Can You Hear Me Now?

This will change everything you thought you knew about child abuse.

Annie O'Sullivan
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Foreword
By: Carol Lambert
February 13, 1992

One evening in January of 1989, I picked up a message from a distraught couple seeking therapy for the wife. A number of therapists had refused to take her military insurance coverage and the implored me not to turn them away. That was the beginning of what was for me one of the most instructive and rewarding relationships, I have ever had the privilege to experience in my work as a psychotherapist.

When I met with my new client a few days later, she told me a story of such complex, bizarre, and shocking detail that I wondered how she maintained enough mental stability to arrive in my office to tell it. The telling itself was an impressive act of courage; Annie took the risk that I would not believe her. Many people might doubt for instance that a double amputee in a wheelchair could terrorize an entire family to the point of complete obedience to his every mad and cruel whim. Experienced therapists, however, have learned that stories like Annie's are usually true. We have numerous, well-documented accounts of unimaginable abuse, terror, and chaos from patients and clients whose families were dominated by one or two pathological, sadistic parents. Annie was one of many clients who have taught me about these families and the incredible resilience and inner strength of some of the children who survive them.

Over the three years of our work together, I also came to appreciate the enduring aspects of Annie's struggle to survive familial abuse. Her attempts to find stability in relationships with men had led her into a number of marriages that started well and ended badly, including the one she was in at the beginning of therapy. Her relationship with family members seemed to be ten percent promise and ninety percent hurt, as one or another approached her offering support, but eventually betrayed and denied what she knew to be true about their past. She occasionally trusted the wrong friend, overworked herself and exploded in rages she didn't understand as she tried mightily to be “normal.”

In the midst of her efforts to be a good mother and to get on with her education, her growth, and her healing, Annie coped as well as she could with emotional intrusions from the past. During times of stress, she would bathe obsessively, scalding herself, going through a ritual of multiple rinses, trying to wipe off the last drop of contamination from the abuse. She walked in her sleep, woke up from unremembered dreams in a state of panic, had nightmares of bloody battles and consciously wondered when her father would come and kill her for telling. She kept a loaded gun in the house in preparation for that event. Sometimes she felt suicidal. Like all abuse survivors, she worried at times that it had been her fault or that she had imagined the entire story. She also feared that anyone who came to intimately know her would eventually abandon her.

There were also the physical remnants: vaginal, rectal and urethral scarring, several miscarriages in the space of a few years, vomiting after conversations with family members on telephone, frequent gastro-intestinal symptoms, a sense of being detached from the physical sensations of her body, unpleasant memories at times during sexual intimacy and flashbacks of the pain of rape.

The major task of our therapy was to safely let Annie have as many memories of her childhood as were necessary to allow her to understand her experience as real and explainable and then to find ways for her to put the abuse and her identity as a victim behind her. She had already began this work in Nevada, and as the trust between us grew, she was able to continue to tell her story and to document it with photographs, hospital records, her own writing and information provided by family members. Although to describe this work is easy, to accomplish it is most difficult. To do so, Annie had to face her sense of shame about what happened to her, the family that allowed it, the acts she’d been forced to commit and who she had been as a child. In
coming to accept the child, she also learned to appreciate the ingenious strategies for survival she had developed in her early years.

We made extensive use of artwork, sand tray therapy and group therapy to achieve our goals. Her artistic talent was a major vehicle for recording and expressing her history and her inner experience in therapy.

Three of her productions come to mind when I think of the stages of her healing. The first was a drawing in marking pens done in her second group session, eight months after our therapy began. It depicts a small girl of about four or five, whose body is scarred, bloody, impaled, and disabled, who is holding bricks in her outstretched hands (one of her father’s favorite forms of punishment) and who wears a pert little bow in her hair, with the caption, “Daddy’s Little Girl”, accompanied by a big black heart. The ironic caption summed up for Annie the denial and the deception practiced while her father committed his crimes. The picture also tells all her secrets, openly and graphically, about what was done to her. In this way, it represents the end of her own denial.

The second piece is a clay-modeled figure about four inches tall of her father in his wheelchair. In one hand, he holds his bullwhip, the other a carving fork he’d used to stab her. His blood spattered t-shirt reads “I (heart) MY KIDS” on the front, and the back of the wheelchair bears the slogan, “CHILD MOLESTER”. He wears a pipe-cleaner gag. This gruesome little figure was the representation of her refusal to be intimidated by her father ever again. She immensely enjoyed that the group joined her in laughing at him, and that he was small enough to put into a shoebox and rattle him around if she wanted to.

The third piece that comes to mind is a mask Annie made when a guest artist came to teach the group how to cast body parts in plaster molds then reproduces the form in Paper Mache. This art form allows for great freedom in incorporating a variety of materials and colors into the finished product. Annie’s mask, the product of and involved process which part chance, part intent, both conscience and unconscious, was both ethereal and beautiful. She expressed surprise at the finished piece, but could recognize in it her emerging sense of herself as a beautiful, strong, and gifted woman. At this point, her recovery took on tremendous momentum.

The year that followed was far from easy. Her pregnancy, as her others, was painful and difficult. Not only did she suffer considerable physical symptoms, her spouse withdrew his support. The eventual failure of the marriage challenged her newfound confidence. Her children were in distress, her nightmares escalated, some friends were loyal and some were not and our work consisted mainly of support and planning around these crises. Thanks to her efforts up to that point, she did not lose ground in her progress toward a new identity. Even at the darkest moments, her old demons appeared in her artwork as diminished, peripheral figures, no longer dominating and threatening her existence and self-respect.

Today (February 1992) our session take place every few months rather than every few days, but Annie’s struggles are not over entirely. There are memories she may never want or need to explore, and others that may demand her attention in the future. She will likely remain on antidepressants for the foreseeable future. She has a great deal of work ahead of her in raising her youngest child, and in negotiating cooperation with his father. Learning to trust and distrust appropriately is a lifelong process for Annie as it is for other abuse survivors. Fortunately, Annie is extraordinarily well equipped to succeed in these matters. Her courage, honesty, integrity, humor and creativity have carried her through the worst of times, and have enriched her life and that of those around her. She has the ability to reach out to others in need, to inspire love and loyalty in her friendships, and to speak her mind assertively.

She also had the wisdom and toughness to know that, despite the pain of remembrance, hers is a story worth telling. In writing this book, she has promoted her own healing, and potentially that of many others who will read this and recognize their own experience. In this
way, she has transformed her anguish into a ticket out of the dark, high fortress of shame and isolation for herself and many others.
To my children who showed me how to be the child I never was and the mother I wanted to be.

I love you all so very much.

Thank You.
It Was That Bad

“What do you mean it wasn’t that bad? What do you mean it wasn’t that bad?” I am completely outraged speaking to my brother John. “It was exactly that bad. You tell me you don't remember that particular beating. I didn't know you were taking inventory of my beatings! My recollection is we beat feet when somebody was getting their ass beat. We left the room, got out, and made ourselves invisible. We certainly never stuck up for each other!”

All I could ever think was “Thank God it’s not me,” and get the hell out of there, if I could! The guilt at believing I was a bloodless child was the topic of many therapy sessions.

My brother isn’t saying much and I say, “Wasn't that bad? The hell it wasn’t!” I’m repeating myself. I can’t help it and I hate it!

“You must have forgotten you and Dad tied Gary up to the broomstick and beat him until you broke his jaw. You must have forgotten the time he stabbed me in the arm with a paring knife over a dirty dish in the sink. Oh, yeah! You didn’t see it, so the scar on my arm never really happened! You must have forgotten the time they ground out a lit cigarette butt out on my forehead. Oh yeah, the fork mark in my left thigh? That's not there either. Maybe the scars on my back didn’t really happen because you didn't see it or remember it!”

The conversation has stopped but my mind is reeling in my anger at his denial. Maybe he forgot the time I was out in the yard with that sledgehammer. Dad was hitting me with a stick and screaming at me to kill a puppy. I finally got scared enough and been beaten enough to hit the puppy with the hammer. I didn’t know what else to do! Dad got angrier at every passing moment. I botched it. I was screaming, the dog was screaming and you my brother came running out from somewhere and finished it. My brother, beat that dog to death with a sledgehammer. I think sarcastically, I guess that was not so bad either...

“IT WAS EXACTLY THAT BAD!” I repeated it again I hate repeating myself. I do it when I’m upset and believe I’m not being heard. My mother and my brother are the only two family members I speak to and they are driving me crazy. As I cry out, “Help me, I am hurting,” it falls on deaf ears.

I sit here, wishing I could beat my brother blue for saying to me it wasn't that bad. My family has been blown apart. Calling them my family is a technicality of genetics.

I called my mother two weeks before and spoke with my stepdad first. He was intent on saving my mother too much emotional heartache. I don't have much new information but wanted to call my brother. I thought he would understand my frustration. This is the one brother I still talk to and it is not going well. I am afraid for my future. I do not know what to think. I reached out to people who cannot be there for me and find
myself feeling more alone than ever. I should have known better. Never, not once in my
life, have they been there for me when I needed someone. I needed someone right now.

My mother was a beautiful woman, dark raven haired with red highlights of her
Irish ancestry. At 5’7”, Mom was tall, slim and long legged, and built like a Barbie doll.
However, she lacked the confidence beautiful women usually have. Shy, quiet, naïve,
gullible and passive, she was the perfect woman for someone (I hesitate to call him man)
like my father. She stayed with him for twenty-five years and left him when her mother
discovered he was cheating. He cheated on my mother my whole life! I just thought
husbands did that. The only new thing after twenty-five years was now my grandmother
knew. Grandma stated, “We are not having that! What are you doing here?” I can only
imagine my mother’s reply.

My father was 5’7”. He was the same height as my mother. While tall for a woman,
5”7 was short for a man, especially one with identity issues and ego problems. Mom
never wore heels. “It bothers your father,” she would say. He was attractive, well built,
and charming. People always liked my father. We moved around so much I doubt anyone
ever got to really know him. I was eleven years old when my father medically retired
from the Marine Corps. He was involved in and possibly the instigated a land mine
explosion in which he had lost his legs. The other guy who was with him died. They said
Dad was a hero. I know he was not. A few years later, while serving my own time in the
Corps, I heard stories from people who had been there, a tower guard, a nurse and people
who knew him. He was thirty-three years old and this tragic event, the loss of his legs,
was the best thing to happen to him. He received pity, attention, an excuse for his bad
behavior and a pension for life. He did not have the stellar career he wanted to impress
people with. No one ever questioned it though. He had the medals.

As a child, Dad was “passed along” in his own family. He was a violent child. He
had “problems” the family politely claimed. Sometimes, they called him “Poor Bryan.”
He couldn’t seem to get along with anyone for long and was passed around the family
from aunt to uncle and cousins. At sixteen, he violently raped his cousin Judith and as
was the custom back then, the courts gave him an ultimatum, join the military, or go to
prison. My father joined the military, was married and proceeded to breed his own
victims. The first child protection laws were enacted when I was eleven years old. To
rape, beat, or otherwise abuse your own children, although immoral, it was not a crime.
People looked the other way. It was believed, some still believe, what goes on in your
family is a private matter. By my fathers own words, I was six months old when we
“played house.” I started it and it was my idea! Kinda says it all, if you want to know
how the man thought.

I have three brothers. Well technically, I have four. Out of respect for their lives, I
don’t show any recognizable photos of them. My parents forfeited their privacy as they
forfeited my life and so there are a few of them. Don’t be fooled by their attractiveness.
Being good looking does not imply innocence.
I am the oldest. Curtis was nine or ten months younger than I was and died a questionable crib death at six months old. John is nineteen months younger than I am. Gary is seven years younger and Bryan the youngest fourteen years younger.

John and I usually talk three or four times a year. I wanted to call him ever since I left the doctor's office thinking he would be the one I could talk to and feel better. I thought he would be the one to understand. I was wrong.

My brother John is a pothead of legendary proportions. He has suggested, on several occasions, I would be happier and less uptight if I would “partake occasionally.” He is married, has a child, and while he appears to be happy enough in his marriage is making it work, he has no desire to have another child and his wife forbids him to discipline their child. He has a wildly bad temper and in his younger days literally walked through glass doors. It was frightening to witness and I have been led to believe that he has stopped. It may be difficult to walk through a door if you’re loaded up on weed. He owns his own business painting and wallpapering homes.

