Empowered

INTERACTIVE E-ZINE | FALL 2021

STORIES OF HOPE AND HEALING

...HOW DO I

...LIFE LESSONS—LIVING ABOVE MY FEARS

...LEARNING TO SAY NO!

...WRITE IT OUT

...YOU CAN STILL BE WHOLE

VOICES HEARD Fall 2021

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WHY VOICES HEARD—WHY INTERACTIVE?



It was during my coffee meditation that the idea came to me.

It was the beginning of Covid. Clearly I wasn't going to be traveling with my "Empowered Voice Traveling Exhibit" for a while, so I'd just asked my guides "What's next." Right then, the idea popped into my head. "Voices Heard, Interactive eZine." OMG! Why hadn't I thought of that years ago. After all, I was a graphic designer and had managed and designed multiple print magazines. It finally made sense.

Why not combine my design skills with my passion for helping survivors!

Voices Heard does exactly that.

Why Interactive?

In this time I find that we are tending to stay home more. Maybe our quarrantine made us realize we enjoy being at home so we're taking more time to enjoy it – watch videos, explore movies and other things on the computer for which we have an affinity. Or maybe like so many, being stuck at home caused us to be victimized more and we're finding ways to heal any place we can.

Click on an orange link to view a video or read more in depth information. Or, hover over an image to see if it's linked to get insights on that person or to view a video.

Listen to the authors' sharing their stories on **audio and video**. Explore video and see the glory of story through movement.

You can also view **Facebook Live interviews** between myself and the writers who share their stories and insights. Simply click on the **orange link** in their article or bio. Each of these casual conversations are created to build resilience, highlight a different aspect of healing or discuss a different type of abuse.

We are continually adding links to resources and books for prevention and healing.

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

Explore to your hearts content.

Maybe like so many, being stuck at home caused us to be victimized more and we're finding ways to heal any place

we can.

FROM THE EDITOR... LEARNING THROUGH STORIES



Each time I read a survivor's story, I learn something from that person.

Sometimes I'm reminded of a wound in myself that's not yet completely healed. When reading other articles, I am so inspired by the steps these women have taken to heal and how they are helping others to heal in so many ways.

Shant'e Reese is one of those inspiring women whose story touched my soul in *Write it Out*. I wish my mother could have been there for me like **Rona Brodrick** is. She shares her emotional journey in supporting her daughter through her poem *Why Do I*?

Dr. Lori Pitts and I both believe You Can Still be Whole but her inspiring story is hers alone. Michelle White Hart is back to share her continuing story of healing in Learning to Say No!—definitely a story I relate to. I also feel Barbara Joy Hansen's silence as she shares her story in Life Lessons—Living Above My Fears. Our Building Resilience section features **Rachel Grant**, *Love The One You're With* as she shares insights on how to advocate not just with other survivors, but at home and with friends. **Denise Bossarte** is back to inspire us to connect with ourselves in *Meditation: A Self Healing Practice for Survivors*.

We're expanding our resources with websites and books for prevention of sexual abuse and healing. All resources are **live links**. We also share **links to healing resources and workshops** that we feel will be helpful for other survivors.

Always inspiring, I learn something from every article I read and every story I hear.

If you're interested in sharing your healing story from sexual abuse or have resources, articles and books, please <u>reach out to me</u>! I'd love to hear from you. Remember, that orange link is live.

Always inspiring, I learn something from every article Iread and every story Thear.

SHANT'E REESE ...WRITE IT OUT



Shant'e around 17 years old

The origins of a Lovely Mess:

Being a survivor of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, I know that I live with these scars every day of my life.

I have been in therapy due to growing up in homeless shelters and living in the children's home, but I didn't really grasp how much it truly affected me.

In an acting class, the teacher asked us to bring in a monologue to perform in class. The teacher said we could bring in any scene we wanted, or we could write our own. I decided that I would write mine but didn't know what to really write about. I had written many sketches, short stories, and even a few screen plays, but none of them felt right for this. Then I remembered a song that I used to sing for the plays I would put on for myself using my dolls and my Snoop suitcase when I was in elementary school. It was called, "Nobody Don't Likes Me". In the play, my pregnant Michael Jackson doll would be pleading with Barbie to stay. He sang this song after she left. The song was very much how I truly felt growing up.

At age 5, I had already been raped and at the time of this "play", I had already lived in numerous other people's homes, shelters, and experienced abandonment. I truly felt that I wasn't loveable and that I was a nuisance to anyone who had me. After all, that is why so many people were in such a hurry to get rid of me. I decided I would write about that song.

While writing, I started to re-live those moments and the moment that, when I was in the third grade, my mom told me that she loved me. I didn't say it back and she asked me why.

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and at the time of this "play", I had already lived in numerous other people's homes, shetters, and experienced abandonment.

••

Atage 5. Thad

already been raped

I told her that I didn't believe in it, so I wasn't going to say it.

By that time, I had been sexually molested by an "aunt" and was in the midst of being sexually molested by my until years later (2018) that I actually performed the *A Lovely Mess* the way I truly envisioned. <u>CLIICK HERE to watch</u> <u>A Lovely Mess.</u>



Shant'e Reese in a scene from "A Lovely Mess"

uncle. I wrote that in my monologue. Thoughts of my mom had me write the character as a homeless woman, as my mom had been for most of my life.

I thought about the unstoppable force that would cause someone to stay in such a hopeless, desolate place. It seemed fitting to add the IV drug issue, to reflect that hopelessness. Then, I thought about the time that I had planned out my suicide. That feeling of being so broken that the only way out was death. In the end, just like the character, I didn't go through with it due to an encounter with God. Just like the character, I was still angry that He wouldn't let me do it. I didn't understand that I had more to give in this life. I finished the monologue and performed it for class. To my surprise, everyone was receptive to it. When I started getting questions of who wrote it, I just simply said I did. I didn't explain my deep connection with the piece. I didn't feel safe enough yet. It wasn't

The origins of Stolen Empire:

When I became older, I sought out something different to help me through my trauma. I was experiencing depression that was un-ceasing. I no longer had a support network, I caught my male roommate stealing my underwear, and I had lost my job. The mask that I had carefully sculpted to fit my face to make it appear as if I was fine had slipped off and shattered into a million pieces. Therapy didn't seem to work anymore. Binging wasn't working anymore or maybe I finally saw that it never really worked. Most of the time, I would be shoving food down my throat until it was raw. I was hopeless. I even tried unconventional methods of dealing with depression, but that didn't work. I had a hypnotist actually tell me that I talked too much, when I was coming to her to cure my depression (I didn't go back to her, but she kept calling me even after I told her not to).

The mask that I had carefully sculpted to fit my face to make it ? appear as if Iwas fine had slipped off and shattened into a million pieces.



Shant'e around 17 years old

By happenstance, I heard about Celebrate Recovery. It was a new program that our church was starting.

It was a 12-step program for all elements of what could get you stuck, including sexual abuse. I signed up to be a leader because I thought if I could stop someone from turning into me, that would be a win. Someone who couldn't control their emotions, felt alone, and couldn't stop crying. Months later, they contacted me after the program already started. I was thrown in, headfirst. I told myself that if I was accepted, I would do whatever was asked of me, no matter how uncomfortable. I'm happy to say that I kept that promise.

I not only stopped being depressed, I was actually smiling again.

I thought the best way to stay with this mood was to give back. I became a coleader for a few years. In the back of my mind, however, was the realization that I wasn't truly free. Yes, I was talking about my abuses, but there was one group that refused to believe that I had such a life—my family.

