

ON BEING ABUSED

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As I considered writing this article I thought, I guess I'll have to use a false name. That determined it. After all this time I still felt too ashamed to own that as a child aged seven to sixteen I had been sexually abused by two men in their 40s-50s. From this realisation the article has been born and written without a pseudonym - I have had the courage to own it.

I going to start by telling the story of the abuse in the form of a fairy tale, and then go on to consider some of the effects having been abused has had upon my adult life. Telling of a trauma, in the form of a fairy tale, does not indicate there is any less truth in what is told, but it is a vehicle whereby the child is more able to speak and feel herself heard, in what is more her language. I first learned of this method by reading an essay by Roz Oliver, a Core Process Psychotherapist working in London.

Once upon a time there was a little girl aged 7, called Monty. She was a war baby, which meant that her Daddy had gone off to fight the baddies rather than stay at home to look after the little girl and her Mummy. When Daddy came home, after all the fighting had finished, he didn't like her very much, he liked the new little sister much more. This made the little girl very sad as she had thought it would all be alright when Daddy came home ... and it wasn't.

About a year after Daddy came home, Mummy and Daddy sent Monty to a little school, Monty thought this was because she was difficult at home, and it probably was. The little school was really special though, people were quiet and calm. They liked children here, there was a big girl who read to Monty. Monty felt safe for the first time ever.

This didn't last long though, the Catholic school, where she really belonged found a place for her, and there she went. This was a big, big school, there were big boy and girl children, and the little girl was only five. She was lost.

After a while one of the teachers asked if she would like to come and tidy his office after school. The little girl was proud to be asked - this was a special job, she was a special child, maybe for the first time in her life. Also she didn't feel she had much choice in it, so she went.

As part of the tidying however bad things happened. He was married and yet he wanted to kiss her. The little girl didn't like the kisses, they were big and wet, and he had a big fat tummy, with hard buttons where he pressed into her. It was horrid and disgusting, and so very

very wrong. She was a really bad girl for doing this and she would go to hell.

There was nobody to tell. Mummy and Daddy were a long, long way away in a different world, doing their thing and putting food on the table. It was far too bad to tell in confession. So the little girl was all on her own. Her friends had other friends who were more important. Anyway the little girl was too ashamed of the disgustingness of it, and also because he was married. It went on for years.

Once when he was made headmaster the little girl stopped going to the office. He was an important man now, he wouldn't want a little girl like her anymore. She could just be a little girl again. But no ... he came and asked why she didn't tidy his office any longer, and it all started again. His coming to speak to her in broad daylight was a big shock, as everything else just took place in the dingy twilight of his office.

When the little girl was eleven she passed the scholarship. She was going to the big school. She would wear uniform, have homework, and be clever. It was a release, a crack in the wall had opened - she could squeeze out. And yes she did get out through the crack, yes there was a uniform, (albeit somewhat spoiled by Granny's hand knitted knee high socks, and the liberty bodices) and there was homework, and she did get to be clever.

However even in this new place the mark that was on her was soon spotted. What was it? Did something on her show that she was a prostitute of a child who let married men kiss and touch her, and even have her touch them?

Soon she was invited into the storeroom of the teacher who taught French; and again the kissing started. Only here there was no preamble of enquiry and kindness, only the kisses. Again she was cut off, she was different, she couldn't tell, she couldn't share it with the other girls and boys, she was bad! After all, the thick books from America, which told boys and girls how to behave, said sexual things were the responsibility of the girl, as the boy couldn't control himself. This she had always known and now it was written down for all the boys and girls to read.

When the girl got to be sixteen, the teacher started touching her as well, and then it stopped - maybe he had frightened himself. Or maybe she was no longer a child and therefore no longer attractive.

However the damage was done - her life was marked. It wasn't until she was in her thirties that she told, and started to know, however tenuously - or at least to be told - that it wasn't her fault.

Hence yet more years pass until this article emerges, and I have the courage and the awareness to be able to put my name to it.

The effects of the abuse have been without number. They have permeated my life. It has meant that in my early twenties, I was an easy target for sex I didn't want. Hard unfriendly, hostile, conquering sex - and I didn't know how to say 'No' in a way that was heard.

It has meant I have had a stigma - a secret - one that probably nobody could see but one that I knew was there, just awaiting discovery. And, as with the hidden but deforming scar, when or if do you tell the new friend it is there.

For many years I chose never to tell anyone and yet it coloured the friendships, there was a secret and when would it be found out.

I had never felt the care and protection of the male. I had known the need and the grasping - so I often chose the partner with the great need who would grasp at me to have his needs met. The grown up men who wanted to care for me and protect me were drawn to me, but the unknownness of this terrified me, and I quickly crossed the road.

Occasionally, and maybe more often than I yet realise, the relationships were abusive. I was in no position to know what I wanted and didn't want, to choose to say 'yes' or 'no'. All I knew was to be compliant and not make a fuss.

I couldn't flirt, I couldn't have easy friendships with men; as then maybe they would want more, want to do what I didn't want to do, and I wouldn't know how to stop them.

I took risks that most girls and women didn't, I walked alone and hitch hiked. I actually managed the difficult situations this led me into excellently. The stranger was no danger to me. There it was clear I could fight, resist, and win. It was the friend, the insidious charmer, that was the danger to me. Here I couldn't say no, nor even know when I wanted to say no.

Eventually I had my own daughter, a completely accidental pregnancy, and the best thing that happened to me. But needless to say I didn't know how to protect her, and no father around to show me and guide both of us. And so the cycle goes on and the despair grows.