Gary, an air conditioner maintenance mechanic, is either drinking himself to death or on drugs, we're not sure which. Given his history of use, either is a possibility. John and Bryan went to find him right after I had moved down from Alaska. When they found him, he looked pretty awful. He would not let them into his house, which had completely gone to hell. They saw him through the window looking unkempt and a little wild, drinking beer and watching a small TV from a folding yard chair. No other furniture was in the room. Gary’s house was always one of the nicest on the street. My oldest daughter Hannah stayed with him for six months while she was attending school. He was scrupulous about the house, the floor tiles, the furniture and the yard. He took great pride in his home. Now the yard was a desolate tract of tumbleweeds, rock and dirt in the front yard from lack of water or care. What John and Bryan could see of the inside was dirty and empty! John hears things through extended stepfamily. Gary still pays child-support for his child, so we know he is still alive. We know that his ex-wife has had several restraining orders trying to deal with his temper.

I look on the internet from time to time to see if I can track where he is living. I discovered he moves a lot. He refuses to speak to any of us. He has old friends who occasionally turn up wondering if I know how to get hold of him. I always have to say, “I’m sorry, I don’t.” One friend was sure the only reason he would stop hearing from Gary was if he was dead. He is not. We don’t know why he won’t talk to us. I believe it has to do with my father’s death.

His ex-wife says she can’t talk to us or let us see our nephew because Gary will "go through the roof and he is difficult enough to get along with already." I lived one half mile from her house for three years and never saw her or my nephew. Gary won't talk to anybody, not his childhood friends or our mother. He had problems years ago, not being able to sleep, drinking more than he should, smoking pot and complained of getting violently angry and blacking out. He unsuccessfully tried anti-depressants for a time before turning back to alcohol.
I don't know for sure what happened to Bryan Jr. He was five or six years old when I left home. I never had a relationship with him, as he was so much younger. I joined the Marines and moved from California to North Carolina. I couldn’t get much further away. I attempted to keep in touch. I sent money on holidays and his birthday. Years later I discovered, as my father was dying, that Bryan never received anything but a few cards, even the letters were gone. He chuckled about “the damn old man” taking the money. There probably wasn’t much possibility of knowing my baby brother once I left home. There have never been family get-togethers, weekend BB-Q’s, Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner celebrations. We did not return to the nest. We didn’t miss each other. After my father died, I had the thought maybe Bryan Jr. and I would repair our relationship. For a short time we made some effort, it didn't last. Neither of us had enough family glue to pull it off, nor did either of us know how to bridge the gap. The lies from my father’s mouth would take a lifetime to sort out, defend, and ultimately heal.

When I moved from Alaska to Nevada and my brother John and Bryan came out to visit. Gary already lived in Nevada. I’d called but it just angered him and he told me not to ever call him again. Bryan and I, sort of, buried the hatchet, agreed to disagree about Dad. He refused to believe that his life could have been so different from John, Gary and I. I thought and hoped fervently that with my father’s death we could heal and be a family with Dad’s interference gone, not so. Oddly, Even John and I talk to each other less and less since his death.

Two years ago, I was in a car accident. Everyone is quite sure it’s just a little whiplash; I’d be fine in a couple of days with a chiropractor, and some muscle relaxers, not so. The Doctor’s office called me later that same afternoon and told me to come in the next day.

I walked in the next afternoon and the receptionist said cheerily, “It’s the C-4 woman!” I didn't understand and went to wait my turn. Engrossed in a magazine the nurse finally calls me to the back to see the doctor. He points out damaged areas on the x-ray and MRI, discussing the condition of my neck. It’s bad. I was under the impression the damage was from the recent accident and wondering how I had walked away! I didn’t have to be a doctor to see that the bones in my neck were pretty messed up!

While the accident definitely caused your current problem, he went on to tell me, the deterioration he was looking at in the x-rays took years to acquire. They started asking me questions. What kind of accidents I been in when I was young. Was I in a car accident previously, or motorcycles? Had I fallen out of a tree as a kid? I told him I had been in a car accident when I was sixteen and my Dad hit a tree, but they discounted the cause when I gave them the details.

When I asked, he said no, this was not degenerative disc disease. Having no signs of arthritis I had to have been injured as a child to show this kind of wear and damage.
I pondered... could it have been from the beatings. That beating? That day so long ago? It was life changing then; it is apparently life changing forty years later. I’m obligated to think about memories I had put on the back shelf of my brain.

On a particular afternoon all those years ago, my father was in a rage. I don’t remember why and accepted a long time ago that why is not important. Dad’s routine was to have this anger traverse into a blind, spitting rage, escalate from screaming to beatings, and later he would complete his cycle with a sexual assault of some sort. When all that was done, he would practically purr his love and devotion to my well-being. It varied little. This day that I would bring forward forty years to a doctor’s office, was not much different.
Rag Doll

I felt like a rag doll as he beat me and threw me around the room. The living room was a wall of glass panels with a sliding door looking out on the back yard and blood is on three of them. It matches the curtains. I saw it spray. It’s probably my nose. I’m not surprised or alarmed. It had happened before. The difference is this time was how angry it is making him. He is screaming, spitting in his rage, “You need to clean that up!”

My father grips my arm above the elbow, kicks me with his artificial leg from his wheelchair and punches me with his other fist. His arms are like a gorilla from using a wheelchair and crutches for years. I twist and turn, only hurting myself worse. He is very strong. At fourteen, always small for my age, I weigh in at about seventy pounds and am 4’8” tall. My face, my back, kidney punches, stomach punches and hair pulling feels as if it is all happening at once.

My parents would yank my hair and leave me with bald spots. Cleaning up the turned over furniture from these “lessons,” I would find strands of hair. I was too traumatized to realize it was mine. Later brushing my hair, fistfuls would be left in the brush. Denial is on occasion something that can save your sanity. They told me I was losing my hair because I didn’t eat enough. I believed them. According to Dad, I was little for the same reason. My brothers eat like horses and are big, tall boys. He piles food on my plate that I can’t eat. Often I am sick after family meals. My father was six feet tall after losing his legs. I believed everything.

I can feel my father taking hold of my ponytail and trying to yank it out of my skull! It burned! Thankfully, the hair tie came lose. My hair is flying all over as he grabs a new fistful and he slaps my face. More blood flies. I see it splatter the window and floor. My arm is being twisted out of the socket and I sweat both with effort to fend him off and with white-hot searing pain in my shoulders.

My face hit the floor! I’m startled. I didn’t expect it. Did I fall? Did he throw me? Maybe he dropped me and I should run for it. I don’t know. I can’t run. He’ll catch me later and it will be worse. Can’t hide, he’ll just find me. He is going to kill me. I think this with all the emotion of writing a grocery list. Demerol would have been nice today. No
one knew he was giving me marijuana and other drugs. At fourteen I am using only when, I think, he is coming for me. I try to outguess him, outsmart him, or, here is an arrogant thought, out think him! Drugs are helpful. I didn’t get them today.

I’m so tired of defending myself, having pain, lying to everyone about every aspect of my life. The room is too small for me to get out. The air is too heavy and oppressive and presses me to the floor like a lead blanket. Don't move, I tell myself. A couple more kicks in the head and I’ll be gone. I’m tired and feeling a little numb, that's nice I think with my eyes closed. I only wish I could be still and just drift off. I can’t sleep if he keeps kicking me. I’m going to die here on the floor in front of that ugly blood stained window. I won’t have to clean it up I think randomly. That’s OK, I decide, just let it be over. I’m not fighting. I’m not crying. I am tired. I am not going to fight it anymore. I didn’t know I could be so tired. He is going to beat me until I am dead this time and I am not going to drag it out anymore, there is was no point in trying to run. I can’t run, he’ll just kill me later.

I gave up on myself, God, family; everything and anything I’d hoped, prayed or thought might save me.

My lying on the floor like a lump infuriated him. I’m numb, not feeling pain anymore. I’m just waiting to die. I just lay there and let him kick me while he is screaming “Get up!”

He can’t reach me to pull me up, so he kicks me and rams into me with the wheels of his chair. I don’t care any more. I enjoy being numb and I perversely and secretly enjoy his frustration at not being able to run me over. If I weren’t so tired, I would laugh.

My mother is screaming as she runs out the bedroom. It’s just off the living room and she is in a rage. I’m shocked out of my haze thinking she is going to help me. I think thickly through my foggy head, “It’s too late, It’s too late, Why did you wait so long?” I’m feeling good because my mother is going to help me. Maybe I don’t really want to die after all. If she will help me, things will be different. You can think so many things in a couple of seconds. I thought out a completely new great and wonderful life! Hope!

She is screaming. HUH! Me! What did she say? “GET UP! YOU GET UP!” I find that I can’t get up. I feel like lead. Mom is between Dad and me. As she reaches down to help me up she grabs my arm, crack! I hear it before I feel the slap on my face as she rolls me over. I see stars as my head reels backwards from the force of the blow. This time I know I am falling to the floor. Did Dad hit me again? He’s behind Mom. I’m confused. How the hell did he hit me from there?

“GET UP! YOU GET UP! GET UP!” I hear this in my ear along with the buzzing. Oh God, Wrong, Wrong Wrong. WRONG! I am so wrong! This is like cold water in my face.

She is in a rage and she continues to scream at me “Get up! You get up!” Hey! She called me a little bitch! I won’t get up so that you can throw me back on the floor! I lay there at the wheels of my fathers’ chair. I have now given up all hope. I marvel at their
hatred of me and wonder why. I marvel at how long it takes to die. He has resumed kicking me and calling me names and now my mother is in a frothy, spitting, screaming, frenzy. I can’t understand what she is saying! Christ! She is kicking me in the head! Not helping me! Not saving me! She's kicking me in the head and the stomach repeatedly all the while screaming, “Get up! GET UP!” Well I’m not going to get up! I lay there as if I was dead already. I give up. I won’t help them kill me.

My head feels heavy and big as she stomps on it. Interesting, she's trying to jump up and down on my head. Is this possible? I guess it is. Suddenly I see a brilliant blinding blue flash. I don't feel real pain, I think I must be past that and I am grateful. I just see a bright blue arch of light. My mother just jumped on my neck with both feet! Christ! I scream, “Just fucking kill me and get it over with,” though it seems to come from somewhere else.

Suddenly Dad is yelling, “Kate! Kate! Stop it.” It was odd, him telling her to stop. Maybe he just didn't want her to kill me; maybe he wanted to have the pleasure of it himself. Why didn’t they do it together? Where are those Goddamn pills he gets all the time? It would be so easy. Gray is coming. I smile. Gray is good I disappear.

I thought I was going to die and welcomed it. I didn’t want to live anymore. Moreover, in case you are wondering, no, I suffered that beating without medical care afterwards. Kids like me aren’t going to the doctor. I suffered some headaches, bruises, some sort of shoulder injury and I believe a sprained wrist. My neck and shoulders hurt, but I knew better than to complain. I didn’t think about that day for nearly thirty-five years outside of therapy.

Years and years of therapy, private and group, all hard work, I believed it would make it all go away. Eventually I accepted it never really goes away but what I never gave a thought to is the physical toll taken on your body. I had worked hard to relegate my memories to the dusty past only to coming to the light of day if I chose. I worked hard to have control over my life. The damage goes on and finds new ways of asserting itself. Maybe they should have left me locked up in that old house I think in a fit of self-pity!

Forty years later, I fall going down a hallway, and twist my ankle. It was not a bad injury. A slight sprain and I was only in a cast for a couple weeks and light duty for a month.

I started getting headaches after a couple days. They were very similar to the headaches I was getting after the car accident the year before. I was taking the pain pills for the mind-bending headaches, not for the sprained ankle.

MRIs and x-ray in hand from the car accident I went to see Doctor Miller who said it was the worst neck deterioration he’d seen in someone my age. The disc is shot, mostly bone spurs remain and the spinal column is being squeezed off. He didn't know what to do with me. I needed to see a specialist. I looked at him uncomprehending. “You are a specialist!”
We went through the ritual of how this injury occurred. This is the third doctor to
tell me this story is consistent with the deterioration in my neck. This is the third doctor
to tell me I had a neck that would one day break when I bent over to tie my shoes. Not
today, but it could be a future issue if left untreated.

 Hmmmmph! It was quite beyond my comprehension. I am an educated, and
intelligent woman, however, the last doctors didn’t suggest anything other than “down the
road you’ll need surgery.” I blew it off. They were there to take care of the insurance
claim injuries, not old stuff. They put something into my neck to get rid of the pain and I
moved on.