The last time I spoke with my family about any of my sexual abuse was when I was 11 ½. I was in the children's home for a few months. It all came out: All the sexual abuses, rape, abandonments, and physical abuses. I received a call from my aunt and by that time, I hadn't spoken with her in several months, so I was excited to speak to her.

When I got on the phone, my aunt immediately started calling me a liar; cursing at me, and said she knows that her husband never touched me, like my mom had told her. She went on to say that she would make it to where no one in the family would ever speak to me again.

I was crying but blurted out that it was a lie. I hung up the phone and I cried in my room all night. My mom was known as a liar, but this was the first time that she actually told the truth. That thought haunted me and caused me such pain.

I wasn't mentally ready to deal with my family issue, even after years of cognitive restructuring (C.R.) and seeing a couple of more therapists. The best way I thought I could handle my family was through writing. In writing, I still didn't want to actually say their names. I wanted to protect them, even though what I was protecting caused me so much pain.

I decided to write *Stolen Empire*—a drama about a woman whose family believes they are helping her by

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This one step released a load off my shoulders that made me feel 30 feet tall and helped me to realize that I do matter. Always have. getting her into the drug game. Once she got older, she began making her own way in life by going to college. She still had this past that haunted her because she was still dealing with her family and the business they created. I wrote in the piece that her family couldn't have anything she created for herself and because of that, her family was slowly "dying on the vein". The characters all had the nicknames of my family members and the situations that the main character got into with her family was a spinoff of what happened to me. I created scenarios where I finally got to tell off each family member. Watch one of those scenes below.

friend of mine who was diagnosed with Alzheimers was going pass soon. I had already been looking up coaching schools, but now it seemed imperative that I show my dear friend that I was going to be okay and she could pass away peacefully. I sat with her and gave her my plans for the next few months. I received a call the next day that she had passed. I was determined to keep my promise.

Because of that promise, I found freedom that I never knew existed.

I was able to slowly peel away those negative thoughts and in July 2021,



Shant'e Reese in a scene from "Stolen Empire"

My life now:

All my life, people have told me in some fashion that I should be a motivational speaker.

To be honest, I've always had this dream for myself, but I thought that I couldn't achieve it.

Then, in September 2020, a very dear

I posted a video on my FB page that made it very clear with my family that we weren't going to live in denial about me anymore. This one step released a load off my shoulders that made me feel 30 feet tall and helped me to realize that I do matter. Always have.

Through my coaching business, I'm able to help those who lost their voice or felt as if they never had one. Survivors are stronger than we know or give ourselves credit for. If you are still here, it means you have a purpose. You don't have to live small anymore or try to fit in with people who aren't "safe".

It's time to step away from the shadows and live free!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shant'e Reese is a survivor of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. She grew up being passed around between family members, friends of her mom's and homeless shelters until the age of 11 ½ when she was placed in a children's home. She's been raped and sexually molested beginning at the age of five.

Today Shant'e is a Motivational Speaker, Coach, and Actor, helping survivors heal and thrive.

A Lovely Mess, was entered into the Independent Shorts Award Festival in 2019.

She can be reached via <u>email</u> or <u>follow</u> <u>her on Facebook.</u>

<u>View Shant'e's interview on Building</u> <u>Resilience Live.</u>

... HOW DO I (A LETTER TO MY DAUGHTER)

Rona Brodrick

How do I

Support you On your healing journey Tell you how sorry I am Because I failed to protect you

How do I

Nurture and nourish our relationship Make up for lost Time trust conversations awareness Connection care security

How do I

Process The grief pain loss 12 Not live in the past Wishing for a do-over Find peace When memories and old photos arise And I find myself thinking About the burden you were carrying Alone Scared So young For so long What I would do To go back and have you know That I would be there To comfort soothe stand by Stand up for Believe You

How do I Do this I am so ill-equipped At times thinking feeling Convinced I cannot *I write you so many letters* That I never send Have so many conversations With myself Preoccupation and angst Can take me away From the present moment And being there for the others For that I am sorry Another sorry For I can see that the abuse Not only impacts you And me But so many others too

How do I Practice what I preach Approach what's uncomfortable uncertain Build an awareness Transform the suffering Find purpose When I sometimes feel Anguish desolation heartache A breath away I am tired of their company But I know That I too Am a being in progress So practice I do

How do I

Find the balance Between worry and respect You're an adult Responsible for your choices Though you may not Be ready want to or know What help you need Where to begin or how to ask I have vowed to never be naive again To not remain silent if when I see The tentacles of the abuse Infiltrating Your behaviors Mental formations Health safety well-being In ways that you may not yet realize *Is it my place to say?*

How do I

Express convey Let's be honest — convince That honest awareness Infused with nonjudgmental merciful grace Of the symptoms and influences of the abuse No matter what they are Are not signs of weakness But the pathway of healing Of gently embracing yourself Of reverent honest safe love Of breaking free Of peace **Of opportunity** Of all the things you deserve Are worthy of And I believe may be The things you wish for too

How do I

Encourage you To find trust use your voice To know that putting your needs Boundaries health safety first Will guide you toward knowing experiencing Kindness empathy acceptance genuine love To understand that respect love contentment Are not measured gained sustained By likes dress size hair color Or compliments from others Instead conditions of happiness joy Abundant wholesome living Are born from Compassionate love of self A celebration of self Exactly as you are

How do I

Say this I love you for who you were are will be Yesterday today tomorrow As I've said This is a mother's Grief sadness trauma shock At the change in plans And trajectory of your life My eyes have been opened To a new reality There was a parallel universe A version of you that was living with abuse And I had no idea It can feel like we are Reacquainting building a bridge Connecting finding our way back To each other Grateful I am for this second chance At love with you

How do I

Make you see believe All the things about you I know to be true The intrinsic nature And essence of your soul Filled with Light Possibilities Hopes Dreams Joy Love That you are Loved and Lovable Capable Talented Strong Courageous Intelligent Creative Kind Tenderhearted So many things You have yet to realize

How do I

Reassure you That I, as Maya says, Wouldn't take nothing for my journey now For your truth has been set free my dear And you no longer shoulder the burden Nor walk this journey alone Sure I may will stumble At times feel weak and unassured But I will never give up Hope love commitment To you To us Listening to and leading with my heart Joy gratitude peace love

Will abound

How do I

There's never a doubt May you always feel know That my intentions motivations are born of love Encouragement support desire for your Welfare safety freedom happiness As you journey onward toward Learning loving embracing yourself

How do I

Because I want will pledge to Always be here for you My beloved child Whom I carry in my heart Compassionately tenderly Respectfully lovingly Gratefully joyfully Sincerely, Mom

As a little girl, my daughter would write me love notes and sign them "Sincerely". One day I asked her why she chose that word as her complimentary close and she said, "Because it means you really mean it." I learned of her incest abuse when she was 20 years old. This poem is a reflection of my journey, thoughts, and feelings. Most of all, I hope it is an expression of my love for her.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rona Brodrick is the mother of a sexually abused child. When her daughter was in college, she learned that she was a survivor of incest. It was a devastating day to learn that she endured six years of abuse and did so in silence as so many who are abused do.

"It is one of the worst nightmares you can wake up to as a mother and parent. It was equally devastating to learn that it was my father." she states.

Rona has founded M*OASIS (Mothers* Of Adult Survivors of Incest and Sexual Abuse) a resource website and blog for anyone looking to understand how to support a survivor of incest and sexual abuse.

"While I am a mom and some of the resources and articles may be skewed toward that perspective, my hope is that M*OASIS will be a resource for friends, partners, siblings or any family member trying to figure out how to support an adult survivor."

