

# My legacy

## by Angela Eccles

As I sat and pondered on Jean's article (Atlow Mill Newsletter June 2007) I thought about legacies and for me what was so fresh in my mind was the legacy of abuse in my family and how this had cycled down through the generations wrapped up in the shroud of denial. I read Jean's words about people who hang on to their parents in the hope that love will be returned to them.

This has so much been my battleground over the years with my own family. However I really thought I'd finally made progress and whilst they were unable to talk about what had happened to me my truth was acknowledged however quietly!!

I believed a truce had been agreed whereby I didn't expect them to look at painful past but they didn't ask me to deny my own truth. We focused on the here and now, and slowly trust built between us. That was how it was for ten years after a huge confrontation with my Mum and brother, but all of this came tumbling down in one telephone conversation, when I discovered that my Mum, my brothers and my sister didn't believe me at all

but simply thought it was 'a phase I'd been going through.'

If words can cut to the core they were the words and conversations that ensued with members of my family. The words of 'I find it difficult to believe. Dad was never odd in any way...although he was a lecher!' echoed in parrot fashion from each member of my family so that I could not help but think that discussions had occurred without me, or did they all hold a mutual consciousness? I wanted to run and never see them again; I cried deep sobbing tears of hurt and betrayal - to hear my own mother be unable yet again to defend me cut so deep that the pain was like a real knife churning stabbing through my chest and heart. I mourned

the loss of a mum who would never be able to protect me and a family who could offer no understanding or sympathy towards me but instead expressed their anger and rage towards me. Am I foolish to continue? Should I cut loose and not engage with them any longer? My sister in law who is the only person who believes me, is deeply shocked by how everyone has reacted and begs me to stay with it and not give up. I am so torn ...

I realise that for me the legacy is that I want the abuse in my family to stop, and I realised that even more I wanted my family to heal. Having to stand by and watch my family self-destruct in denial, I feel this invisible glass wall that exists between us and I despair on how this can ever change. I struggled with the thoughts of how can I relate to a mother who denies her daughter's basic truth? I feel so sad as I realise the real limitations of our relationships as this huge mountain of our history stands between us, blocking any deep connection because of my family's dedication to ostrich posing.

I thought about 'trust' and how my mother had really bankrupted that yet again by her denial and lack of empathy. I asked myself can anything be salvaged? Yet I don't see my mother as bad nor even weak, but an immature woman stuck in an old defence mechanism and ways of being which deny her the most precious gift of all; that of connecting with her children and grandchildren. I see my brothers and sister moving away

from my mother, being dutiful rather than engaged and open. I weep. I realise that her loss is immense too as the consequences come home to roost in subtle ways. I know that there is nothing more that I can really offer; the old adage of 'you can take a horse to water but you can't make it drink,' springs to my mind. This is my family. Not bad people but hopelessly snared in their own traps; those traps blocking deep connections.

Realising this I can stand back. I still hurt and feel sad about what can never be but somehow their behaviour no longer feels personal; their actions are not really linked to me but are to do with them being scared of facing their own truth. I realise that I don't have to do anything. I don't have to say goodbye but I can choose to accept where they are and who they are being and let go of my expectations of wanting them to be different

Maybe a legacy we can all hold and bring forth is one of integrity and love to all those in our lives. Love and integrity seems such a simple legacy to leave behind but the challenge is in the carrying out - I know that this is definitely the case with my family and will continue to be. I hope that no matter how many times I fall down on this I can still bring myself back to this simple philosophy. I hope so because for me it would be a legacy I would feel honoured to have been a part of, and who knows what impact this would ultimately have on society. After all out of small acorns trees do grow!