 Dr. Miller says, “You can walk around continuing to ignore this till your neck
breaks and it will literally kill you or cripple you, or you can go see a specialist and do
something about it”. I’m doing the obvious. I’m terrified and I find I am actually thankful
I took that fall.

 I want my family to step up to the plate. They can't. My brother asked questions
and then cuts me off and before I can answer him. He says go see a chiropractor. I tell
him I did. I tell him they take x-rays, and then won't touch me. He says, “Well, I’m sure
the doctors you’re seeing are all quacks. How can they tell your neck is like that from
being beaten when you were a kid? They take out little blue crystal ball?” This is
infuriating me. When I was a kid, they did beat me! I'm sure he has been smoking weed.
My brother is a legendary pothead. I don’t ask if he is however as I know it’s a useless
conversation, he knows what I think about it and I know what he thinks. It’s a draw.

 After some length, with our so-called conversation, my brother tells me, “Well, I
have to have that same surgery in ten or fifteen years myself. It's not to be that big a
deal.”

 I’m furious and as I hang up the phone I say, “I can’t talk to you anymore. What did
you do, take out your little blue crystal ball?”

 I've never been afraid in my life, not really. The litmus test for me has always been
my father. No one was ever meaner, nastier, more perverse, more selfish, a bigger liar or
less compassionate. Even when I was a kid getting into school-yard fights, no one hit as
hard as my father did or could say nastier things to hurt your feelings. There was nothing
new you could do to me. I lived.

 Now I'm afraid, and being afraid makes me angry.

 I started out writing this book because I wanted people to know how it felt to be a
violated, raped, beaten, and belittled little kid. Everybody knows the nuts and bolts of
abuse. Everybody knows what it means when someone says that little girl was molested.
Everyone knows the details without hearing it and without seeing it. What they don’t
know is what went on in that child’s head. Everybody says child abuse hurts you for the
rest your life, even I said it. I want you to know it’s more than a memory that causes poor
decisions. It colors your life, but the physical abuse causes wear that you don’t think
about. The physical abuse goes on after you leave. It goes on when everyone thinks it
stopped. Something is set into motion when your body is twisted into unnatural positions, poked, prodded and pummelled.

This is not the first medical issue I've had over what happened to me as a child. Some of it was painful, embarrassing and very expensive. There have been moments when I thought they might as well have kept me locked up in that house, gone on with the beatings, belittling me, calling me names, and raping me till I was dead or mindless.

After a considerable amount of therapy, I find myself sitting here angry and hurt all over again. Violated again! CHEATED!

The irony of life is not lost on me. We are all told,

• When you ride a bike wear a helmet
• Skating; Helmet, shin guards and elbow guards
• Riding a motorcycle, wear a helmet, and leather
• Football, baseball, soccer, martial arts, wear protective gear for every conceivable sport
• Going home? Mommy and or Daddy have a bad temper? Sorry, no protective gear for that

I'm walking advertisement for why you should not abuse children and what it does to them for the rest of their life. I've had problems with my bowels, headaches, trouble having children, my hands go numb, for years I had nightmares I couldn’t totally remember and years of therapy. And now, MY NECK!

SO YES! MY BROTHER! IT WAS EXACTLY THAT BAD!
Always With Me

This is me. In a manner of speaking, She is more than I am. Maybe she is just all of me. She represents all that I endured at the hand of my father. I have referred to this nameless, beat up, pathetic and pain ridden creature as “Her or She” for years. She never had an official name, but She was my very best friend. She was very real, very touchable and always to my right. For fifty years She held on to every thought I couldn’t think, every memory I couldn’t bear to look at, and feelings I didn’t know what to do with or want to have. She held in her small body what I found inexplicable. She held all my confusion. She remembered how it felt to be me when I’d had enough. She remembered the stabbings, his friends, and the sodomy when I had no words for it. “She” let the horror; confusion and pain just disappear from my day-to-day reality and existence. She remembered the dead cats, shot dogs, items forced into my body. She remembered hurricanes, closets, beatings, screaming, loneliness, and isolation. There were bruises that I forever explained away and sometimes couldn’t even tell where I got them, She knew. She remembered my fathers friends when I didn’t and couldn’t. When the bullwhip came out… She took it, not me. She took all the mind-bending chaos for me when I could no longer bear it. She was always with me and was in all ways, always, my best friend.

SHE,
with no name is my childhood.
And
SHE, in her pain, was no longer content
to remain silent and hold on to all these secrets.
It was too much
And
At thirty three years old

SHE didn’t want to hold all that pain by herself any longer.
I started to remember what She had let me forget
and
My world exploded…
First Memories

I was very little when we lived in Tacoma, Washington. Actually, I remember living in two places in Washington. These are my first memories of my life.

The first was an old house and I managed to fall out of the second floor window. I remember the window in my bedroom I fell from a dark wooden floor and the bed. I remember a whitish bedspread and the bed is rumpled where I had been jumping on it. I remember a kitchen in that had a staircase to my room and I remember what my mother looked like standing at the sink in a dark colored dress with her hair in a ponytail washing dishes. Makes me laugh… That is the whole house to me. It’s all disjointed. Funny looking house eh? I’ve learned that’s how memories are, sometimes only bits and pieces, little shreds of photographs of time in our heads. It’s a sketchy memory, as I was in fact quite young. I think four. Some of it put into perspective by people who were there or recall the story from all those years ago. I was in my room and not in my bed where I belonged, looking out the window at some cows out in the pastures and I was singing my heart out to them instead of taking a nap. The cows were meandering across the field, grazing on very lush green grass. I climbed up onto the windowsill and was pleased I could see them better. As they moved so did I. I crept slowly across the windowsill leaning, pushing against the screen so I could see them as they were slowly meandering out of my vision. I had worked my way all the way over to the other side of the sill. The screen started to give a little and now I could see them again. That made me happy. Hmmm, had to move yet again to see them and the screen gave just a little more. I smile and sing some more! This goes on for a time, their wandering and my pressing into the screen.

BAMM!!!

Suddenly I’m on the ground outside and screaming bloody murder! I didn’t know how I got there! I couldn’t see the cows at all! I only see my back yard and two very large, no enormous, garden snakes whipping out from beneath me. AGH! They touched my leg! AGHHH! AGHHHH! A snake!!! AGHHHHHHHHHH A snake touched my leg!!!! I keep up the ear-piercing screaming about the snakes. My mother thinks I am
upstairs taking a nap and doesn’t know where to look for me screaming like that. The only way I could get outside was down the stairs and right past her. I could hear her calling out my name but I don’t answer. I just keep up my ear splitting screaming about snakes. Their color, their feel, their yellow ugly eyes, their general yuckiest traits as I saw them in my young mind! My eyes must be squeezed shut while I screamed because as I sat there I am abruptly yanked up out of my cushy leaf and grass-clipping chair. It startled me into silence for a moment before I started screaming “SNAAAAKKKKES!” again. There is a box of rusty nails on my left, a box of broken glass on my right. I landed between the two on a very large pile, of grass clippings and leaves from recent yard work. I had such a padded landing that I didn’t receive a single scratch or a bruise. Mom heartily spanked me for screaming over the snakes. I’m told they nailed the window shut that very day. I guess when I was four they didn’t wish I was dead. Ten years later, they would tell me they wished just that!

That same house had a shed out back. There is a dirt floor and some windows with the glass out of them. The wood was so old; it was faded to gray with age. The paint peeled off long ago, if there ever was any paint. It is wondrous inside. There are all sorts of interesting things. There are old soda bottles, jars full of rusted nails, screws, and metal things. There are shiny and dull pieces of glass for my treasure box out here too! There are old boxes falling apart from years of getting wet from a leaky roof and drying out over and over again. There are old rusted tools, buckets and things I can’t identify everywhere. It’s warm to sit in the sunny windows. I loved the mystery of all that “stuff” and being in there.

The shed was strictly off limits. It’s the first place I go when no one is looking. I didn’t do it to sneak or be bad. I just can’t “resist myself.” It is a fascinating place.

If I jump up and down in the dust, it made magic looking dust beams from the sun shining through the window. I love this place. I love looking for pieces of glass to put in my treasure box. My mother gave me an old cigar box telling me it was for treasures. I thought old glass shards were wonderful and beautiful treasure. My mother always acted as if they were precious treasure too. I would show my new finds and she would ooh and ahh over them. I always had good luck looking for them in the forbidden shed. Mom didn’t know that.

Today, while hunting up treasure, I came across an empty glass five-gallon water bottle in the sun and I knew it would make a terrific rocker. I sat on it and rock and roll, back and forth. I sit rocking admiring the sun and feeling good in the warmth coming through the window. I admire a piece of glass shard I will be collecting in a minute from the corner. I am having a marvellous time. I’m alone and no one is bothering me. I’m singing a little song. My dog is sitting there smiling at me, (I’m four, dogs smile at you when your four) he is happy too. Life is good!

POP! I hear it! Suddenly I am sitting in the dirt. It was quite a jolt! Kabam! On the ground just like that. I’m not sure what happened but I can’t move and there is blood on my dress. I’ve have never seen anything like that before. It’s upsetting to be messing up
my dress, but I don’t know what to do. I can’t get up. There isn’t any real pain. I don’t understand that this is bad. I just sit there!

I don’t know how, when or what happened when my mother found me but she did. I’m sitting on the dirt floor, impaled by a five-gallon glass bottle. She had to get me off the broken glass bottle and it must have been, gruesome.

She was again quite upset and yelling at me. I have a vague memory of her trying to stop the bleeding and putting me into a snowsuit. I did not want to wear it because it was summer. We have no car, no phone, no neighbors, and no way to get a doctor or any other medical facility for that matter. We live in the middle of nowhere. My brother is too little to walk and I am very likely bleeding to death. My father is working at the diner. So… she bundles us up and ties me into a snowsuit that is doubling as a bandage and we walk to my fathers’ burger joint.

It’s a diner of sorts and to get there one very long dirt road. There are no trucks, no cars no traffic of any kind. All you see for miles are hay fields along the way. I don’t know if we walked the whole way or got a ride. I remember walking. In an odd kind of memory, I can see us walking down the road, my mother carrying the baby and myself beside her half walking, half being dragged as she tried to hurry. I see it as if I am behind us, as if I am someone else watching. I can hear her tell me I have to walk; she can’t carry me and she is getting upset because I am crying. Well, the little girl I am looking at is crying anyway.

To be fair, my mother was probably beside herself. She couldn’t carry us both. I am cut very badly, bleeding and having trouble walking.

We arrive somehow at the diner, I am lying on the counter, and my father is laughing. They got the snowsuit off and of course my bare behind is out and the place is full of truckers eating lunch. My world got very gray as they were hooting about a show. “Hey O’Sullivan we get a lunch show! We’ll be back every day!” They are laughing. I am confused, it hurt, they were laughing at me then everything went from gray and to black. I don’t know how many stitches I got that day. I don’t know if I went home or stayed at the hospital. If it weren’t for the jagged scar and proof of stitches across hind end, I couldn’t tell you a doctor even saw me.

It was a bad day. I survived it as I would so many more times.
Pierre, The smoking goat!

I remember few moves although there were many. I only recall suddenly we are living somewhere else with big chunks of time missing. As a point of interest, it bears mentioning, this move was no different. I don’t remember moving. We’ve moved. Now I sleep in a travel trailer with my brother. My father had gotten out of the Marines. My parents are building a house at the top of the driveway on a hill. Just my brother and I are living with my parents on twenty rolling acres.

We have a white goat, Pierre, who eats lit cigarettes, blows the smoke out of his nose and thinks he belongs in the house. I would beg my parents for lit cigarettes to feed Pierre. There are no doors and no windows installed on the house yet so I guess I don’t blame the goat for thinking he should come and go as he pleases. Once my mother blocked the door with a piece of plywood and he simply turned and jumped through the window. We still have the smiling dog.
Trailer and The Boogey Man

There was a little travel trailer, the kind that looks like a little round pill, parked by a creek. This is where we slept there at night. I don’t actually remember my parents sleeping there but I guess that is irrelevant. What I do recall, quite vividly, is the devil looking through the window and shrieking at us, moaning, groaning, grunting and shrieking, crying to get in and then he drags his nails slowly down the screen in the window. We could hear his cackling bone-chilling laugh. The devil’s face would appear hanging upside down in the front window where my bed was. His awful face hideously lit up, hair askew and bloody. He would shriek again, MUA-A-A-A-A-AAA! Then as if by magic, in a flash, he is at the back window scratching on the screen. He is at the door howling and banging on it to let him in. He is hungry and little children are his favorite meal! We could hear him pattering on the roof and on the walls outside. HE WAS EVERYWHERE AT ONCE! We could see the face in the little window on the door, in the front, and at the back. I wet the bed on those nights. I was awake. I was terrified. I was spanked for being afraid. I was not supposed to be silly. I was supposed to set an example for my little brother who was shrieking right along with me.