"I am not a therapist, nor do I have any professional training in abuse. I am a mother who wants to share her story with others so we can shed the shame, open the dialogue on this issue, and work toward ending childhood sexual abuse."

You can find Rona at <u>M*OASIS</u>. You can also <u>email her.</u>



CREATIVITY UNLEASHED COMING IN JANUARY 2022 MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Creativity Unleashed encourages survivors to unearth the root of their story & nourish their creativity through expressive arts.

Through Creativity Unleashed, you will heal with a small group of women like yourself who are dedicated to healing their sexual abuse. Giving voice to your story through expressive arts helps you heal. Seeing it and hearing it helps others heal as well.

UNLEASH YOUR CREATIVITY

DURING THE 9-WEEK PROGRAM YOU WILL:

- Learn how to share your story through simple art techniques effectively
- Use a story board to effectively organize your thoughts and ideas
- Create an artist book or art of your choice using simple effective techniques
- Learn how to share your story vulnerably yet powerfully
- WOW your audience with public speaking techniques that will have them intrigued from your very first words
- Get published in Voices Heard quarterly e-Zine (if you desire)
- Be part of the *Empowered Voice Traveling Exhibit* (Live and Online)

ACCELERATE YOUR HEALING AND RECOVERY

- Expand your capacity to hold grief, loss and more
- Learn simple practices for when you're triggered
- Let go of anger, mistrust, and not being enough
- · Share your needs and desires confidently at home and in business
- Reclaim who you are at the core
- Love yourself unconditionally
- Release your story once and for all
- Become the strong confident woman you know you can be
- Embrace your prosperity
- Shatter the silence of your sexual abuse

LEARN MORE & REGISTER

DR. LORI PITTS ...YOU CAN STILL BE WHOLE



Dr. Lori Pitts

I am a survivor of multiple sexual assaults. Boy, that still feels weird to say at times.

My abuse started early in my childhood and extended into my twenties. I am one of those people that choose to look at the blessings and positives of a situation, regardless of what it is. The abuse I endured is no different for me. Therefore, this article may annoy some; however, I hope that you will gain some inspiration from what I have to share. My prayer is that my perspective will help you to challenge yourself in a healthy way that moves you further down the path of your healing. The purpose of my article, advocacy work and my work as a healer is to simply remind you that you can still be whole after sexual assault trauma. So, I would like to briefly share the insights I have learned about myself as a result of each assault.

Each assault caused me to feel and discover something different about my true self. The self that was pure and undamaged by the sexual violation.

The person I was before the assault and the person I have since chosen to be once again. **Each causing me**

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My father stepped

up and assisted

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to have a new awareness of not only who I am at my core but my true abilities and strength.



Lori at approximately 5 years old

The first assault started when I was a young child and went on for quite some time. I was a very trusting and inquisitive little girl who was violated by a family member that I trusted and adored. However, he proved to have a much different side. This violation taught me that I wasn't a fragile little girl in the yellow romper that needed to be saved by others.

After my parents learned of the assault, my persona morphed into this desperate helpless energy that took vears to shake. My father stepped up and assisted me tremendously in obtaining justice and was the first person to bring to my awareness that I could heal. His response helped me to feel protected, heard, and loved. Unfortunately for me, my mother was also a survivor and due to her not having worked through her pain, she was unable to be there for me the way that you would think a mother should. I couldn't understand this then. So, of course, this caused me to be angry with

her for guite some time until I began to understand more about her journey. Before being able to acknowledge her hurt, her absence made me feel like my pain was invisible. Therefore, I went throughout my life unbeknownst to me manifesting situations that placed me in a position to be a victim over and over again. I was hoping to have my pain acknowledged while looking for my mother to run to my aid. It took me a while but I learned that I didn't need anyone to come to my aid. I learned that help simply wasn't coming. If I wanted to be saved, I had to depend on myself. In no doubt the most uncomfortable way. I learned the karmic lesson that I was strong and capable. I am currently living life from this space and it feels really good.

The second assault was a gang rape by some classmates during high school.

Several years passed, when I saw one of the boys, now a man, in a grocery store near my childhood home. He was with his son and me with my daughter. He recognized me immediately and humbly approached me. I instinctively stood in front of my daughter as he walked closer to me. He also grabbed his son in a protective manner unsure of how I would respond to our encounter. At that moment, I felt something come over me. I felt a warmth fall on my heart. As I continued to look at him, I began to have a clear vision of him and his life. I saw that his life was very rough and dark. He began to speak, apologizing for the role he played in my assault. He stated that he was young and didn't understand the magnitude of what he had done. He divulged that a close

At that moment. I felt something come over me. Ifelt a warmth fall on my heart. As Tcontinued to look at him, Ibegan to have a clean vision of him and his life.

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loved one had been raped helping him to fully understand the torment he was responsible for putting me through. Instantly, it was as though I could see this assault he mentioned in my mind's eye. But more than anything, I was able to feel the intense pain in his heart. I knew he was being genuine. He was truly remorseful for the pain he caused. **The exchange was brief and very impactful. I knew he was forgiven.** The insight I gained came more from this very public apology in the grocery store than the actual assault.

During this conversation, I could see and feel the pain of someone else. This was interesting to me, as I have previously stated that I often felt like my pain was invisible to others.

I began researching what I had experienced and discovered that I was an empath and a seer. I had what I now consider to be a gift to see and feel other's pain. Once I learned about this gift, I began to understand how to then use it to help others on their journey to healing. I noticed that more often than not, the clients that would come to me also had unacknowledged pain. These clients understood that I felt their pain and trusted me to help them by navigating them through it.

The last assault was also by a family member. This one, quite possibly, taught me my greatest and most challenging life lesson. My mother was always a godly woman before her sudden transition in 2018. Before her passing, she and I were not on speaking terms as I informed my parents several years prior that I was gay. Due to their religious beliefs, as you could imagine, this caused a great distance in our relationship. I was not welcomed in their home and, once again, felt unacknowledged by my mother.

What was baffling to me was that although my mother knew of the assault by this family member, he continued to be welcomed in their home and would from time to do odd and end jobs around their home to earn some extra money. For the life of me, I could not understand why he was allowed to come around. Especially, since I had felt that I had lost my family due to me disclosing my sexuality. My understanding of this changed drastically after the passing of my mother.

It's strange how your perspective changes after a parent's transition.

Suddenly, all the things that perplexed you when they were here seem to become so very clear. I realized that even in my mother's passing she was still teaching me lessons to carry for the rest of my days. She was teaching me how to boldly stand in my truth even when it's hurtful to others. Her decision was hurtful to me that he was welcomed in their home but I was not. However, her beliefs were hers and she had a right to them. She was also teaching me forgiveness. This was someone who violated her child in one of the worst ways possible. Yet, she had it in her heart to forgive him. Profoundly, not only do I see my strength and but I also see the strength of my mom.

I was able to feel the intense pain in his heart. Tknew he was being gernine. He was truly remorseful for the pain he caused.

I have been asked by other advocates and clients if I think it is possible for one to ever consider themselves fully healed?

My response is, "No." I believe that one just continues to heal and reach new levels of that healing on the journey.

What I have shared in this article are just a few perspectives that have helped me tremendously to move from victim to survivor.

