE BOOKS FOR KIDS



30 Days of Sex Talks for Ages 8-11: Empowering Your Child with Knowledge of Sexual Intimacy by Educate and Empower Kids. This is a series that helps you discuss sex education as a family. Having these talks with your child will establish a pattern of healthy conversations for the future. As you move through the discussions, these interactions will gain depth and your relationship will strengthen. Your child will become more comfortable talking to you about anything as he or she grows into the healthy, knowledgeable person he or she will become.

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Pictures Bad Pictures, Good by Kristen A Jenson (Author) and Debbie Fox (Illustrator). A comfortable way to talk with your kids about pornography. This newly revised edition of the original bestseller from Defend Young Minds makes that daunting discussion easy! Good Pictures Bad Pictures is a read-aloud story about a mom and dad who explain what pornography is, why it's dangerous, and how to reject it.



Good Pictures Bad Pictures Jr.: A Simple Plan to Protect Young Minds, by Kristen A. Jenson (Author), Debbie Fox (Illustrator) It's not if our kids come across pornography, it's when. This is a great book for parents to read to kids about why pornography can be harmful.



Some Secrets Should Never Be Kept by Jayneen Sanders (Author), and Craig Smith (Illustrator). A beautifully illustrated children's picture book that sensitively broaches the subject of keeping children safe from inappropriate touch.

What Do I Do Now? A Survival Guide for Mothers of Sexually Abused Children (MOSAC) by Mel Langston PhD and Leona Puma. Book for moms of daughters of sexual abuse.



I Said No! A Kid-to-kid Guide to Keeping Private Parts Private by Kimberly King and Zack King (Authors) and Sue Rama (Illustrator) Helping kids set healthy boundaries for their private parts can be a daunting and awkward task. Written from a kid's point of view, I Said No! makes this task a lot easier.

Let's Talk About It by Erika Moen and Matthew Nolan. The Teen's Guide to Sex, Relationships, and Being a Human. Inclusive, accessible and honest graphic novel guide to growing up, from gender and sexuality to consent and safe sex. Perfect for any teen starting to ask questions.



Sibling Sexual Abuse: A Guide for Confronting America's Silent Epidemic by Brad Watts. While this book is written by a counselor who rehabilitates offenders, it gives insight into sibling sexual abuse, the causes, the effects and the devastating statistics.



Tootles The Turtle Tells The Truth by Lenell Levy Melancon (Author). This is a lovely book that playfully walks a child through a story about someone scaring a child not to tell. The characters ask interactive questions at the end of the book to engage readers in a candid discussion of good, bad, or scary secrets.



MEL LANGSTON, PhD with Leona Puma

What Do I Do Now? A Survival Guide for Mothers of Sexually Abused Children (MOSAC) by Mel Langston PhD and Leona Puma. "What do I do now?" is a mother's cry after she learns her child has been sexually abused. Research shows that one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before age eighteen, usually by someone they know and trust, often by a father or father-figure. Many children remember the abuse only in adolescence or adulthood. A mother's belief in her child's disclosure and her active support and protection after disclosure are essential to recovery from the horror of sexual abuse.

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS



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WE SURVIVED... WE THRIVE

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY <u>THE EMPOWERED VOICE</u> We Survived... We Thrive is a new sponsored page that allows survivors to be listed free of charge in support of other survivors. It demonstrates the pervasive nature of sexual abuse/assault and the support from the survivor community.

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Voices Heard shatters the long held silence of sexual abuse survivors through story-telling and expressive arts.