My father with his flashlight thought it was hysterical and laughed about it for years. It wasn’t funny. It was awful. I never told him I thought the Devil was more real than God. The devil was pretty real, up close and personal. God was harder for me to find.

My grandmother said to me, “Always ask God for help.” Well, God wasn’t ever in my window telling me don’t worry or looking in the window. The devil was in the window threatening to eat us! Dad would have laughed harder with that kind of information. Dad never saved us from the monster he created with the flashlight. He let us think the monster wandered away to come back on another night when we were asleep.
The Dog and the Semi

There were no houses around those twenty acres. We have moved into our new house, it isn’t completed, but it’s liveable. There are miles and miles of tall golden grasses moving like an ocean of gold, rolling with the breezes all around us.

I have a new friend named Timmy. He quickly became my best friend. I met him when my parents started building the house. He showed me how to play hide and seek in the grass. Most importantly at the time, he showed me how to hide from my father in the grass and often told me when he was coming so that I could run and hid.

We have so much fun. Moreover, the best part... the grass was very tall. Taller than I was and I could hide in it. No one could see me if I stood very still. If I crawled along I didn’t have to be still and Mom and Dad still couldn’t see me. Sometimes they would call me and I wouldn’t answer, I would lay in the grass under the sun, invisible in my golden sea. It was quite a magical feeling. Timmy showed me this game and I loved it.

At the end of our very long driveway was a long, lonely dirt road semi-trucks sped by all day leaving behind huge billows of dust. You couldn’t see across the road until the dust settled. My mother fussed about those trucks even years later, long after we moved from there. She always worried that one of us would be run over.

That dog! I can’t even tell you what the dogs name was, though there are pictures of him. I owe that dog my life, and my mother told the story for years.

I was wandering down the driveway toward that dirt road and she was calling after me. She could see the semi truck coming down the road and I was on a collision course. I didn’t answer her call and kept walking until I was in the middle of the road. As she tells is, I was picking something up in the middle of the road, quite engrossed in studying whatever I’d picked up. I stood up, looked across the street at my mother who was yelling at me. It was meaningless to me as I couldn’t hear her and so I stood there. I remember the dog suddenly pounding into my chest, knocking me into the ditch. He scared me and knocked the wind out of me. My mother was hysterical. She thought the truck had hit me. She had seen the dog go tearing across the drive and pound into me, but that was all. The truck screamed by without notice of the dog or me. My
mother was racing down the driveway. When she gets to me, I am still lying in the ditch on the other side of the road, unharmed, bewildered, and vaguely wondering what happened. The dog lies lifeless in road. Again, she didn't want me to die.

Things like this make me contemplate; what was I saved for?
I remember Timmy as if he were here this morning. He is a little older than I am, and about two heads taller. I still remember the smell of his shirts. He was always clean, neat and with his hair combed and no unruly bald spots. I remember how he smelled of soap and the feel of his starched shirts. He always wore a red and white flannel shirt. It would be tucked neatly into his jeans with a brown belt. I even remember the flecks of green in his blue eyes and deep dimples in his cheeks. He had very shiny golden hair, sun bleached white on the ends and the sun always seemed to light it up, make it glow. Timmy was always on my side, he always listened, and he tried to keep me safe.

We were inseparable and my mother often set a place at the dinner table for him while we lived there. Timmy was clever and looked out for me many times while I lived there. Later, right before we moved to San Diego he offered to let me come live with his family. “You don’t have to leave here,” he said. “Stay here. My family will take care of you, don’t go.” He said, “We love you, don’t go!” I told him my father would never let me stay here.
The Creek

Down the hill from the house my parents were building was a little creek. The trailer we slept in was parked next to it. There were trees around it and some bushes as well. It was quite picturesque by any standard. My brother John and I often played in it, chased tadpoles and waded. The Washington and Oregon area is very lush and this was no different.

My father was very angry with me on this day for some infraction. As often happened to me, even this young, I remember the spanking but can’t remember the catalyst for it. His tempers, or rages, were/are legendary. I was supposed to be telling him something while he was beating on me. If I had known what to say, I would have. But I am confused; I am mute, small, and stupid. His fist hits me on the side of my head and then my stomach. Suddenly he is dragging me through the mud to the creek! I’m getting mud on my socks! I’m getting mud all over my dress! Now my face! I can taste dirt. The water is freezing cold and knee deep. The shock of the cold water causes me to suck in air as he shoves my face into the creek water violently shoving me in and out, up and down like a rag doll in a washing machine. He is holding me under the water! UNDER!! I am really fighting back now. I’m soaking wet. He has pulled out chunks of my hair. I felt the hair come ripping out; I wondered if some of my skin came out this time… I have felt that before! It’s familiar though and somehow this thought comforts me. Hair pulling is familiar. I know what to expect. The water is different. I don’t know what is going on, what to do, or say. This is new and I can’t grasp it! I hear a snap and it blisters my face then another. Now a snap blisters my arm! I think, the wet towel snaps me, Daddy thinks it’s so funny to chase us with, but how? I’d never been hit wet before. My dress was torn. I don’t even know what he is saying to me anymore much less what I should be saying. Nothing makes any sense, I am cold, and I hurt everywhere. Worst of all, I can’t breath. I’m choking on water. It has gone up my nose and is burning. I can’t breathe and I don’t understand what is happening but on an instinctual level, as young as I am, I know I am going to die. I’m going to die right here in this freezing cold water. This is the same place where I’d been catching tadpoles with my brother earlier.

I once read somewhere when you realize you are mortal, when you understand you can and will one day die, you are no longer a child. I am five now, and my childhood is apparently over.

I believe I am dying in that creek. It is a matter of fact thought. Death may be a good thing in a minute. I was young not be afraid of death. I wasn’t sure what happened when you died, but was quite sure that this pain and confusion this shaking and shattering feeling would stop. You go somewhere else, right? Grandma says God comes with angels and they take you to Heaven. Life is good in Heaven. Everyone there loves you. My panic is starting to ebb. I’ve decided I’m going somewhere, any place is better than here. The fight is going out of me and things are going grey, white, and grey again, fading in and out of colors. The world is turning black and white shades of gray live a black and
white TV. I think I am disappearing because of it. The color is changing because I am disappearing! Disappearing would be good! Yes! I want to disappear and I am almost gone!

Suddenly... He screams, “YOU CUNT!!!” He has let me go! I can breath! Timmy! I see Timmy standing there on the edge of the creek, his shoes toughing the water! He looks mad too! I don’t want him to be mad at me as well! Dad’s arm is bleeding a little and he is fire hot mad now! Enraged! I only thought he was mad before. Now he is sputtering! I can’t really hear him, it sounds like machine stuttering coming out of his mouth, and I can’t focus on what he is saying and he is so far away. brbrbrbrbrbrt, brbrbrbrbrt, brbrbrbrbrbrt

Timmy bit him! Timmy bit him and he let me go!! I am bugged eyed with the shock of it! The pure joy and wonder of it! Timmy bit him and Daddy let me go!!!

Daddy grabs me by my arm and drags me out of the water spanking me the whole way my feet not touching the ground. I don’t even care. I’m out of the water and I can breath. He is yelling for my mother and telling her, “I’ bit him! Now my mother is yelling at me too! I didn’t bite him I tell her, Timmy did it. She doesn’t believe me and now she spansk me for lying! “Timmy would not bite your father.” I’m so confused I say nothing else. I’ve already learned that there are times to just lay low. When I don't know what they are, talking about it's better to just be quiet. I don't know why he is telling her I bit him. Maybe he doesn't want to have to talk to Timmy’s’ parents. They are nice people. Timmy is never spanked. They just love him. I don’t have to understand anything; I only have to get them to quit hitting me. I already know this means Daddy will come for me later and I will have to do things to him. He will take off his clothes, it’s part of the punishment. Timmy saved me. Timmy bit my Daddy and made him let me go. He was now my friend for life. Timmy is brave and I will love him forever. He is my best friend ever.

I don’t see Timmy for the rest of the day. I had to go to bed early and without dinner. I am in the little trailer, alone. They, my mother, father, and brother are all up at the house hammering away on something. The hammering and sawing goes on day and night. I couldn’t even bring the dog with me to bed. Daddy said the dog didn’t want to be with me tonight because I was so bad that he didn’t like me either. I hate the dog.

Nothing was ever said about my black eye, torn dress, cut legs, scratched face, or what happened at the creek. Nothing was ever said about the chunks of hair that were missing. Nothing was ever said about my being soaking wet. Mom never asked me, and though I would like to think she questioned my father, I am sure she didn’t.

In my house, growing up, no one ever questioned anything. My mother never questioned anything. Dad never beat Mothers body. He beat up her mind. Too many questions would get you beat up, yelled at and chastised. Don’t ask. Don’t tell. My family invented that saying.
I’m pondering on how brave Timmy was this afternoon. I wonder to myself if his mother got mad at him when he came home a little wet and with mud on his shoes. I’m really wondering if he will get in trouble for biting my Daddy. He told me his parents never, ever hit him or yell at him. He was very brave to help me. I am more than a little afraid for Timmy. I am afraid he won’t be able to come see me anymore. I am sitting in the middle of the bed in my nightgown. It’s white with little blue rosebuds all over and a ruffle at the bottom with blue piping. It’s very soft and it’s my favorite pyjamas.

I am admiring the flowers and looking out the window when suddenly the door opens and there is Daddy! I didn’t see him coming down the hill to the trailer and he startled me. This pleases him. He chuckles about it and is saying something the things I make him do, shaking his head. I’m not really listening. He is always telling me that I make him do things to me. He tells me it’s my own fault. I never understand and I still don’t know what he is talking about. I don’t’ make him do anything. Why does he say that all the time?

I know what he does to me is a secret. I know he will kill me if I tell about what he does in secret. I know my mother will not let me live there anymore if I tell her what daddy does at the playhouse. I know my mother hates me because I was born and ruined her life. Daddy tells me all these thing for my “own damn good,” he tells me. I know I am choked sometimes and he doesn’t care if I die. He has told me many times that no one will look for me. I’m just a little kid and no one cares about little kids. I am five years old. I already know the better I am, the more I cooperate and follow his instructions, the better he likes it, the quicker he will go away. I am only five.

He drops his pants and calls me over. As he touches me, he is talking but I never know what he means. It’s all gibberish to me. I don’t care; I just want him to go away. “It” is in my face, touching my cheek. I hope I don’t choke, I choked once and couldn’t breathe, and it was scary. “It” touched my teeth, it’s terrible when I choke and can’t breathe. I start to cry. He tells me to shut up, “You brought this on yourself,” He snarls, “Don’t you dare fucking bite me.” He says I like it or I wouldn’t be so bad. He says to tell him I like it. He just keeps talking to me and now I’m gone. I’ve become part of the screen on the little door in front of me. I’m one of the little squares in the screen, dull, gray, and square with rust in the top corner. It’s over. He’s gone.

The next morning is business as usual. My eye is very swollen and ugly. I know this because my brother cried when he saw me. He is eighteen months younger than I am and he’s quite afraid of me this morning. It makes me feel big and I think “good you brat!” and “I whisper to him, “I’ll get you later.” I plan to feed him some mud pies with bugs later. I’m feeling a little tough this morning. I have decided this morning that I hate my brother John.

I’m learning already that if you are bigger, meaner, and scarier, there is power. I was enjoying having some power over my eighteen-month-old brother. I was enjoying his fear of me. This is lost on everyone around me.
Pancakes for breakfast with powdered sugar and milk, then I go look for Timmy out in the fields. He didn’t come for breakfast this morning and I am worried about what happened to him. I find him out in the field on the side of the house and he smiles big when he sees me. He assures me everything is O.K. He assures me he did not get in trouble. His mother was happy to hear Timmy bit my father! She was proud of him! He tells me not to worry and wants me to know; he will always look out for me, always love me, always is my best friend, and will never leave me. I believe him.
The Playhouse

My mother had built me a very neat little playhouse out of scrap-wood. It was behind the house they were building and located in what would later become the backyard. There was a window with a curtain, a play kitchen with a sink, a stove, and a little table with a chair. I loved to play there. I kept my treasure box on the table and pretended to cook for my dolls and for Timmy. It was a good place to be most of the time. Timmy liked it too. It was our house and our favorite place to be.