This is an example of one of the tools I use when working with clients. Sometimes, we are in the pain for so long because we have not challenged our perspective. I have found that when we reframe a situation and question our viewpoint, we can then choose a thought that helps move us from the victim seat to becoming an advocate or healer. Furthermore, if we play the scientist of our life, we can choose to see the perspective that expands us and moves us farther away from the pain. Moreover, when we acknowledge our own gifts and power, we relieve those around us from the pressure of responding appropriately to our pain. We in essence take back our power and, once again, begin to guide our ship towards who we were meant to be before the pain. I am honored to call myself a healer who holds space for others as they walk this journey to reach a new level of healing.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Lori Pitts is wife and mother to 3 amazing children or as she would call them, her soul extensions. She is a 3x's survivor of sexual assault trauma and believes in taking a holistic approach to healing. She has been quoted saying that, "Sexual assault happened for me, not to me."

Dr. Lori is a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community. She and her wife Regina live in California with their blended family, (son 24 and 2 daughters 18 & 15).

Desiring to teach others what she has learned along the way, Dr. Lori founded Still Whole Wellness in 2017, where she uses holistic methods to help clients heal from sexual assault.

Dr. Lori has an M.S. degree in Professional Clinical Counseling, Life Coaching Certification, and a Doctorate in Metaphysics as well as a Grand Reiki Master certification. Before working in private practice, Dr. Lori worked in the mental health field for over fifteen years working on trauma healing, substance use disorder. Dr. Lori believes that we should all make efforts to heal every day.

Learn more About Dr. Lori and her work at <u>Still Whole Wellness</u>. <u>View Dr. Lori's</u> <u>interview on *Building Resilience Live*</u>. You can reach her via <u>email</u>.

Thave found that when we reframe a situation and question our viewpoint, we can then choose a thought that helps move us from the victim seat to

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becoming an advocate on healen

MICHELLE WHITE HART ...LEARNING TO SAY "NO"



I've gotten used to living with the impact of it—the sponadic sexual expression, limited relationships, the smallness of my life, the difficulty in saying no.

The embodied 'No! Collage by Michelle White Hart

I've been working with a somatic trauma therapist weekly for the last 8 months. It has taken me many months to move from the chair to the table for the hands on work with good reason.

In my late twenties, I got a visceral sense that I had experienced emotional incest and that was why I was mostly sexually abstinent. I'm 58 and I've gotten used to living with the impact of it—the sporadic sexual expression, limited relationships, the smallness of my life, the difficulty in saying no.

It's taken several months to build up trust in my own body to face the trauma—however small or subtle —and make it more conscious. As John, my valiant trauma therapist says, "Trauma is not the event, it's how you react to it." It doesn't matter what

happened—though not to belittle the horrific experiences survivors have endured. It could be as small as getting

a mean look from someone—it's how your body has reacted to the event that is the trauma that needs to be healed.

For example, I get hyper vigilant when

someone grazes my butt—either by accident or on purpose. It enrages me. How dare they? I sometimes can feel it's about to happen and then it does! Not that often but it has happened on a few occasions where it was kind of premeditated to seem accidental, inconsequential. It is far from inconsequential. I want to rip their hands off... Even friends of mine, women friends mostly, seem to think it's okay to pinch my butt—until I tell them it most definitely isn't! And, it usually takes a while for me to let it go.

So why does it incense me so much? I'm starting to get some clues. When I was on the table once, on my stomach, John was pressing certain areas on my back to relax me when I felt his T-shirt and torso touch my arm, by accident. I froze.

I didn't say anything right away, but I did at some point. I told him, I'm sure it's legit, just an accidental torso graze, but it still made me tense and brought up some anger. He was glad I mentioned it and asked me to mention it whenever it happens again.

It happened a few other times. I felt so stupid that it bothered me so much and I didn't want to stop the work we were doing so I waited and brought it up at the next session and the next time a little sooner, like after the session. He acknowledged me for letting him know and then we spent a session on it. I discovered, the longer the graze, the more deliberate, the more it made me brace and I felt controlled and very irritated.

One time, he pulled the sheet from my back and it landed on my butt. That triggered me. It felt like his finger went up my butt! Jeez! Just giving you all the deets, in case any of this helps make sense out of seemingly 'nothing.'

Another time, when he moved from my back to hold certain trigger points on the sides of my hips, I started crying. I remembered an edgy sexual encounter that became a totally unexpected, surprising anal sex experience. At the time, I thought I was responsible for it and didn't say anything and quickly set it aside. This was almost 40 years ago! This time, on the table, I was feeling the shock, the feeling of being used and treated like a thing.

Afterward, I felt discarded like a bad piece of meat by this man I barely knew but to whom I felt I owed something. I had initiated a sexual connection because he had given me a line of coke in the bathroom of the bar I waitressed at. This, I now see, is what got me in trouble...

First, feeling like I owed him something which then led to putting on a bit of a show that I was some sort of a femme fatale?!! Which I most certainly was not! I had just turned 19, barely lost my virginity, lived a fairly sheltered life in Canada. Now I was working in a bar in downtown Philadelphia and I was in way over my head with this guy.... I ended up in a seedy motel with a stranger who was a drug dealer, no less! Yikes!

It was the emotion that I have never processed about the experience that was coming up.

And as I felt the hurt of being treated unceremoniously, I shared the story with John and my shame. He said I hadn't done anything wrong and that I didn't have to do something I didn't want to do. I couldn't quite take that on, at first.

We talked a little and he asked me if I could relive the situation how would I do it differently. I was embarrassed for having initiated and gotten myself into such a gnarly situation that I really couldn't think of doing anything else. I kept feeling, "Well I brought this on to myself. I instigated it. I made it seem like I wanted this. So he didn't do anything wrong."

It was the emotion that Thave rever

processed about the experience that was

coming up.

I kept blaming myself for getting into this mess. I really believed that I didn't have any rights in the situation, that I owed this man whatever his desire. I didn't know how to stand up for myself because I didn't want to make him wrong or feel bad.

Not being able to even envision the situation differently felt even worse. I felt so powerless and stuck.

So we continued to do some work around it. I had more tears come up about feeling used and discarded which led me to feel anger toward this man, which helped me get out of the stuckness. John kept validating my feelings.

He then said that because I had been taken by surprise when this man flipped me abruptly onto my stomach, there wasn't actual consent on my part and that I had every right to say that I didn't want to do this.

Whether this man officially raped me or not, my body registered the experience as a rape.

So this is what we were dealing with now. We needed to unwind the feeling of being raped, not debate whether this man had raped me or not. This really helped me untangle the shame of feeling responsible for the whole situation. The truth is, I did not give my consent to having sex this way—too fast, too hard, too impersonal, and in the anus—a new way that I wasn't used to.

The whole experience was trapped physically and emotionally in my body.

Speaking with John about it after not really talking about it for almost 40

years, really helped. Staying connected to the sensation of contraction in my heart kept me in my body and not looping in my head. I really got on a visceral level that I did have a choice in the situation, that I didn't have to endure anything with this man even though I had initially seemed like I was a yes to the situation.

After about 30 minutes of talking and feeling in my body and John supporting me, he asked me again if I could do it again how would I handle the situation if I was in that motel and this guy was flipping me over and starting to have sex with me. I felt in my body the energy of anger and fear and turned onto my back and kicked my legs as if to push him off of me and yelled,

"Back the fuck off!"

The energy coursed through my body and it felt so incredibly empowering. This was not a performance. This was my embodied "NO!"

And as a result, I have been able to say no in a hell of a lot more situations, far less dangerous, that I had often said, just to be nice. This all stems from a codependent pattern that I'm not really delving into in this article. It started in the emotional incest dynamic with my mother and being a good girl that I mentioned in a previous article. (See page 20 in the Spring 2021 issue of <u>Voices Heard</u>.)

This experience has made it so clear to me how my people-pleasing and codependency has made me into what I've heard Claire speak so powerfully about being a "Yes" girl and how being a yes girl can really leave you very

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the feeling of being naped, not debate whether this man had raped me or not. This really helped me untangle the shame of feeling responsible for the whole situation.

