

Dear Courageous Ones,

You have begun reading this open letter. Please continue to read only if you feel that this would be beneficial for you. If the quiet inner voice leads you to discontinue reading, I think you would be wise to follow this guidance. The material is in no way graphic but, even so, the subject matter can be triggering.

This writing is about my healing - from hopelessness to hope, from despair to belief in life, and from self-hatred to trust in myself and others. Now I enjoy life on a scale which had seemed for so long out of my reach. It's not that I float on a heavenly cloud — I have my ups and especially downs — but depression no longer rules my life. This in itself is a miracle.

As an example...yesterday was a hard day. It was raining and I'm sensitive to the weather. I couldn't get up enough energy and will to crawl out of the doldrums. Today the sun is out and I feel much better. On days like the rainy one, it's a struggle for me to remember that emotions are fluid and that this too will pass. In the larger scope of things this day's mood is

only one day's mood.

Many years ago I read a poem about a tree and its right to be. Desperately I wanted to know that I had just as much right to be as did the tree. This longing proved to be the beginning of my healing.

I'm a woman in my late seventies. My father sexually abused me for about a decade, beginning in my early childhood. At that time and place, who would have taken a child's word over that of a "respectable adult?"

I know what it's like to lie
sleepless in bed...waiting.

I know what it's like to "lose my Soul"
and to live in the frozen fear
that it will never return.

I know what it's like to have a
split-off part which carried the
knowledge so I could go on.

I know what it's like to
not know who I am

and to stand in the
rubble of despair.

I've been there.

Years ago I wrote the next poem and the ones to follow (If you don't like poetry feel free to skip them. I think the letter holds together without them).

Pain is my truth
and suffering my world;
all is hard
edges sharp,

My will wonders
if it is worth the while.

Tears tell a story
of a journey too long
that sits in my heart
like a stone, rocking
the limits of memory.

Can I stay centered on pain when
pain is all I have?
Can I look myself in the eye
and follow my pain back home?

Two strands have been braided together: the strand of my hard work and the strand of the grace of God. Without either I would still be drowning in a sea of bitterness and despair.

My life began to become my own about thirty-five years ago....when suddenly I remembered. I was walking alone in the woods when out of the blue a cascade of repressed memories imploded inside of my head — my drunken father, me, sexual images, a little body — a cacophony of chaos and confusion. I was stunned.

Virtually every evening as dusk came around, I lost my Soul. This is the only way I know to describe the horror. Everyone and everything seemed to move out and away, and I was left in a circle of aloneness. It was exquisitely painful. Could this have been hell? Did I go to hell and back each evening to try to retrieve my Soul? My hell was an ocean of infinite hopelessness.

These descents into such dense darkness haven't happened in a long time, yet my heart still shrivels at the thought

they might return. The pain seemed limitless. No one asked me if there was anything wrong. Hell is a solitary experience.

Grief overflows the well
of my innermost
being
and
I am awash in my own sea of
sadness;
in a frail craft
I am awash.

Grief rocks my body
in rhythm
to long ago hurts.
My arms are crossed
and
shoulders hunched.

“Why, oh, why!” grief calls out
to a silent universe
made mute
by the very energy
that calls its name.

Who was I? At times I would look in the mirror and my Self would reflect back to me. A light was in my eyes. This pure

acknowledgment stirred my Soul and probably saved my life.

He was dying when I remembered. The child in me was afraid she would have to die for him, as she had had to live for him. Remembering, then, became the safe haven. On the one hand, there were decades of looking at my life one way. On the other hand, there was a walk in the woods which changed everything.

What do I mean by healing? Here are some of my thoughts. You will have your own.

- To be able to love
- To have at least one close friend
- To be able to look after oneself
- To have strong boundaries and to open to what is healthy and to close to what is injurious
- To have self-knowledge and self-respect

- To seek Higher Truth
and be faithful

Please don't be discouraged by this long list of attributes. They rest on a spectrum and are always more or less. They are never black or white.

My teacher taught us that it's relatively unimportant where we are on the path. It matters only that we are on the path. You are on the path because you're reading about healing. In clarity, there is strength and depth.

Healing is not trying to paint over the pain of the past nor is it reaching for near perfection. It is not an exact science and there is no right way. What constitutes healing for you, only you can say. For myself, I can say that I have healed more than I even could have imagined a few years ago. This doesn't mean that I'm far along the path. It means that I'm on the path.