Sometimes my father would come in all hunched over. He was too tall for the house and his 5 foot 7 inch height; seemed to fill it all up when he entered. He looked like a giant coming through the door to my little house.

He sat at the little table and said, “I would like to play house” with you. I will be the daddy and you can be the mommy.” He went on, “This is such a nice little house and we are so lucky that your mommy built it for us.” I don’t want to play house anymore. “Don’t you want to play house with Daddy?” He sounds astonished and hurt that I might not want to play the game with him. I would just stand there. I wouldn’t answer and this would infuriate him or he would take that silence for yes and proceed to pretend to eat dinner. He would comment on how clean I kept my little house, what a good cook I was and tell me dinner was so yummy. He would ask what was for dessert, eat whatever I served up and then it was time for bed… I was the mommy and he was the daddy. It was time for bed and it was our honeymoon. "I like this Daddy. This is fun Daddy, I love you Daddy."

Daddy says, “Little girls are supposed to want to be married to their Daddies. Don’t you want to be married to me? What’s wrong with you?” I don’t know what is wrong with me. He is shaking his head in great, dramatic disgust. He is calling me bad names and then his is gone. I’m glad he left. I’m glad I made him feel bad. I know I am not supposed to make people feel bad. I was bad. They’re right I am bad and selfish. I don’t know why I can’t help it and love people.

My beautiful playhouse memories are ruined. I don’t want to play there anymore. Later I cried and Timmy comforted me. I was sorry I was bad. I was sorry I didn’t know what to do. I was confused about why I was bad. I try hard to be good.

One time Timmy saw Daddy coming and told me to run, hide. There was nowhere to go that Daddy wouldn’t find me. I ran out of the playhouse like a cat on fire, to the front of the house. I discovered my brother John playing in a dirt pile. I stopped and made mud pies, which I fed to him. I would feel better for a little while. It was a terrible thing to do to him. I would make beautiful mud pies decorated with whatever plant life and bugs were available. “No, those are not bugs silly, its candy!” I would then tell my brother that they were yummy and pretend to eat them myself. He ate them every time. We laugh about it all these years later. I was so mean and he was so accommodating.
Fifty years later, he says, ‘You know, you really owe me for eating all those crappy pies!’ I tell him it was therapy and send me a bill. We laugh.

Another time I was out playing and I heard my father coming out into the fields calling my name. The grass was tall and gold. So tall if I were very still I would not be seen. Timmy showed me how to do that. “Get down! Get down and don’t move! He laughed and explained that no one could see me in the thick, tall, grass. He was right and it worked most of the time. The trick was knowing Dad was coming. Sometimes I hid too late. Sometimes Timmy would see him first and we would duck and giggle when he couldn’t find us. It amused my father that we hid.

Nothing was ever said about Timmy biting my father or that I couldn’t play with him anymore. Mom still set a place at the table for him.

When my father had gotten out of the Marines after Korea, he moved his young family to Washington; he had opened a diner somewhere on this road to town. I had been taken to this same place when I cut myself so badly on the jar in the shed. The story is that he had the best burgers for miles around. He had all the trucker business and I guess life was good for Dad for a while. As usual, his own worst enemy, he was poaching deer and mixing the venison with the hamburger, he was buying. The health department shut him down permanently.

I was about six when I stood out in the fields talking to Timmy. It was sunny and summer. The tall grass is always golden when I remember it. That day was no different as I told him we were moving away. I was sad and crying. Timmy was crying and he offered to let me come live with his family. “You don’t have to leave here,” he said. “Stay here. My family will take care of you, don’t go.” he said. Stay with me.” He hugged me fiercely. I told Timmy I had to go. My father would kill me if I tried to stay.

These types of conversations went on for days, maybe weeks. It was such a long time ago. Somehow, I knew I had to go and that I didn’t really have any options. I knew I was afraid of my father’s wrath if I tried to go live with Timmy. I couldn’t even ask my parents! I asked Timmy if he could visit me and he said no, he couldn’t leave. My best friend and mentor couldn’t even write me a letter and he couldn’t visit. What would my life have been like had I tried to stay? What if I stayed? That was a question asked in therapy years later and for years.

Timmy was the best friend and playmate I would ever have. He saved me from my father down at the creek bed. He was my look out at the playhouse. He taught me ways to hide and told me things to say. He hugged me when I needed one, he listened to me when no one else could hear me, and he loved me when no one else did. Even today nearly fifty years later, I still miss him on occasion.

Timmy was my best friend, my angel and my saviour. Timmy, whom I can still remember so vividly, was my imaginary friend.
My soul is in this jar. Timmy kept it for me 'til I could take care of it myself.
School

I hadn’t been in school before. We moved to California and I was going to be in first grade. I joined the Brownies. I loved my teacher. I played with kids at recess. I sold Girl Scout cookies and got to spend the night at a friend’s house. My teacher told me I was smart! We lived in a duplex within a few blocks of the ocean and my mother would often walk us down to the beach. I loved walking on hot sand and the feel of the waves. I hunted for shells and my brother I buried each other in the sand. We built sand castles with moats that the waves would creep up to fill in. Life was good here! My uncle would come to visit and we would visit my cousins. We made friends with twin boys that lived next door. Dad’s family lived in southern California and my Uncle Ernie on my father’s side (really my grandfather), would save us Disneyland tickets guest left in the rooms of the hotel he managed nearby. It was a kid’s dream, free tickets to Disneyland! I loved California and wishing Timmy could see it! Daddy still visits my room, but I don’t care anymore. It’s just part of life. I think it happens to everyone and I just have to live with it. I’m not special.

My father’s temper got worse.

My brothers will tell you daddy never did anything to them except hit them, beat them and call them some nasty names. I’m in second grade now and I guess you could call this just a beating and some name-calling!

Neither John nor I can recall what set him off. He beat us with the belt, which of course set off tears and wailing. This chaos set him off further, causing him to force us to strip naked, then, get on our hands and knees and crawl to a destination in front of him. He still held that black belt in his had swinging it.

“You are pigs, Say it!”

“WE ARE PIGS”

“Wrong! Who’s a pig?”

“We ARE!”
“I’M A …” My face hits the coffee table and the pain above my eye is excruciating. I lift my hand to touch it out of reflex, WHACK!

“Did I tell you to touch your face?” Another blistering strike across my back with his belt. He has the buckle out swinging now.

“No Sir!” I cry out.

“I will tell you when to move, what to touch, and how to touch it!

“If I say jump you will ask how high!”

“If I say shit you will ask what color!”

“I am your God and you will do what I say, you will think about only what I want and what makes me happy. You exist only because of me. You owe me for that!”

“Who is a P-I-G, pig!?”

He swings hard, Whack! It’s a blistering strike to Johns’ back. He got it first and I can see the welt swelling, red and burning already. I started up to run as suddenly I see my turn coming. It’s a rare thought, running and I hesitated. Before I could even get to my feet, my back is on fire! I can’t get away. The pain is burning and while still comprehending the first hit a second rains down on me. “Don’t you dare fucking run,” he says. “I always know what you are thinking! Do you think you have an original thought in your head?” We have heard this speech before. “You don’t have a thought in your head that is your own. I know what you are thinking before you ever think it!” We have managed to gain control and now we are both silent on our knees listening.

My brother no longer exists. I can’t even see him or hear him anymore. He is erased from my head, my life, and my existence. It’s now survival. Survival did not include taking care of my brother, nor him taking care of me. We took care of ourselves.

“What are you?” he bellows.

“We are pigs!” we cry out in unison, trying to give him what he wants. The belt whooshes down again, this time in slow motion. I know I’m a bad person. I know I’m going to burn in hell. I don’t care about my brother, my mother, or about God who has abandoned me for all my badness. I only want to get away and somehow make it stop. I need the pain to stop. I am shaking and I can’t stop that either. Out of control, must stop shaking! Do not cry! He hates it when you cry. He will beat you more if you cry. He will beat you ‘til you stop crying. DO NOT CRY!!! OK! I’M NOT BREATHING, and I am not crying, I’m not breathing and the pain is searing. If I take a breath, I will cry some more. He is talking again, not really yelling, but it’s a menacing, snarling and dangerous sound that is coming from him.

“Not “we” you dumb shits! Say, I! Am! A! Pig!” He tells us in a condescending voice. “And make a piggy noise!!” He cackles.

In unison as if rehearsed, we stutter out, “I-I-I A-AM A P-P-P-IG oink oink.”

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“OINK OINK What!?” Another strike of the belt. I am melting from the pain now and my mind completely blank. I don’t know what to say. I just look at him afraid to say anything that could be the wrong word. I said what he told me. I’m confused. My mind and my face are blank with stupidity.

He screams. “Sir!! SIR! SIR!!” I’m a pig, oink oink SIR!! I hear the belt whistle but it doesn’t hit me this time and I am grateful. No empathy, only thankful it wasn’t me.

He laughs again, and I see my mother, but she is silent! She came out of the kitchen and she’s standing there. She doesn’t stop it. She is watching. No time to think about her. His voice is in my head again, “Crawl around the coffee table, say, I’m a pig, Oink Oink.” Laughing he says “and keep going till I get tired!” I am crawling. “Quit that God Damn whining and crying or I will really give you something to cry about,” My knees hurt from the braids in the rug and they begin to bleed. Later they will be scabbed over and he will kick them open. However, I am not thinking about this now.

We have come around past him several times and he hits us with the belt each time we pass. He is angry now that we are not crying.

“Think you’re tough eh!” He is sitting on the sofa and he pushes me into the coffee table with his foot as I go by.

Oh NO! What is the answer? I don’t know! Am I tough? Does he want yes? NO? It’s a trap question and I can feel the panic is setting in. He was calming down and I thought maybe it would be over soon but he is escalating again and getting louder and I can hear the frenzy in his voice. My head is screaming at me, he is screaming at me and I DON’T KNOW THE ANSWER! WHATS THE ANSWER?"

I am starting to move to a new level of panic. He has moved to the other side of the sofa. It is near the vase with peacock feathers in the corner. The feathers are gone from the vase and he has them in his hand. I’m seven. I’m confused. I think he is going to hit me with the peacock feathers.

“Bend your dumb ass over the sofa.”

“Huh?” I blink and I’m sure that I looked at him in blind ignorance of my situation.

“Get over here and bend over on the fucking sofa, are you deaf and stupid, you little Cunt?”

So I get up and begin walking over to the sofa, and he shoves me to the floor.

“Crawl over!” he is screaming. “Who do you think you are, walking in front of ME!!” I don’t answer so he hits me again with that belt again.

I am crawling, my world no longer exist for me. I am alone. Moreover, it’s black, just me and my father’s hands.

We are bent, our faces in the sofa and still naked. Suddenly there is pain like fire. Blistering pain! I think I am on fire. I think. “He is shoving a lit cigarette up my butt! I
didn’t know your could do that.” It’s one mind-bending experience after the other! “MY BUTT, MY BUTT, MY BUTT”

Suddenly it dawns on me what has happened. He inserted those feathers in our rectums, and secured them with tape to ensure they stayed. “CRAWL” he snarls. You’ll cry now you little fuckers”. And we did. We sobbed! Of course, as was his habit, he beat us until we stopped. The grand finale of this event, I was told to go outside and down the driveway so that everyone would see I was bad. Everyone would now know what a little cunt, whore, and troublemaker I am. No one would be friends with me anymore because I was a pig. He opened the front door and shoved me out. I am looking around. I’m naked, beat up and have feathers attached to my backside. I am so worried that someone will see me. Jesus. The shame! MINE! It doesn’t occur to me that I might get help if I am seen. I only think everyone will know that I am sooo very bad. Finally, my mother says very softly, “Bryan, that’s enough.” He relents and tells me to go to my room and get dressed. He will deal with me later he says. My brother has disappeared already. I don’t even know if he was outside with me. John could never remember past the coffee table.

That night, Daddy comes to my room locking the door behind him as he always does. He looks at my bruises and welts. I’m scabbed over now and sore when he touches me. I have many welts and bruises and though I don’t know it yet, I will not be going to school the next day.

“I don’t know why you make me do this to you”, he says. I just look at him. I have nothing intelligent to say so I decide better to just keep quiet.