We needed to unwind



The cycle of empowerment, Collage by Michelle White Hart

unprotected and unsafe in even semidangerous situations where you choose to take care of someone else's feelings instead of taking care of yourself.

And I know this is taking it way way to the extreme, but I know this is how they groom young girls and women to be sex-trafficked. I go through phases of learning about sex trafficking—there are many videos on YouTube. It starts from a co-dependency vulnerability that they feed off of and escalates all the way to mind control in which you ignore your bodily needs and you are now living dissociated, in your mind.

That enlightens me to know my somatic embodiment skills are the key to empowering myself to say no so as to prevent further trauma and heal from any kind of trauma.

In learning to say no. It's been a little bumpy. I am saying no more often now in situations where I feel sorry for the person but instead of taking care of them and putting their needs first I'm just saying no. Often, I'm angry about it and I say no in a kind of resentful tone of *"how dare you ask me."* There's an edge to my no at the moment which I'm sure as I become more comfortable I saying no the more graceful and diplomatic I will be. I won't be blaming the person for asking me, I'll just simply say no.

Though it's a rocky road in that department with certain people in my life, I see it as a really positive outcome

I'm learning to say no! It's been a little bumpy. I am saying no more often now in situations where I feel sorry for the person but instead of taking care of them and putting their needs first. I'm just saying MOI

of this work. I have this visceral memory now of seeing myself flip around and use the strength of my legs to kick this guy off of me and get up and say "I don't want this!" and walk out the door, get in a cab and go home.

This has become my new memory — one of empowerment — not of shame, self-blame or lack of consent or allowing myself to be demeaned or submitting against my will.

Further to be explored is that in learning what my No is, I'm learning pieces of my Yes. What I want. What I desire. Those have often been hard for me to pinpoint. I'm seeing more and more inklings of what I want in different situations. This is exciting!

To be continued.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle White Hart is a **Sacred Visibility Coach** who has studied and taught somatic movement for over 25 years. After she did her first Yoni Steam (aka V-steam) she realized she wasn't embodying her feminine power center aka Yoni/Womb.

It felt so grounding and soothing to her nervous system to inhabit her whole pelvis. She could not believe how calm, present and at home she felt. It was a confidence that felt un-hyped and sourced from her essence.

That's when she knew something very important was missing from her visibility work with women. She was compelled to create **Womb Power** to help women feel and embody their sacred feminine power and she incorporated the Yoni/ Womb focus into her sacred visibility work where she helps women unwind protective patterning that is holding them back from being seen, being themselves and being with others.

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BARBARA JOY HANSEN LIFE LESSONS — LIVING ABOVE MY FEARS

Like a deaf mute, Thecame silent about it for decades, desperately wanting to tell someone what was happening in my silent world of memories. Like the silent falling snowflakes, no words came out; no voice was heard.



Sketch of Barbara

As a pastor's daughter I was given deep spiritual roots by my parents. The incest began when I was two as grandpa molested me while treating me to ice cream.

As I was unprotected and vulnerable, he entered my bath time without the knowledge of anyone in my family. Taking me in his car, he exposed himself to me numerous times asking for sexual favors.

He told me not to tell, so I didn't.

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My freedom day was October 1998. That day was a huge step of courage and freeing my soul from shame.

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As a child, I was intensely shy, quiet, very trusting, sad, withdrawn and extremely vulnerable. Like a deaf mute, I became silent about it for decades, desperately wanting to tell someone what was happening in my silent world of memories. Like the silent falling snowflakes, no words came out; no voice was heard. There were only tears late at night when no one but God was listening.

At age five, I woke my mother up in the middle of the night screaming hysterically! She knew I had a nightmare and reassured me, "Mommy's here. You're OK." Sobbing and frightened, I kicked her while hysterically screaming, "You're not my mommy!" She recalls that I looked so very scared that it frightened her terribly! She held me close and patted me for about half an hour until I went back to sleep.

The second abuse began at age eleven. "Shhh! Don't tell!" This is what the stocky and balding twenty-sevenyear-old youth pastor told me as he gave in to his uncontrollable urge to molest me. He singled me out, as if picking the sweetest, ripest, freshest, undefiled oranges at the supermarket. The details of those events are as vivid in my memory as if they happened yesterday. He fondled me underneath my bathing suit while he laughed and joked at the swimming hole. He whispered in my ear, "This is our little secret; keep it to yourself; don't tell!"

My parents trusted everyone, thinking I was safe from predators, not realizing that these child molesters – who they knew – were hurting me and others, luring us all into their deceitful web!

As I grew into pre-adolescence, I looked undernourished and anorexic. The signs are all there in my pictures. I drank milkshakes to gain weight and didn't understand why I was so skinny. I never gained weight and I never liked the way I looked. I thought I was ugly. I didn't go through puberty when my friends did. I was mortified at the age of sixteen when I hadn't started my monthly cycle my mother had to take me to the doctor for hormone shots to make my body begin doing something that should normally have started by then.

Victims of sexual abuse male and female—become stuck in both an emotional and physical time frame. The body shuts down physically and emotionally, and becomes unable to function as it should.

As a teenager, I felt lifeless inside, was so filled with shame and scared that my smile became forced. I had few close friends and my schoolwork suffered. I studied so hard for tests, but because of the post traumatic stress disorder and memory blocks it forced me to blank out. Testing was very difficult, so I resorted to cheating just to pass. I never dreamed I would become an author, but it shows that God can make something out of what appeared to be nothing.

As I grew into young adulthood, I felt as if a wrecking ball had come down on my head and shattered my life like a mirror into a million pieces all over the road of life. Just like all the king's men in "Humpty Dumpty," I had no idea how to put myself together again. This huge puzzle with its scattered pieces created in the image of God, but in my shattered state, it was impossible to realize that image. I had been betrayed and because of that betrayal and the thirst the perpetrators had to "feel good," I will never be the same!



My "freedom day" was October 1998. That day was a huge step of courage and freeing my soul from shame. After our son's wedding I was finally able to relax. Everyone except my parents had left our home. Dad was in a different room while my mother and I watched television. The Oprah Winfrey Show was on. I remember it was about confronting your past. I admired the courage and boldness it must have taken on the part of those who were speaking. My 83-year-old mother and I were agreeing with Oprah and her guests about the importance of coming clean from whatever harm had been done to them.

I felt as if I was living a lie.

I remember thinking to myself, I wish I could do that! How I wish I could openly tell my mother about being molested by her father. But the secret of that hideous humiliation had been locked inside me by tremendous shame. Years of doubts and fear had bound me for decades! How come I don't have that kind of courage? What is it going to take for me to tell? Questions I had asked myself over and over again.

Just that summer I had mustered all the courage I had and finally told both of my parents about the youth pastor who had sexually touched me when I was a preteen at a youth camp years ago. **But this deeper secret plaguing me was too close to home because it involved my grandpa.** The secret buried for decades was now creeping to the surface. What energy it took to keep it under wraps. Would my mother believe me anyway? I lived with the fear my father had impressed on me when I told him about Ba Pa just three years earlier.

<u>Émail Barbara</u> to purchase her book or watch the video.

"Don't tell! It might kill her!" That's exactly what grandpa told me after he molested me. I felt victimized all over again by my own father.

"Daddy," I said at the time, "I know without a doubt that she was also a victim!" Two of my cousins had already told me that they too had been molested. I knew from what I had read that child molesters don't stop at one victim.

In climbing out of the pit. I was leading others out as Itanght a transma support group. No doubt dad was afraid for my safety.