If the primary purpose of life is spiritual growth, and I believe it is, and if all events have a part in that growth, as I

believe they do, then a deeper understanding and acceptance of our lives will be healing.

Comparison doesn't yield understanding, even in similar-seeming circumstances. Each person has their own path and some must walk through an arid, joyless land. Others will have paths which are less, or more, painful and arduous. There are many types and combinations of abuse and no matter how we sort and file them, they are all harmful. Most can have serious and long-ranging effects.

Comparison only diverts us from focusing on our own healing. Suppose we set out together to sew patchwork quilts. We save patches of leftover emotions and memories and fit them into patterns. We sew the patches together. My quilt cannot be compared to your quilt because my patches differ from yours and no one can say that one quilt is superior, or inferior, to the other. We can say, though, that both have the potential of keeping us warm.

Self-doubt nearly drove me out of my mind. In the fog of unknowing I could see only traces of my abuse. “Was I lying and denigrating my father?” “Did I inflate a one-time event into ten years of abuse?” The prosecutor in me would hammer tough questions at me. Yet deep down I knew that the process of facing the truth, acknowledging it, and allowing the healing of it was cleansing the muddy waters of negativity. I had no desire to expose, blame or shame.

Buried deep in my psyche, my core knows the abuse to be true and that I have the right to express it. I don't need to defend or second-guess myself. It is the accusers who are lying.

An opposing lie is that we are too damaged to heal. Yes, there are scars. We cannot change the past but we can separate from it. We can be kinder and more gentle with ourselves and others. Softness, along with boundaries, is a long stride toward self-respect, worthiness and healing. I had wandered the world with confusion and self-loathing. I had

experienced life through a prism of depression and despair. It seemed that there was no way home.

It was the split-off part of my inner child who mainly carried the burden of not remembering. After all, it was she who suffered the abuse and singling her out was vital to my integration.

Children know only what they have experienced. For wounded children this is heart-breaking. My inner child needed to be home-schooled. The curriculum was love, tenderness, patience, understanding, kindness and other inspirational subjects. In time, my child joined the rest of myself and I was made whole.

From what you were taught,
my child, it is
different now
the old no longer serves
the new

to be safe is to hang back
no more
but to stand at the edge

here, stand with me

and put your toes
on the line with
eternity

for this is where all
magic happens

here
together now
in this moment.

I think that every wounded person needs a guide to travel along with them, to believe in them and to be a calm and steady influence for them. The guide mirrors their growth and wholeness and brings them back to the present — again and again. I have a therapist who meets me here. We have worked together for four years and I plan to continue for as long as my mind and body will allow. In my experience her skill and devotion to my healing is unparalleled. I trust that you, too, will find the healer you need.

The present is the safest time zone we have. The past was defiled by abuse and the future is unknown. The present

simply is. If we can reside in “isness,” there is no trauma or worry - and we are no longer victims.

Accordingly, my teacher maintained that there is no answer to the question, “why?” The theoretical can lead us astray. I have faith that in some larger understanding the universe rebalances, and all that happens makes sense. I cannot parse life’s mysteries. I can only make peace with what has happened to me.

In order to keep my balance and soundness of mind, I had to inch my way to and through what had transpired. I had tormented myself with if and why and how? Rising out of victimhood and gently encouraging myself, the perspective of my childhood and subsequent life has changed over the years.

Abusers were themselves abused. Inherited brutality is passed down the family tree until it reaches our own branches. One way or another, we will pass it on — unless we are healed from the desecration we endured.

My path has been a winding way. It's been long and hard — and worth it beyond measure. To my eternal relief I now know that my Soul has remained constant. There were many rewards along the way and each reward motivated me to continue the search for the Self.

Gradually my world got larger and began to right itself. No longer did I have to memorize how to be in the world and to repeat my role by rote. The lens I looked through wasn't now trained on my debasement. What a joy to experience my life in the present!

We are survivors, no longer victims. When we can feel this startling distinction, we stand taller, straighter and act with greater purpose. We walk the path of the hero and if we never give up, we will circle around and return home.... changed. How better can we spend our lives!

Hope leaps
as the wind runs through the trees
and the leaves spin round

each one tied on differently

Joy abounds
as sunlight splatters through the branches
in patterns known only
to themselves

Now this leaf
now that one
plunges into the foreground

and dances its dance
doing what no one has ever done
before

With Love and Respect,

Your Friend

We Are Survivors!