“Daddy loves you more than anything and it hurts me to hit you like that.” He continues, “You know that right?” I nod yes. “You know you’re my little girl and I love you more than life right?” “Yes,” I say.

“Yes what!”

“Yes Sir.”

“Take off that gown and come over here.”

He is sitting on my bed with his pants down around his ankles.

Take it! He touches me.

I do what I have to do. The next day…it’s all forgotten. I don’t know what to say about my cuts and bruises so I just say I fell down. I think everyone believes me. I think everyone believes I deserve whatever I got handed to me.

I’m no longer allowed to go to Brownie meetings. The leader tried to talk to my parents but it did no good. Dad said I didn’t deserve to be in brownies and I didn’t deserve to be with those nice kids.
Third Grade

Mrs. Velasquez was the best. She wore suits everyday with heels. She swept her hair up into a fancy twisted bun every day. I thought she was beautiful and she never knew how important she was to me. I got to sit with the smart kids. She knew I was smart and she gave me things to do that proved it to myself. If you got good grades and turned in your assignments, you got extra privileges. She made me feel so good about myself that I desperately loved her and would do anything for her. I would only have her for half the school year as we moved to Massachusetts. It was the beginning of the Vietnam War and my father was going. Mom wanted to be with her family while he was gone. Off we went Christmas tree and all.
We arrived in Medford, Massachusetts when I was half way through the third grade, and it was of course Christmas. I even remember the tree being up before we moved. Daddy was going to Vietnam and my mother wanted to go home to be with her family while he was gone. Seems we always move mid-year and we always moved about the same time people began to ask about my bruises and bald spots. I assume they asked my brothers the same sorts of questions. My brothers and I have never spoken of it. These topics are essentially off limits.

We dress up in our good clothes as people did in the sixties and got on a plane from California to Massachusetts. I felt very special in my black patent leather shoes and my new dress, purchased especially for this trip. My uncle took us to the airport. He was a pilot for Continental Airlines at the time and loved going to the airport. He was a beautiful man with movie star good looks. I was going to miss him so much. He called me his Princess and I believed I was.

Uncle Bink had been a mercenary in Africa and told stories about the animals, natives, and plant life. He was a terrific storyteller and I was a child in need of a fantasy. I hung on every word he said. He and I were going to live in Africa. When we got there, I would be Princess. That is who I really was. He would be bringing me my crown soon and I would see it was true. We would live in a giant strawberry eating only the most delicious of fruits and have no worries. Being the princess, everyone would love me and only want to make me happy. I would wear beautiful hand carved wooden and bone bracelets. I would have no chores because I would always wear beautiful clothes. I believed him. I needed him to tell me those things. I needed a magical place to live in my mind that was so different from my reality. He didn’t know that, he just liked to tell me stories and play make believe with me.

My mother would get angry with me for talking about the crown I never got. She would inform me that my uncle was telling me stories and he shouldn’t. “You are not a princess!” She would tell me sharply. “You are not going to ever go to Africa and live in a strawberry! Stop talking about it!” He was just being my uncle and I think he truly cherished that. I know I cherish the memory of those stories.
Viet-Nam

My father is off to Viet Nam and my mother, John. Gary and I are in Massachusetts. My maternal cousins, grandmother, aunts, and uncles are all there. My mothers’ sister, Terrie, lives in the house they grew up in, my grandmother on one floor and my aunt and her family on another.

We had Christmas together before my father had to leave. Overall, it was a good time. Dad only got me alone in the basement once the whole time we were there. I suppose there were too many people around. I became great buddies with my cousin Michelle and we quickly became inseparable.

I don’t realize it at the time, but, I am about to embark on the best year of my childhood. We ate fish on Friday, chicken on Sunday, and spaghetti on Wednesday. I went to church around the corner from my house and was in a variety show. Three of us were dressed like cats and sang, “We Are Siamese If You Please” from the Disney movie.

We jumped out of windows at that same church playing Mary Poppins with our umbrellas. Of course, our mothers put a quick halt to that.

There were trips to New Hampshire, Revere Beach, Mauldin, and the homes of relatives.

We spent the summer or at least the better part of it at my Aunt Mary and Uncle Rick’s house in New Hampshire. Upon arrival, in the dusk of early evening, there were bats that flew out of the attic. The house had been closed up for months and the disturbance caused them to come flying out. My brothers and I ran around screaming hysterically. We thought the bats would get in our hair and make us crazy. My mother and my aunt ran around behind us telling us to shut up, quit screaming, the bats would not eat us, make us crazy, or stick to our hair. It was a site to behold.

Somehow, we got ourselves settled in and so began one of my best summer memories as a child.

The woods there are all birch trees with beautiful white bark. We would get up early in the morning and run around in the woods. We made friends with kids who lived around us. We found out there was a swimming hole if you followed the path in the woods.

The swimming hole was our favorite place with some of the coldest water I ever remember in my life. My uncle Rick told my brother and me that he went down to the swimming hole every morning and threw ice cubes in. John and I got up every morning and raced to beat my uncle to the swimming hole so that he could not put ice cubes in. It was great fun. My Uncle Rick laughed every day with us about it. We had barbecues, we made birch canoes with my mother, we saw ski lifts, and best of all we saw the old Man of the Mountain, a natural rock formation in the mountain that looks like a man. My mother made sure we saw the sights, heard the history and all of the folklore of the area. I
suspect this is much how my mother grew up. There are many pictures of my mother with aunts, uncles, and her travels.

I’m in fourth grade now. I discover this year, via my cousin Michelle, no everyone does not take their clothes off with their daddy. This is a revelation to me, never spoken of again, but I do think about it from time to time.

While I am happier at home, school is not going well for me. In California, they learned times tables at the end of the year, in Medford they learned them at the beginning of the year. I’m so behind, I can’t catch up. I don’t like my teacher. She tells me, “Your stupid and you should be held back a grade.” I’m used to getting good grades and don’t know why I’m having so much trouble with my work. I’m frustrated and so is my mother. She tries to help me with my schoolwork to no avail. Things are good at home with normal punishment for the usual sorts of kid stuff. I don’t know how to ask for help and it I don’t think I am supposed to ask for anything.

My father’s been gone to Vietnam for nearly a year and I haven’t thought about him. I hear he is coming home soon.

My cousin Michelle comes over and we are peeling apples for my mother. My great-grandmother is sitting at the table with us shredding paper for the cat box. She’s been very ill and is staying with us. We have sharp knives and I say to her, “Lets see who has the sharpest knife.” She puts out her wrists and I press the knife to her flesh. Then I put out mine, she presses the knife into me. I feel no pain, although I can sense the sharpness of the blade. She puts her wrists back out and I touched a knife to her flesh again, no reaction. I don’t want to hurt her I love her. My mind starts to turn, next time, next time it will cut me. It won’t hurt.

Out goes my wrist, the knife leans into it, and as I feel the pressure, I pull my wrist away with a smile I say, “You win.” I look in fascination as the blood sprays. I was right, no pain. My cousin turned white, my great-grandmother, who is not well, and not able to speak well, with eyes of saucers ran after my mother who was in the kitchen.

No one ever asked what we were doing or what I was thinking. It was just another accident in my life. Mom and Grandma said I should have my arm stitched up without anesthesia. This was my first thought, how easy it would be to stop existing. It happened in an instant. I wasn’t sophisticated enough to understand it was suicide, a sin or even wrong. I only knew I wasn’t happy. My mother and grandmother were talking about my father coming home for Christmas as my cousin and I sat with very sharp knives.
I can’t remember you

One night after dinner there was a knock on the door. My mother asked me to go answer and there stood in the door, in full uniform, a smiling man I didn’t know. The screen door is locked and it is dark outside. I told him we were not interested in buying anything. I slammed the door in his face and turned off the porch light.

Before I have made it down the hall there’s more pounding on the door. My mother comes running out of the kitchen wanting to know what’s going on. I tell her that a salesman at the door and he won’t go away. She opens the door to see what the problem is. She let this man into the house and he is screaming at me for not letting them in. I’m dumbfounded. This goes against all the rules. Strangers, especially strange men do not come into our house.

This man is yelling at me!
So I yelled back, “Shut up!”
My mother is horrified.
The man is stunned, and raises his hand to strike me.

He says something to me, and I say, “You are not my boss and I think you should get out of my house.”

He grabs me by the arm and begins to shake me. My mother stopped him by saying something quietly to him.

Mom smiles and says brightly, “This is your father!” I’m staring and I don’t remember him. My mother says, “What is wrong with you of course you do?” My brother John is now jumping for joy and Gary who probably can’t remember either is also jumping for joy. I’m not happy to see this man like everyone else is. I am crying and he, my father, spanked me. He sure wasn’t home very long

I’m in my room crying because I don’t remember him. I think he’s a bad man. I think he tricked my mother and she let them in the house. He took off his belt and reminded me exactly whom he was. My mother tried to tell him I needed time, I was just a kid, but it didn’t matter and in the end, she didn’t stop him. The belt blistered my backside.

A few days later, my father has acquired a car and we have gone off in it one evening. He talks to me as if I’m an old lover who he has come back to visit. I don’t
remember my father but I do remember vaguely things he used to do. I know I don’t want to do those things. I say, “I don’t remember,” “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” and “can we please go home now.”

He could have walked away that night and pretend that none of the past ever happened. He could have changed the course of my life, his life, but that isn’t what happened. He wanted me to remember, and he reminded me in great living color. He reminded me that I said it was fun. He reminded me that I said I liked it. He told me he had missed me more than he had missed my mother. He told me how he had a little girl my age living with him while he was overseas. She liked it as well. She took good care of him, cleaned his house and washed his clothes too! He asked me, “Don’t you want to be like her?”

This is not going well for me. I believed, if I just kept telling him I don’t remember, he would stop. I’m a year older and now know this is not normal. Nevertheless, there still is no way out of it for me.

We parked somewhere outside of the city lights in Medford, my father sat in the front seat of his new car with his pants off. He grabbed a handful of my hair with one hand and twisted, with his other hand he took off my clothes. As he shoved my face into his lap, I just disappeared. I began to lose time. I didn’t even have to see the gray first this time.
The Closet and the Gestapo Games

Shortly after Dad had come home from Vietnam, we moved to Sneads Ferry, North Carolina. I was in the fourth grade. This was a particularly bad time for me. The violence escalated and the games Dad played were more complicated. I started to realize I lost time. I thought it happened to everyone. I began to be accused of and punished for things I didn’t do, and even worse, accused of being “seen” doing them. I could only say was “I didn’t do it,” but still suffer the consequences. Sometimes in an effort to escape the beating for lying, I would plead guilty to the crime and get beat anyway. Dad assured me it hurt him worse than it did me and it would have been worse if I had lied. He went on to lecture in his fatherly voice, telling the truth is always the best thing to do. My life never made any sense and was becoming vague in ways I couldn’t understand or articulate, if I asked.

We had moved into a house on the bay in a small North Carolina Town. They were building a house on one side and on the other was a trailer. A boy named Charles and his mother lived in the trailer. I think this was the first house my parents owned.

A boat slough came nearly all the way to your house. It was rough looking though, a great gouge in the earth full of water from the bay, no decking or dock and only mud paths up to the shore. Tied to the roots or big rocks sticking out from the sides were the boats. It was usually full of water moccasins. There was also, what passed for a beach. It was a stretch of mud, weeds, and a shack down along the water. It was all very rustic and we were told nearly daily to stay out of the water or the alligators and snakes would get us. John and I swore we sighted alligators on a regular basis; however, most of the alligators we saw were old logs floating in the water. The water moccasins, however, were very real.

Right next to the shoreline at the front of the house was a drop off into deeper water well over our heads. There was an old rowboat sunken there. We discovered we could stand on opposite ends and make it rock like a seesaw. This went on for weeks. We thought of it as our underwater teeter-totter.

It was inevitable one of us would get hurt. We got it rocking and I slid over what was most certainly a rusty nail or boat trim and it ripped through the skin on my ankle. I still have a nasty scar from it.
Wooly Booly, a man we were not supposed to talk to, lived in a shack down by the water. He had hair like a sheep and my father called him Wooly Booly. Locals said he was crazy. He had crazy hair and liked to fish. John and I liked him and he didn’t seem crazy to us. He lived alone. I don’t know what his real name was, but he carried me, bleeding all over him, to my mother.

John and I never thought he was crazy. We were always being told that this person or that person was crazy, or not nice, or not to be trusted. Wooly Booly was always nice to us. He showed us how to catch crabs. Sometimes he would give us baited strings to catch them and a bucket to throw them in. We thought this was great fun.