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This dirty secret lying just beneath the surface was killing me! An abuse victim suffers in silence and by remaining silent, the effects of the abuse on my adult life was more devastating than the actual abuse.

I turned off the TV when my father came into the family room and he began to chide me about my ministry to those "crushed in spirit" - drug addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes, ex-cons - the world sees as throwaways. They were invited into our home out of prison and drug treatment programs. My husband and I had gone into a minimumsecurity prison and several crack houses to minister to drug dealers. We had begun to mentor those steeped in their addictive lifestyles. In climbing out of the pit, I was leading others out as I taught a trauma support group. No doubt dad was afraid for my safety.

Suddenly on that day in the room with my father, all the suppressed venom, like a poison from a viper, came out with an overflow of tears and sobs that I didn't even realize were coming from me.

I'm not an angry person, but what I failed to see is unless anger is dealt with, it eventually destroys you! When anger is released, it doesn't mean that those horrific memories are forgotten, it means that you are released from the hatred that has settled inside your soul. I had never acted this way before. "Daddy, you don't understand! The pain the people I work with aren't any different than me!' Why can't I tell my mother? Ba Pa is dead but I did nothing wrong to deserve my being so dead inside my soul!

I heard my father say, "Maybe you should tell her now?" Words I never thought I would hear that would free my spirit forever. Running to the basement where my husband was working, I grabbed his arm and told him, "Pandora's box has been opened! You'd better come upstairs because I'm about to tell mother the dark, dirty secret of my past!"

Weeping for the loss of my childhood innocence, I realized the importance of what was about to happen in relation to healing my family. I began telling my mother that I was a victim of abuse, not only by a clergy but by my grandfather and that I knew he had molested her!

Nodding, my father looked at her with disbelief as mother asked me, "Why didn't you tell me years ago?"

Fear chokes the soul just as weeds choke the flowers in the garden. As my fear was released, this garden of my life could now bloom. When fear comes uninvited, it needs to become an offering to work through those fears in order to free your soul to live!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barbara Joy Hansen provides much insight into domestic violence and sexual assault as a survivor of childhood incest, preteen clergy crime, rape and tragic losses including betrayal in her own marriage. After living a "silent scream" for many decades, Barbara faced, confronted & chose to forgive one of her perpetrator's with three other survivors in a Sex Abuse Case. She facilitates *Beauty Out of ashes Support Group*, teaches battered women and works with male survivors online. She also supports victims of crimes in the courtroom.

Barbara has a God given passion, and purpose, to help release survivors, former addicts including prostitutes, prisoner's & sex offenders from shame. Barbara is Co-Host of <u>Talk Show</u> <u>NAASCA National Association</u> Adult Survivors of Child Abuse NOW. She's had countless interview's including being the Dr. Oz Show with 20 survivors of sexual assault/harassament and CBN Asia, <u>The 700 Club Show</u>, a 4 minute YouTube documentary made with Filipino actors in the Philippines during her Humanitarian Aid work.

Barbara is a Prison Chaplain, Speaker, Life Coach, Counselor, Warrior, Humanitarian Aid Worker and *Survivors Against Violence Everywhere* Ambassador Massachusetts Hope Pyx Global.org Learn more at Listen to the Cry.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

LOVE THE ONE YOU'RE WITH

By Rachel Grant



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The main thing that gets in the way of us anthentically interacting and forming relationships with others is our need to look good!

The more I work with clients, the more I am aware of one of the greatest hopes we have—that our hurts will not have been in vain—that there is some way to make it matter.

I know we often look to volunteering with organizations, offering our time and energy to support a particular cause, or serving in some other way that contributes to society. This practice is of great value to both the giver and the receiver. Yet what often goes unnoticed are the opportunities to serve those who are in our immediate circle ... the ones we are closest to, the ones who put up with us during those years of struggle, the ones who cross our path every day.

Often what inhibits and prevents us from giving or sharing freely with others is a kind of stinginess. This is not the stinginess that makes you give a \$1 tip when you know you really should give more. It's not the kind of Ebenezer Scrooge stinginess that causes you to ignore the circumstances of others. Rather, it is a type of stinginess born out of a need to hide and protect ourselves and to preserve a sense of control. Where does this type of stinginess come from in the first place, how does it most often show up, and how can we break free of it?

Human beings are funny creatures. We crave interaction and relationship, yet often behave in ways that directly counter this need. The main thing that gets in the way of us authentically interacting and forming relationships with others is our need to look good! How many times have we been in a conversation, and we have no idea what the person is talking about? Yet we nod and agree as if we are also a scholar on Far Eastern spices. When we almost trip and fall on the sidewalk, our first response isn't, "Thank goodness I didn't get hurt," but rather, "Did anyone see me fall?" More significantly, we are struggling through a divorce

but refuse to tell any of our friends, because we don't want them to think we are a failure.

For many of us, this need to look good is often exacerbated by an experience in our past that made hiding the safest choice. Additionally, many of us have suffered in silence and worked to keep up appearances to the outside world — looking good was a way to shield ourselves from revealing the truth.

Our egos are important and our need to protect them is also functionally appropriate in many circumstances. However, if we never risk ego by giving up looking good, then we miss key opportunities to share and learn from others, to give others a chance to share genuinely with us, and, perhaps most tragically, to really be seen and known by others. **We have to stop hiding.**

Another way that stinginess shows up is in our amazing ability to make choices for other people. I am sure we have all experienced the following sort of invitation, "Hey, there's a party this weekend, I'm sure you're too busy to go and wouldn't be interested, but I think it will be a lot of fun — you should come." What in the world is that?!

This sort of non-invitation is used as a defense mechanism to protect

our egos from disappointment and rejection. This type of exchange allows us to believe that the person is rejecting the party (because they are busy) rather than rejecting us. The error is in thinking that a "no" to an invitation means the person is saying "no" to you personally. If we can recognize that a person may refuse an invitation for any number of reasons (granted, one of those may be because you aren't their cup of tea), then we can give up the need to protect ourselves by offering these sorts of noninvitations.

Instead, make a clear request — "Would you like to help me on this project?" instead of, "I have this project that I would like your help on, but I understand you're probably too busy." Then, accept the person's answer (which, by the way, will often include an explanation such as, "Sorry, I already have too many projects.") without taking it personally. By making clear requests, you avoid inserting a negative influence that would rob the other person of the opportunity to choose for him/herself.

Additionally, not asking others for support (e.g. keeping the fact that you aregoing through a divorce to yourself) is also a type of choosing for others The people in our lives want to give



If we rever risk ego by giving up looking good, then we miss key opportunities to share and learn from others, to give others a charce to share genuinely with us, and, perhaps most tragically, to really be seen and known by others. their support. It is an act of stinginess to deny them the opportunity to love and care for us. So, how do we counter this tendency to choose for others? It may seem simplistic, but, when you extend an invitation, filter out anything that is not the clear request. When you need support - ask. Stop choosing for others!

STEP 1: Get clear about what you want. What specific type of support do you want/need?

Example: I would like to talk by phone; I want to meet in person.

STEP 2: Get even more specific - How often? What day? What time?

Example: I would like to talk by phone once a week on Tuesdays at 12p.

STEP 3: Ask for confirmation/agreement.

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Example: How does that sound? Would that work for you?

STEP 4: Negotiate. Based on the person's response, you may need to adjust the details or you may have to hear them say, "No, I can't do that," and not fall into meaning making as a result.

It is a gift to those with whom we are interacting to give up looking good rather than deceptively nodding to avoid acknowledging that we do not understand.

