

I Promised the Children

I am here today, not only for myself, but to be the voice of a newborn, an infant, and a young man who cannot speak for themselves, and to fulfill a promise I made many years ago.

When I was a child I experienced abuses that no child should have to experience. I felt so totally alone. There was no one I could turn to for help. My perpetrators were those who should have protected me and a group of people whose names I do not know. I was so young when it began that when standing up I was half the size of the adults who were in charge. I was half the size of those who planned my days and nights. I was half the size of those who tore my heart out. I was half the size of those who threatened me and others with extinction. I was half the size of those who choked the song out of me, robbed me of my sense of safety, manipulated my longing to belong, and ruined my ability to trust and feel a sense of well being. I was half the size. In order for my perpetrators to carry out their agenda they used those of us who were wholly innocent to do their jobs. They were not even brave enough to do the work themselves.

Today, I am the sole survivor of those years of horror who can recall and feel safe enough to tell the story; my story, and the story of the three who could not be here with me today. I am alive today only because I lived long enough to finally find help. I was able to find help in countless dedicated and well trained therapists and good friends from whom I could draw strength, commitment, goodwill, and faith until I found a measure of those things within myself. Had it not been for those peoples' interventions in my life, I would not have made it through. It was only for the good grace of people outside my family of origin family upon whom I could depend, trust, and come to rely on that I am here today. I am eternally grateful for each and everyone.

Recovery is a might challenge. It is not for the faint of heart. It requires more from us than we think we have to give and then some, and yet it appears that it is possible. It takes many years for some of us. It takes determination, unending courage, and a will to keep focusing on things we cannot see...things that we can only dream of...and things that we can hope for.

Many have given up before they could complete their work. I have known those who lost all hope and couldn't hang in there even one more day. I have known many who have not given up and many of them have gone on to do good things. Through persistence and determination those who have not given up have shown us and the world at large that they will not be defeated...that they will overcome all the odds and go on to be of benefit to others, just as others were a benefit to them. So many people I have known have walked my path before me and come out of it on top. These people give me inspiration and the belief that no matter what life has in store for us we can find ways to cope, ways to heal, ways to thrive, and ways to contribute back.

I have lived a far from perfect life. I have lived so many years hiding secrets I thought too horrible to be believed and too scary to give voice to that I have done my fair share of damage to others as well. The internal pressure the denial and the lies from my perpetrators, the complete lack of any kind of validation, concern, and help from my family of origin contributed to that life. Although I was light years ahead of my perpetrators and did

not perpetrate the abuses heaped on me, I did fall short in many ways I would have liked to have done better in.

Most of my life I made decisions based on fear. Fear that originated with the conditioning of my young mind by those who did not see me as a child worthy of love and protection but in fact saw and treated me as a being ranking lower than a dog, quite literally. This inability on their part to view me as someone other than a projection of the sickest parts within themselves was not my fault. It was however my reality and the reality I had to live with and cope with on a day to day basis for most of my life.

I have anger. I have anger not only for myself but for those who never had a chance against the evil that I saw but was told I also must deny. I had so much stored up anger by the time I was a teenager that it is a wonder that I was satisfied to fantasize about revenge against my perpetrators instead of act it out. I suppose my fear of jail kept me in line when I could have lost control and exacted my own kind of justice, in my own way. I am glad now that I did not give in and lose my way. I am glad I

saved myself from years of more abuse and living life in cells a few feet wide and only a few feet longer.

I have pain. Pain that so much suffering exists, pain that the youngest amongst us have so little power and such small voices, pain that so many children grow up in financial poverty, emotional poverty, mental poverty, physical poverty, spiritual poverty and medical neglect...pain knowing that evil exists and is often in those you are forced to depend upon...pain that there is not enough help out there or enough resources to meet the needs head on...pain in the knowing there is so much potential lost...so much happiness lost, so much creativity lost, so much laughter never to be heard.

I have fear. Fear that survivors won't be able to tolerate the enormity of what lies ahead of them to heal...fear that the abusers will outlive and outsmart the survivors...fear that we won't be believed when we finally have the strength to speak our truth...fear we will be re-victimized over and over...fear we will be denied our story because someone else cannot stand to imagine it, hear it, or accept that it occurs and in the way that we remember it...fear that others who have not walked in our shoes will

walk on by and not give our plight a second thought...fear that we won't imagine a better future, know our gifts and set our own goals...fear that we won't ever experience the love we so deserve or be capable of fully loving those we know...fear that we will give up before we get to the light at the end of the tunnel that can guide us back to ourselves and give us a life of meaning and purpose and service to all others.

I have all these things, but I also have hope. I have hope that someday it will be different. That my children will do better than I did. That my children's children will do better even still. I have hope in the resiliency of the human spirit. I have hope in the people who live their lives with integrity, good intention, and right action. I have hope in the heart's ability to grow in love, in the mind's ability to stretch in imagination and the soul's ability to take flight. I have hope in the Creator's ability to hold us when we cannot hold ourselves, to see for us what we cannot see for ourselves and to guide us gently back to our rightful connection while creating the sacred space within which that happens best.

I have so much to say, so many more ideas and words within to share, but for now I have said enough. Now I will rest peacefully for a time. I am grateful for the blessings that have been bestowed upon me. I am happy that a song has begun to sing in my heart, a brighter future is building in my mind, and that I am now engaged in living out my true purpose here on earth.

Thank you dear ones who cannot be here to sing your own song...imagine your own future or live out your intended purpose. May I never forget and may I never let you down.

Francesca Okerlund