We would sneak down and swim on a regular basis, usually right in front of his shack, always careful to yell and scream and throw rocks into the water first, as he had shown us. This way any snakes would be frightened away. “Those snakes don’t like you anymore than you like them. Let ’em know your coming,” Wooly Booly told us in his thick southern drawl.

When it rained, in the summer, it was a warm rain. The sky would open and it would pour. I loved being out in that downpour, splashing in the mud then running into the water of the bay.

This was the sort of place people dream of for raising families. It was rural. Dirt roads and bus rides to school. It was a place where kids could grow up playing in the woods and learn to sail. You could pick berries in the summer. You could swim in the bay. You could dream if you had a minute and you knew how. Or…You could play hide and seek.

Daddy had a new favorite game. He learned it in Vietnam; it is hide-and-seek, called Gestapo. Daddy was the Gestapo, my brothers and I, and any friends we had around, had to run and hide. If the Gestapo found one of us, he could torture us with whatever choice of torture he chose. I learned a new word, torture. We didn’t know what that meant.

At first, it was just my brothers and I playing. Later Dad got Charles, the boy from the trailer next door, to play. Charles was about our age, a little soft fat on him from staying indoors too much, awkward and a little quiet. He didn’t have a dad. After a few games, he didn’t want to come out to play anymore. My dad went and talked to his mother. His mother said it would be good for him to play with other kids and forced to come out and play with us. It might have been fun if it had really been a game. I doubt Charles was having much
fun.

I would never know what went on with other kids who played this game. What the Gestapo, always my dad, did to his victims was a secret and part of the game. The other kids always quit playing. Sometimes mothers would send them out to play with us anyway. My father was a smooth talker and most of the time; they would come back for a while at least. The mothers liked my dad. They thought we were lucky to have a dad like him.

He assured us torture was part of the game. The Gestapo was the bad people and they have to torture the people they caught. I could not quit. If I quit he would tell my mother. In addition, she already hates me. If I quit he reminds me, "She will make you go away to live at the parochial school and then you’ll find out how good you have it here." Daddy knew how to get what he wanted from us.

When we were playing, once, he took me to the empty house that was under construction. We were forbidden to enter this house. He told me he had special permission to use it. There was a light coming in through the window from the porch light at our house so I could see fairly well. Once in, he took me to a closet, hung me from my wrist and then stripped me of my clothes. I was old enough now to feel great shame and humiliation at being naked. He was talking and I could hear roaring in my ears like the ocean. Love he said. Caught was another word. I was hanging there, watching lips move with no comprehension. I was catching a word here and there, but they made no sense to me. There is this “fun” roaring, “love” in my ears! So loud! The ice pick came out; It’s not the first time I have seen it, but I can’t remember what happened before or why I’m not surprised to see it. He pushes me so I am swinging back and forth. My wrists are burning and my arms and shoulders ache from hanging there. My feet don’t touch the floor. I see the ice pick and he is coming at me with it. He keeps pushing me so I swing, prick I’m stuck with it. Prick. He is talking. “GESTAPO.” I can’t tell what he is saying. THE ROARING IS TOO LOUD!!! Prick. “Good.” Prick. “Tell me.” Prick. “SAY IT.” PRICK! PRICK! PRICK! PRICK! The roaring got louder. I AM IN A PANIC!! SAY WHAT! SAY WHAT? I CAN’T HEAR!! I can’t talk either. The gray is coming and I think I will disappear soon. The world around me has become darker in the already dim light. Blackness. Nothing. Whatever else happened, it’s gone from my head. I never remembered, not in seven years of therapy, not in hypnosis, never. Suddenly I am in the house listening as he is tells my mother I fell in some terrible sticker bushes and what a clod I am.

My parents had an argument with Charles’s mother. At some point, I believe she accused my father of some things. Nothing ever came of it of course. Nothing ever did. He was after all “god.” Charles didn’t play anymore and we only saw him on the bus to school.

Of course, we still played the game with Daddy. I stopped remembering being caught. Just like the night in the car in Medford, it was more lost time.
My Bedroom

I loved my bedroom in the Gestapo house. The rest are disjointed piece of a house. It’s odd. I remember the front door of the house, but never going through it. We could enter the living room from the front door; however, I can’t tell you what it looked like. I remember a bathroom with a white toilet, but no sink, shower or walls. My parents room was somewhere down a dark hall from my brother’s room and me. I have no idea. I can’t remember any other room save the kitchen sink with a sunny window over it.

This bedroom of mine had a rug in the middle of the floor. There was a picture on the wall. A couple of stuffed toys were usually on the floor and on the bed, and a toy box graced the floor under the window. The sun spilled in through the curtains and caught the dust particles causing colorful sparkled beams from the window to the floor. If it wasn’t God, it was surely fairy dust or angel dust. It was magic, my magic.

I love my bedroom. I don’t share it with anyone. Sometimes when the sun comes through the window, I sit there in the warm light and pray. Grandma tells me I can always talk to God. That room is so warm and magical feeling when the sun comes in that I believe I can. God can hear me in this room.

I pray for my dad to go away or at least break a leg and leave me alone. I heard you could ask for a sign. I ‘m asking for a sign, life would be ok. I promised to put the sign on my wall and tell other people. Evangelism, tent meeting and revivals were everywhere in the Deep South. It worked for them, why not me?

Dad has never been in this bedroom. It’s mine. I don’t have to share it and I’m safe in here. Yep, yep, yep. Life is going to be good in this room, a magical room with sunbeams and moonbeams. Only I, me, myself can come in here.

Too bad Timmy isn’t here. I miss him. Maybe Mom can talk to his mother and invite him and then he can visit this summer even though he said he couldn’t. I like the way my sheets feel and they smell good when Mom brings them in off the line. I fell asleep hugging my bear, thinking about my good luck. Daddy can’t come in here. Yes, life is good in this room.

Hey! HEY! Hey!! I’m being pulled out of my bed by my hair! I can feel it coming loose from my head. I hit the floor with a thud and my head banged on something. HEY! Now my head hits the corner of something and I think I feel blood coming down my cheek, but there is no time to think about it. It’s dark. I am trying to get up, tripping over my nightgown and I get a fist in my face, then into my side. As I try to twist away, I slip on the rug. It’s my praying rug! How can this happen on the praying rug? I make a run for it, going, who knows where, just going! He grabbed my wrist; I know I’m not going anywhere. I’m awake now. I do not know what happened. I don’t know why he is hitting me in the middle of the night.
“You didn’t get me up!” Dad has my arm in his grip along with my nightgown and shakes me until my teeth chatter. My head is bouncing back and forth and side to side. I am trying to focus. I can’t. I just stare. I’m blank. I can’t think. I can’t talk. I don’t know what to say. All I can do is listen to my head tell me repeatedly like a broken record, It’s the middle of the night, while Dad is screaming at me. “You didn’t get me up!”

My alarm did not go off yet! OH NO! What happened! Panic rising now as it begins to dawn on me that he got up before I did. It is my job to get him up for work every morning. I get him up, make toast and go back to bed ‘til it’s time for me to get up for school

”You didn’t get me up you stupid fu…” I don’t hear the rest of the sentence as another smack across my face knocks me to the floor and my hip burns where I hit the wooden floor.

I’m crying now and holding onto my face, still not talking. There is nothing to say. I’m nine. I don’t know why the alarm didn’t go off, maybe it did. I’m trying very hard to remember why I am supposed to be here, what he is talking about, and what the answer is supposed to be. There is no answer. I can’t concentrate as he tosses me around my safe magical room. It’s dim, gray. Everything is grey and sort of see through for me. Maybe I’m only sleeping. Why isn’t the light on?

As if to let me know I am not sleeping, he hit me again. The screaming, shrieking, and spitting goes on as he hurls vulgarities, threats and accusations. I can think about the spit spraying me more than the words. He roars at me, “I will get in trouble and then I won’t have a job and it’s all your fault!” SMACK!! “Your family won’t have a place to live because of you!” KICK! “I have to be at work on time!!!!” WHACK IN THE SIDE AGAIN! I just want to get away from the pain. My head is pounding with my heartbeat and my chest hurts. Something is bleeding, I think maybe it’s my chest, later I discover it was my nose. He just keeps hitting me and screaming.

The light came on! My bed is in a shambles. The blankets and sheets are on the floor. The rug is in a heap in the corner opposite the door. I see my father standing over me, sweating and breathing like a dragon with his hands balled into fist!
“Bryan! Bryan! STOP!” I hear my mother and try to comprehend her sudden appearance in the room. I am astonished! Mom is yelling at him. He is telling her I didn’t get him up and now he is late for work. He is screaming at her now and she screams back as if he is deaf, “Bryan, she is just a little girl.” Wow, she is so brave! She made him quit! He is still yelling, swearing and name-calling but he has quit hitting me. I’m not listening to them argue anymore. I am happy they have forgotten me for the moment because they are yelling at each other. This is a bad situation as they could both turn on me in a minute.

He storms from my room, brushing past my mother who follows him. Suddenly he whirls back at me and in a low nasty voice and growls, “You will pay for this later. I won’t forget and I-Will-Get-You-For-This!”

I just stood there.

As Mom followed him out of the room, she told me to go wash up and go back to bed. “You have school tomorrow.” I did too. Washed my face and went to bed. I couldn’t get my bed put together and so slept under a pile of tangled sheets and blankets. I am living in the moment and this moment, it’s over.

My job is to get Dad up in the morning. He goes to work early in the morning. I get him up; make his English muffin with peanut butter, jelly and butter. I take it to him and then I am free to go back to bed until it was time for me to get up for school.

He is furious. His parting words though a little bone chilling to an adult meant little to me. I wasn’t sure what he meant, but assumed it would be nothing new. He would take off his clothes, talk about why I was so bad to make him do it and then it would be over.

I know I sound casual and for some, it is a disgraceful attitude. I don’t look forward to it. It will be awful. I will cry and I might even beg, but it is inevitable. It is part of my life. I didn’t know this doesn’t happen to everyone. I knew I couldn’t tell and that was all that mattered. It was part of the punishment. Being beaten was going to teach me what it was like to be a grown-up. When I cried he told me, “I don’t know why you’re crying, you make me do this to you.” My shame of being such a dreadful person was crippling. By now, I do know in my heart, I am a horrible, awful person. Even God is ashamed of me. The truth is I had no idea what to say if anyone would ask me... If there were no words in my vocabulary for what had been going on so far, what would happen later that day was worse, would be incomprehensible for years and the damage permanent.

I got up, went to school, gave some lame, I fell down excuse for the new bruises. This “don’t tell rule” was re-enforced regularly. If I told, he would kill me. I believed him. He also made sure I knew, no one would believe me if I did decide to tell them. “You’re a kid,” he would say, “Who do you think they are going to believe?”

This is about the time people were starting to think that maybe you shouldn’t be doing anything you wanted to your children. The first child protection laws were enacted this year and I was attracting some attention with my pulled out hair and bruises. The new thought was maybe children shouldn’t be coming to school with bruises on their faces, arms and legs. I had a male teacher this year and he was always asking about the
bruises. I believe he was honestly concerned. He made a mistake in calling my home and asking about me. My father gave me a beating for not telling my teacher a better story. I had not told my teacher anything except that I had fallen down. It was what I said to teachers as long as I’d been in school. I fell down. I didn’t know what Dad was talking about. The teacher stopped asking me how I was acquiring those bruises when I came to school the next day with new ones. I was learning that people might ask questions but they couldn’t do anything but make it worse for me. That teacher was my first lesson from outside the family.

Dad drilled it into me afterward as the experience was not lost on him that they couldn’t stop him. “They will never believe you. You are just a stupid kid.” Then his lecture would begin:

“I am your god”. He would Boom at me, “I made you and you owe me for your very life. Those teachers you think care about you don’t really. They believe me and not you! I can kill you and no one would know or care and your mother would be glad. She is jealous of you and she finds you disgusting. She wishes you were never born to ruin her life. She wishes you were dead.”

I can hear you thinking the question as you read this! Where was my mother when he was telling me these things? I don’t know. Sometimes I didn’t think she was even real. Sometimes she would start yelling and screaming at me and I would see her lips move but nothing would come out of her mouth. How did she do that? She must have asked me a question because she just slapped me screaming, “Answer me damn it!” My usual response at this point is to mumble, “I don’t know.”