It is a gift to let others choose for themselves by making clear requests rather than using non-invitations. It is a gift to others to ask them to support us rather than hiding behind excuses for not doing so (e.g. "I don't want to impose.") It is a gift to those we love to risk our ego in order to build a more intimate relationship.

We will discover that our relationships become more genuine and the ones we





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.

She works with survivors of childhood sexual abuse to 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 ...

MEDITATION: A SELF-HEALING PRACTICE FOR SURVIVORS

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

I had been practicing yoga for a number of years and had experienced a transformation in my relationship with my body, and how I lived in and treated my body.

But I was still dealing with mental demons.

There was the voice of my grandfather telling me I was worthless, unlovable, and dirty. That I deserved everything that he had done to me. A voice that directed how I saw myself, how I imagined other people saw me, and what I thought I deserved in my life.

And there was the other voice. The "Perfectionist" who had developed to counter the voice of my grandfather. The Perfectionist who was convinced that if I did everything right, everything perfect, then I would stop "causing" the abuse to happen. It was the voice

that promised control over my world by always showing up perfectly. But, as we all know, there is no way for someone to be perfect; not any of the time let alone ALL of the time.

By Denise Bosarte

The Perfectionist voice just was another type of abuser in my head telling me I couldn't do anything right, that I was stupid, and a failure. So much for countering the voice of my grandfather!

Eventually, I decided to try meditation. I'd heard it was a way to work with and quiet your mind, and I thought it would make a good compliment to my yoga practice.

I started with guided meditations that walked me through a meditation practice gently and with the supportive presence of a teacher. I needed to have someone else there with me in my head to help silence the other voices.

Through the guided meditations I became familiar with techniques to



But slowly Istanted having glimpses of moments of peace, quiet, and contentment. They were brief but powerful experiences of my mind being my ally instead of my tonturer.



TanteTati/Pixabay

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

relax my body, and recognize my thoughts and emotions as transient experiences. The teachers were kind, compassionate, and non-judgmental in how they approached meditation. Even if they were just recordings, I felt their presence with me, helping me feel safe to be sitting with my own mind without the usual distractions.

Eventually, I decided to join a meditation center. It was here that I faced some of my biggest challenges in developing a meditation practice. Now it was just me, on the cushion, trying to work with my own mind!

The mediation center I joined practiced several types of meditation. The basic meditation was to follow your breath, and whenever there was a distracting emotion or thought to just label it "thinking" and release it. The idea was not to get hooked—to get pulled into the past or the future—but to stay present in my body and let that emotion or thought flow by like clouds in the sky.

Sounds easy, but very difficult to do!

Like many people, when I started meditation, I suddenly realized how busy my mind was. Instead of getting quiet, it seemed like my mind was on overdrive, constantly chittering and chattering, like a monkey in the jungle darting all over the place.

But slowly I started having glimpses of moments of peace, quiet, and contentment. They were brief but powerful experiences of my mind being my ally instead of my torturer.

Slowly my monkey mind started to settle. And I recognized the voices of my grandfather and my "Perfectionist" were just voices, not me. I could simple stop paying attention to them and letting them dominate my thinking. I could be quiet and discover my authentic, true voice that I had seemed to have lost so many years ago.

I have been practicing meditation in various forms for over thirteen years now. I try to find time multiple times a week to sit quietly in the morning or after work. I just let my mind rest and follow my breath, as much as I can, being compassionate with myself if my mind wanders. Gently bringing myself back to my breath.

And I still listen to guided meditations and dharma talks to learn and grow in my practice. I know there is always something more I can learn about and incorporate into my practice.

I have moved from a place of being afraid of what my mind would do next to cause me pain to a where I can be authentically me, authentically present without judgement.

I like hanging out there with myself!





I try to find time

multiple times a week

morning or after work.

to sit quietly in the



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Denise Bossarte is an award-winning poet, writer, photographer, and artist. She is a certified meditation facilitator and 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.

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

RESOURCES: BOOKS FOR ADULT SURVIVORS



The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma: Bessel van der Kolk M.D. Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, uses recent scientific advances to show how trauma literally reshapes both body and brain, compromising sufferers' capacities for pleasure, engagement, self-control, and trust. He explores innovative treatments—from neurofeedback and meditation to sports, drama, and yoga—that offer new paths to recovery by activating the brain's natural neuroplasticity.



Beyond Surviving: The Final Stage in Recovery from Sexual Abuse: Rachel Grant Author Rachel Grant brings to the table a passionate belief that you do not have to remain trapped or confronted daily by the thoughts or behaviors that result from abuse. Through her own journey of recovery from sexual abuse, she has gained insight and understanding about what it takes to overcome abuse. This makes it possible for her to relate to and appreciate your struggles intimately.



Miss America by Day by Marilyn Van Derber Marilyn Van Derber, former Miss America, tells the story of how she was sexually violated by her father from age 5 to age 18. She was 53 years old before she was able to speak the words in public: "I am an incest survivor." She opened the door for tens of thousands of sexual abuse survivors to speak the words, many for the first time, within their own families and communities. Van Derbur describes in detail what specific "work" she did on her successful journey from victim to survivor



My Pain is My Power by Tanisha Bankston This book is written

from my heart. My life changed before it began at the age of 5 or 6 years old when I was raped by a friend of the family, and I wasn't believed. This caused me to go into a shell and lose my inner voice. I was instantly overtaken with fear of what had happened to me. The damage done to me caused me to have to relearn how to walk. I continued to experience pain from an early age before I could enjoy life.



The Journey of the Heart, by Anna Cley From floating boxes to lifesaving riddles to an enlightened mirror, The Journey of the Heart is a timeless tale that speaks to the inner child in us all.

Courageously determined to escape their past and find a better fate than the ones they were born into, Mylandra and Unique embark on a journey toward discovering how to love themselves. Along the way, they learn that the heart can hold joy the same time as sorrow, and their past does not determine their future.

Celebrating the universal statement that our own truth is the best treasure of all, The Journey of the Heart offers heartfelt assurance that no matter into what circumstances we are born, our future is ours to write.



The MindBody Toolkit, Kim Deramo, D.O. 10 Tools to Instantly Increase Your Energy, Enhance Productivity, and Even Reverse Disease.

Your body has the ability to heal itself. Your mind and body are connected . . . so how do we activate this within ourselves?

The MindBody Toolkit explains the science behind the mindbody connection and gives you 10 tools you can use anytime, anywhere to activate self-healing and awakening now!



Thriving After Sexual Abuse: Break Your Bondage to the Past and Live a Life You Love by Denise Bossarte

Thriving After Sexual Abuse is an eloquent and empathetic selfdevelopment book laying out a blueprint for survivors to heal themselves. Denise Bossarte

ADULTS CONT.

writes with fierce candor as she shares her own traumatic experience with childhood sexual abuse. Thriving provides tips and suggestions for readers to seek help, self-reflect, and pursue healing through a range of activities and practices and offers tangible strategies for readers to reclaim their lives and move forward to a life of Thriving.



Victim 2 Victor by Anu Verma This inspiring and brutally honest memoir details the struggle for survival, and the search for healing and happiness. Raised in abuse and navigating through consequences, a young, broken soul finds the strength to embark on a journey to reclaim her self-worth.

What kind of childhood is possible with sexual assault? Is there a way to escape from hurt? How do you shed the victim identity? This gripping book details the life of a first-generation girl who went through hell. Born in England in 1980 with mixed Asian Indian ancestry, she narrates her story of hardship and resistance. Dealing with deep traumas from sexual assault endured since the age of three, and the challenges of being a woman, this girl managed not to break. Her inspiring journey is a lifelong struggle to find self-worth on the ruins of self-esteem.

PREVENTION FOR KIDS, TEENS & THEIR PARENTS



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.



Good Pictures Bad Pictures, 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.



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.



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.

ONLINE SUPPORT



Sibling Sexual Abuse: A Guide for Confronting America's Silent Epidemic by Brad Watts. This book is written by a counselor who rehabilitates offenders. The author 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 into not telling. The characters ask interactive questions at the end of the book to engage readers in a candid discussion of good, bad and 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.



Ascend, a Zine for teen survivors of sexual assault and friends. Ascend supports young people who are survivors of sexual assault.

ONLINE SUPPORT GROUPS FOR SURVIVORS:

1 in 6 sponsors free anonymous chat-based support groups for male survivors of sexual abuse seeking a community of support. Sessions are offered Monday through Friday. These written chat (no audio or video) groups focus on education and mutual support for males and are facilitated by a counselor.

<u>Complicated</u> <u>Courage</u> is a website and blog for sibling sexual abuse survivors.

Healing PTSD Naturally offers support for people and who suffer from PTSD to help them discover some natural methods of dealing with PTSD, no matter what the cause. This group supports all trauma not only sexual abuse survivors.

HelpRoom is an anonymous online group chat option that allows members of the community who have been affected by sexual violence to connect with one another. Trained staff facilitate group discussions to ensure a safe environment for all visitors to discuss topics and experiences related to sexual violence.

Hidden Water Circle has groups meeting weekly — either inperson or online — that are designed to enable participants to find the growing edge of their healing alongside others who have had similar experiences with childhood sexual abuse.

Incest AWARE is a group for those working to end incest and help survivors of incest abuse to heal.

The Incest AWARE Facebook was born following a large meeting of incest prevention advocates, healers, and authors who came together in February 2021 to talk about the opportunities and challenges we face today in our efforts to prevent incest. Isurvive is an online abuse survivor support group. Their forums/chat rooms are open to adult survivors and their loved ones seeking to heal from all forms of abuse, including sexual, physical, verbal, emotional, and ritual.

The Lamplighters is dedicated to recovery from incest and child sexual abuse. They have chapters located throughout the US that organize groups for survivors.

National Association of Adult Survivors of Child Abuse has a list of recovery groups and services worldwide for adult survivors of abuse, including incest. Their online daytime recovery meetings are an open discussion forum about child abuse trauma and recovery and are hosted by volunteer members.

Rape & Incest Survivors Facebook Group is a place to realize you aren't alone & to provide support. Only survivors know what it's like to live with the memories & PTSD that has lifelong effects on us. Helping others helps us deal with our memories, even though they don't go away, we can lessen how much they effect our lives.

This is a Peer to Peer support group, no professional therapists available, therapists will need to be found near you.

Sexual Assault Advocacy Network (SAAN) Facebook Group was founded to support the people who support sexual violence survivors. Their active Facebook group connects survivoradvocates who are working to support other incest and other sexual abuse survivors, change policy, and raise awareness.

Survivors Of Childhood Trauma is a friendly group to offer help and advice to fellow survivor's from all walks of life.

SUPPORT CONT.

Survivors of Incest Anonymous (SIA) is a 12-step recovery program for adult survivors of incest. They offer a range of peersupport groups, including virtual, phone, and in-person - all free of cost. Their website contains other resources and information of interest to incest survivors

StopSO Support for Families Online Group is designed to be a safe and supportive space for family members of a sexual offender or for family members of someone who is worried that they may cause sexual harm. (This organization also provides services for those at risk of offending and concerned about their thoughts or behavior.).

Tail of the Bell is Geared toward adult survivors of incest, Tail of the Bell will soon be offering peerto-peer incest survivor facilitated groups called YANA. Participants will become members of small groups of 6-8 survivors maximum who will meet weekly in a virtual space to offer mutual support and guidance.

Triumphant Trauma Tribe: Started by an experienced therapist, this is a virtual group support meeting for trauma survivors gathering several times per week. The format is a combination of sharing and group support. If you have something you're going through, they encourage you to talk about it and others can give feedback, support, or just general encouragement. There is a screening process to get into the group; this ensures that the membership is appropriate for this setting.

Wings Support Groups offers a variety of virtual and in-person groups in the Denver Metro area. Wings supports adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse to live their fullest, healthiest lives as they speak about, heal from and thrive beyond CSA trauma.

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF SURVIVORS

<u>M*OASIS</u> (Mothers* Of Adult Survivors of Incest and Sexual Abuse) is a resource website and blog for anyone looking to understand how to support a survivor of incest and sexual abuse.

SEARCHABLE DATABASE

Psychology Today's website has a "Find a Therapist" directory of therapists, psychiatrists, treatment centers and support groups located throughout the US that is searchable by city or zip code.

RAINN's "Find Help Near You" database connects survivors to information about centers located in their region that may offer support groups and other local resources.

NSVRC has compiled a list of linable websites and resources offering support and help for survivors, which includes links to support groups.

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 Rain Website

National Domestic Violence Hotline: Select "chat now" Or call **1.800.799.7233** (If you're not alone text **LOVEIS to 22522**) NDVH Website

COLORADO

CCASA Hotline: 800.799.SAFE (7233) Website

Advocate Safehouse Hotline: 970.285.0209

Response Hotline: 970.925.7233 Response <u>Website</u>

Colorado Crisis Services:

844.493.TALK (8255) Text TALK to 38255 4 pm – 12 am 7 days a week

ARE YOU READY TO SHARE YOUR STORY?

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

SHARE YOUR STORY

...for you ...for them

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

BE ONE OF THE VOICES HEARD!

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

SUBMIT AN ARTICLE NOW

WE SURVIVED... WE THRIVE

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY THE EMPOWERED VOICE

We Survived... We Thrive is a new sponsored page that allows survivors to be listed in support of other survivors. It demonstrates the pervasive nature of sexual abuse/assault and the support from the survivor's community.

DEBRA ADAMS Rifle, Colorado

TANISHA BANKSTON Oxford, Mississippi

DENISE BOSSARTE Houston, Texas

CARLA BEATRICE Boston, Massachusets

TANYA BLACKLIGHT Paonia, Colorado

DENISE BOSSARTE Houston, Texas

KATE BOSWORTH Oakland, California

DRU COWAN Oakland, California

ALISON EISEN Santa Monica, California

JANE EPSTEIN San Francisco, California

DINA ZISKIN FORTUNE Latham, New York RACHEL GRANT Oakland, California

JULIE HART Glenwood Springs, Colorado

BARBARA JOY HANSEN Massachusetts

KIMBERLY HENRIE Glenwood Springs, Colorado

ROGER HOUSE Denver, Colorado

DAVID IRVIN Watertown, Connecticut

JACOB JAQUEZ Avondale, Arizona

JEANNETTE JAQUEZ Avondale, Arizona

SHANNON JONES Carbondale, Colorado

ANNE LAUREN San Diego, California

CARI KNAUDT LAUSIER Fruita, Colorado VERAKERR LOPEZ Oakland, California

CHARLOTTE LOZANO Seattle, Washington

ANNIE MARGIS Long Beach, California

BOB MCNUTT Glenwood Springs, Colorado

CLAIRE O'LEARY Glenwood Springs, Colorado

HOLLY PERREAULT Ireland

DR. LORI PITTS Los Angeles, California

SHIRKYDRA ROBERTS Seattle, Washington

JAY SANTOS Brazil

STEPHANIE STANFIELD Glenwood Springs, Colorado

ANU VERMA Coventry, England

MICHELLE WHITE HART Los Angeles, California



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