Therefore, that morning, I went to school and the day was not too eventful. I remember we played baseball and I had to change my clothes. I came out to PE with shorts on and my teacher asked about the bruises again. I told him I fell out of bed. He asked if I was sure and I mumbled yes looking at the grass very hard. I am terrified of the conversation he is trying to have. He looked very sad and said to me, “OK, Let’s go play some softball, you can be first base, you’re the best first base we have!”

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I was nine years old and in love with my teacher from that day on. He was always very nice to me, asking how I was today and telling me I was a smart girl. He told me I was smart in spite of all my failing grades. He knew I was smart and he knew I just had very important things to think about. He was right about that. I was thinking about staying alive, staying out of the way and how not to go home. I guess he didn’t really know what to do about the situation. Mornings were great. I loved being at school but I didn’t have the concentration to really get my work done. After lunch, I would start thinking about going home and not any better.
I was especially tired and distracted today. I am sure he is going to beat me some more when I get home. I am sure he will be waiting when I get there. What if he is soaking that belt, I hate when he soaks that belt. When it was all done I would have handed him the soaked belt with a smile, if that had been a choice.

I got off the bus and discovered he had indeed come home early and he waiting for me. Mom was in the kitchen when I got there and I saw him give her some money and tell her to go shopping for something. Off she went! She left me alone! Where are my brothers?” I ask warily.

“They are out at the neighbors playing,” he snarls, “I’ve been waiting for you.”

“Oh”

I don’t know what to do, but he fixes that right away. “Get to your fucking room” he says in that same ugly voice.

I go to my room and sit on my bed. I’m not sure what is going on, but I have the sense to be afraid. In he walks with a stool he brought in from somewhere. He set it in the corner. He leaves me waiting for him to return.

I wonder what is that stool for but know better than to ask aloud. I am completely fixated on the stool in the corner.

I’m startled when he comes in telling me brusquely to take off my clothes. The tears start. I’m old enough to know this isn’t supposed to happen. I’m off balance and confused. This is different and I don’t know what to think.

“Get on the stool and face the wall.”

“Huh?” I try to buy some time. This angers him further and he slaps me hard enough to knock me down.

“I said get on the fucking stool you stupid c____!” he screams at me now. “Quit crying, No one can hear you” That means no one can hear him. No one can hear me! NO ONE CAN HEAR ME!

My mind is reeling! I am getting on the stool to be hit some more. Why on the stool? This is my magic room! God is in this room! What if I fall off the stool? He keeps knocking me to the floor. I know I’m going to be knocked off the stool to the floor. He chased God out. I want to say something, anything, but I can’t speak. All I can do is obey him and hope for the best. He has worked himself into a frenzied rage and I’m too slow and clumsy for him. He keeps hitting me to speed me up but it makes me more awkward. He is making fun of me for falling down when he hits me to the floor. I just get up and try to continue.

The stool is in the corner of the room. The door is off to my right and the door is even still open! The door is never open when he comes for me. My magic had abandoned the room because he left the door open, “Oh No!” I finally fumble my way onto the stool and stand on it facing the wall.
He growls, “Put your hands on the wall and bend over!” I do it thinking oh no, the belt, the wet belt. I’m shaking thinking about it but I have no comprehension for what is to happen next.

Grease! What! WHY! I’m terrified and I say nothing. I see him putting it on himself, on his P-E-N-I-S! I can’t say it or even think the word. I always spell it, even in my own head. Grease? It’s Vaseline for the babies butt! What? Why? I don’t get it! He wanted me to see him do it. He turned the stool some so I couldn’t help but see what he is doing. I don’t comprehend and his crucial moment is lost on me and angers him.

“Do you know what I’m doing?”

I shake my head slowly, “No” not taking my eyes off him.

Now he is smiling, “Turn around, hold the wall and bend over.”

Suddenly there is white-hot searing pain. I’m screaming!!! I’m crying for help!! I’m dying!!! He has hold of me and won’t let go. I can’t see anymore. My body is being slammed into the corner of the wall over and over, hitting the top of my head, then my face as I squeal and twist to get away. The pain in is unbearable. I’m nothing but a forty-five pound rag to him as I try to fight my way out of his grip, the pounding and this blinding pain!

Suddenly it’s over. There is still pain and there is blood everywhere! OH NO! There is blood all over my legs! I still don’t know why. I still don’t know what happened to me. He dumps me on the floor; apparently, he no longer thinks he needs to hang onto me. I can’t walk very well. I’m now on the floor, on my knees, and quite speechless.

Rags materialize out of thin air and he throws them at me saying, “Clean up this fucking mess. I can’t believe you made this mess. For Christ sake! Clean it up!”

I have quite forgotten that I am even naked and start cleaning up the floor and the stool. He walks out of the room saying, “I’ll be back and this mess you made had better be cleaned up.” He is subdued now but still clearly angry.

He comes back a few minutes later and sends me into the bathroom to clean up. I can’t. I am finally sitting on the toilet as I have discovered that is where the blood is coming from. I’m mystified as to why there is bleeding like that. I’m not sure what to do about it. He makes me bend over again and I start to shake. He laughs and tells me to relax; he isn’t doing that again today. He puts some sort of salve on me and tells me to get dressed.

I’m crying again, if I ever really stopped. I am trying to get my clothes back on and he leans in the doorway, “Quit snivelling, this is what its like when you grow up, so you better get used to it.” I vowed to myself at that moment, “I will never grow up! NEVER!” You better get used to it, has echoed in my ears ever since.

My mother got home shortly after and called me to help carry things from the car into the house. As I came into the kitchen, she stopped short and asked me what happen.
She is looking at me hard. She never really looks at me, but today she is. “What’s going on, what happened to you?” she says. She never asked before. I am trying to tell her. I’m going to tell her. I just stood there looking at her, mute. I have no words. I don’t know what just happened to me. I don’t know where to begin. I am helpless. Daddy came strolling into the kitchen, while standing there looking at my mother, he suddenly puts his hand on the back of my neck and is squeezing it hard. It hurts. There are bruises there too; I can feel the tenderness as he touches my raw skin, digging in his fingernails for good measure.

“Oh hell,” he says. “She was just being bad, I took care of it, Sugar. Don’t worry about it. You know how she is, always doing stupid shit.”

Mom looks hard at me again and I am still trying to form something to say. I can’t. My brain is seizing up as I struggle to form a word or thought I can say aloud. I stand there hopelessly mute, knowing my chance is over. He says to me, “Get out of here, we don’t need you in here ruining our day and messing up our life. Go outside.” She never asked again, and by the time, I did have the words, it was too late. My father had convinced me, she knew and she didn’t care.
We Don’t Live in the House Anymore

I ran out of the house and I don’t remember anything else ‘til we turned up moved to the trailer park and we don’t live in the Gestapo House any more. My magical beautiful room is gone. We live in a trailer. I asked about the trailer, why we lived there now, what happened to the other house and my mother is getting annoyed with me for asking stupid questions. “What’s the matter with you?” She would ask. I quit wondering and just figured that was part of life. Things change. Sometimes you know, sometimes you just wake up there, but for the love of Pete, do not ever, ever mention that you don’t get it!

I’m supposed to know things happened but I don’t. There is something wrong with me. They tell me I’m stupid. My father tells me this is how life is for every little girl. I could not risk asking the wrong questions. Even the right question today might be the wrong question tomorrow. Better to keep your mouth shut and believe whatever they tell you to believe today.

I don’t remember my favorite teacher, going back to school, packing or moving. Nothing. I don’t recall months at a time. I simply wake up and my world is changed, teachers would changes, homes change, even my hair would change. I still had my own room, but I can’t remember what it looked like. I remember a twin bed and I remember wood walls. I didn’t pray for signs again. I didn’t try to tell anyone anything. I stopped asking God for help and I quit praying.

All my mother really had to do was look at me, hear me, see me somehow, but she couldn’t. I didn’t know how to make her or anyone for that matter, hear me or see me. I am trapped in my own ignorance, naïveté, and in the lies and threats that were part of my life.

If I got too bold and caused him to fear, I might tell he escalated the threats of death, lectures of who God, my God, really was. If I became sullen he would punish me by masturbating in my face, want me to do it for him, rub himself on me or want a blowjob. By now, I knew what a blowjob was, but I still didn’t know what a period was or how you got pregnant.
The Hurricane

There was a hurricane. We lived in the trailer and I helped my mother tape the windows so they would not shatter, they tied the trailer itself down somehow. We were busy getting hunkered in for a big, big storm. The wind was whipping and the sky black. Trash is blowing around a bit outside. It wasn’t terribly cold as I recall just dark and endless whistling wind.

I was helping my mother inside with water jars when Dad came in from work. He said he needed to go to the store. Mom argued weakly with him that it was bad weather for a car ride anywhere and probably not safe. Of course, he won. I had listened with interest of a child listening to something that doesn’t really concern them, being quite nosy.

Suddenly I heard I was going with him! I felt my stomach fall. I didn’t want to go out there into a big storm! They told us all about it at school. This is not safe. He is not safe to be with either.

Trapped! It’s too late. I could argue, but I would get a beating with the belt. Maybe the buckle, maybe a fist, or worse something would be slammed into my body. There would be more bruises to explain and hide.

OK! I will just go to the store. Help get groceries he wants and get home. We will do it fast and then I’ll be home. It’s ok. My mother is still protesting, but he was never a man to listen to anything but his own out of tune drummer. We go into the hurricane.

I was looking out of the car window thinking about the car being sucked into the air like the wizard of Oz when I hear Dad say, “You know, we aren’t going to the store.”

“Huh? Where we going?”

He laughs and says, “I’ve missed you.”

I’ve heard those words before, my heart skips a beat, and my chest hurts. I know better than to say anything. I finally noticed he is not driving toward the little store, but turns onto a tractor road in the cornfield.

Why didn’t I think of this? Would it have mattered? NO! Even if it had occurred to me that this would be my fate in the middle of a hurricane, it would have changed nothing. I would still be sitting in this dumb car with my heart pounding, no place to go. I
can’t run. No one can hear me, though by now I don’t believe anyone can or will help. The storm is closing in; rain is pelting down on the car, lightening is flashing and the thunder in clashing and clamoring. The wind that was picking up when we left is beginning to howl eerily through the fields. The road is dirt and quickly turning to a river of mud. I’m not sure where I am. If I did run, he would kill me when he caught up with me, or he will tell my mother what I did and she will kill me. He’s told me repeatedly only he loves me, my mother hates me. I need him. I’m trapped. Trapped like a rat. No, not a rat, a rat could scurry away and hide. I’m worse than a rat. I’m afraid. I’m disgusting. I’m only ten years old.

He parks the car and grabs my arm to pull me over to sit by him. His pants are open and I don’t even know how they got that way.

“Tell me you like this” as he grabs my hair and shoves my face into his lap. I have to say things to him. He tells me what to say. If I don’t say it fast enough he will slap me and pull my hair some more.

I resisted and he slapped me again.

“If you bite me, I will kill you. I can. No one would ever know. I will leave your little fucking body right here in the corn field as fertilizer and no one will know. What makes you think you are worth looking for? You’re not, no one will care.”

I’m crying and that satisfies him that I believe him. I do. I believe even God is afraid of my father.

He hands me a washcloth that has appeared from nowhere. Now he is nice to me, hugging me and says in a jolly voice, “Let’s get home, there’s a storm out. But first I got something for you.”

He pulls a big white shoe box out of the back seat and sets it in my lap smiling and looking very pleased with himself. I’m confused.

“Open it!” He demands happily, expectantly even. There in that box were the coveted white go-go boots. He is happy to give them to me. I put them on and I don’t know what to say. I just sit there looking at him. He smiles and says to me, “You earned them, your mother won’t understand, I’ll take care of that though.” I remain silent looking at my boots.
My mother is angry when she saw the boots. She is yelling at me over them. My parents fight over it. Of course, I didn’t tell her I earned them and neither did my father. By the time I was ten I knew better than to tell anyone anything, especially my mother. I learned from the incident in my old bedroom that she wouldn’t ask too hard. If she did, I didn’t have the words anyway. We were more naïve in the sixties. I didn’t know how to say this was happening to me and been convinced by Daddy that no one would believe me anyway. I was just a kid. His kid and he could do whatever he wanted with me. I guess he was right. I slept in those boots. I earned them and they were mine.

Yes, indeed, I earned them…

This concludes Annie’s memories of her younger years, her next instalment will be released in the coming months. A portion of proceeds from each sale will be donated to the National Association to Protect Children.

Thank You…