

## Turning Points

January 15, 1994: I remember being on the floor beside my bed, unable to move, and I was crying. Camille, my friend Cathy's little girl and my biggest fan, was on the floor beside me and crying too, hugging me and telling me "I love you" over and over.

I remember thinking that Cathy shouldn't be letting her witness this, then I lost consciousness. Then the paramedics were there; I could hear them but I couldn't see them. I couldn't see anything; everything was blurry and very dark. Next I was on a stretcher and they were carrying me down my icy stairs. The freezing wind hit me and I began to shake uncontrollably. I was loaded into the ambulance, blind, cold, and crying. Again I slipped away until we reached the transfer point; different paramedics then and somehow I was in another ambulance. One of the paramedics was shouting at me, calling me by name and telling me "OPEN YOUR EYES! KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN!" but my eyes wouldn't listen. The last thing I remember him shouting was "I WANT TO SEE THOSE PRETTY BLUE EYES!"

I never saw him, or any of them. I saw only darkness. It seemed to suit me.

So began the last of many attempts to end a life that had overwhelmed me since I was a child of twelve. Even if I had been conscious I would not have been able to realize that something was about to happen that would turn me upside down, inside out, and set me on the road to recovery. My rude awakening was still hours away, and I would have to go through hell before I faced it, but it was there, miles and hours away, waiting to confront me.

The treatment I received in the Emergency room was the stuff malpractice suits are made of. I was unconscious for much of the time I was there, but what I experienced in the short time I was conscious was enough to make the hospital decide to write off that portion of my bill. I was given either an enema or a large amount of a laxative, then left to lie in my excrement for hours. I was conscious when they decided to pump my stomach. When I tried to keep the tube from being forced down my throat, my arms were twisted behind me and I was restrained, my hands bound at the wrists and tied to the gurney. The tube being crammed down my throat caused me to gag and vomit; one of the crammers remarked to the other "Oh why is it that they always eat pizza before they pull this shit?" When they were done with that project, I was left to lie in my vomit as well. I was given the standard dose of charcoal, rather than taking into account that I weighed only 88 pounds. This had the effect of blocking the absorption of all nutrients and calories I consumed for a full week, and I lost a pound a day after my release. There were several people working in the Emergency room in the five hours I was held captive there. In all that time, not one of them spoke kindly to me. It wasn't until someone from Psyche was summoned to come and get me that I was cleaned up and spoken to at all.

They called the loony bin “Life Stress,” and the woman who came from there to fetch me was kind and caring. She got extra pre-warmed blankets to wrap around me before pushing the wheelchair I was in across the frigid parking lot. Even so, I was shivering violently and my teeth were chattering by the time we passed through the series of heavy locked doors, and we were finally inside where it was warm. I was sick, weak, and exhausted, and about to confront the form that would haunt me without mercy—ultimately forcing me to get the help I had needed for a very long time.

It was the intake form, and they wanted me to fill it out right away—no waiting until I’d gotten some sleep or was feeling better. If I had not felt like I’d been run over and dragged for a mile or so by a dump truck, the form may not have had the impact it did. But I was weak and defeated, and unprepared to have a bizarre version of “This is Your Life” staring up at me from the clipboard resting on my lap. The form consisted of questions, and from my point of view, they were rude, invasive, and none of anybody’s business but my own. The questions were followed by two boxes, yes or no, check one.

Have you ever been verbally abused? Yes. I checked No. Have you ever been physically abused? Yes. I checked No. Have you ever been sexually abused? Yes. I checked No. Have you ever been sexually molested? What’s the difference? I wondered. I checked No. Have you ever been battered? Yes. I checked No. Have you ever been raped? Yes, twice. I checked No. Inside I was fuming, but I knew that if I wanted to get out of there, I’d have to appear to be cooperative, so I calmly continued to answer nearly every question with a check in the No box. Have you ever had suicidal thoughts? Only every day since I was twelve. Have you ever acted on those thoughts? Only about fifty times, I thought, remembering all the cars I’d walked out in front of, pills I’d swallowed, and other risky things I’d done in my life.

Well, they had me on those two last questions; a “No” wouldn’t fly very far under the circumstances. The questions became less adversarial, but still I answered No to all the Yes’s I possibly could. I was FINE. This was all just a big mistake, especially the part about Cathy and Camille coming over when they did. I told myself that as soon as I got out of this nut house I would figure out a way to do it right—my Final Solution.

My short stay in Life Stress felt like weeks, and was like something straight out of “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.” I had been admitted at 5 a.m. but at 7 a.m. I was literally dragged out of bed and forced to join in a group therapy session, still filthy and stinking of various bodily functions gone horribly wrong. I was angry and embarrassed by the indignity of it, but quick to settle on what my story was going to be. Just an overreaction to a fight with my boyfriend, that’s all. I drank too much on an empty stomach, he shocked me with an admission of something he had done, I got depressed and swallowed a bunch of antidepressants (well, I was really depressed—hahaha.) Yes, and then I followed them with a beer chaser. No big deal, a mistake, I’m sorry, I’m FINE, let me go!

I made it through Group, but still had the biggest hoop to jump through—my interview with the Psychiatrist on duty. He was the man who had the power to keep me

indefinitely or let me go home and devise a better plan. My performance would have to be Oscar worthy, and I knew it would be. But first, I needed a shower. I *really* needed a shower.

I went back to my room and looked for my Hospital Hospitality Package of shampoo, conditioner, comb, and soap. Not finding it, I went to the desk to ask for one from the nurse on duty. The nurse on duty was busily filling pages of a notebook, so I watched and waited for him to get to the end of a sentence and notice me. But he neither got to the end of a sentence nor noticed me. He was furiously writing away, without the interference of any punctuation to slow him down or add any sense to what he was writing. And he was writing with two pens, clutched together tightly in his white-knuckled hand, so that even if he had believed in punctuation, his words would have made little sense to anyone but himself. I began to get the impression that this person might not be a staff member after all, and then I began to hope he wasn't; I was beginning to sense that I might be in real trouble if he were. Eventually a real nurse came over and asked me what I wanted, then told me that the patients were responsible for either bringing or buying their own toiletries, as none were supplied as part of the \$1,500 a day stay. I was tempted to reply that I hadn't planned on coming here, and the paramedics hadn't thought to bring my purse, but I thought better of it. They probably weren't fond of snarky littlewise-asses. A patient standing near enough to know I needed a shower with soap and shampoo came to my rescue and let me use hers, and I gratefully went to clean up before my meeting with the man who would determine my fate. When I went to take my shower I noticed that there were no towels, clean or otherwise, anywhere in sight. I returned to the nurses' station and explained that I needed a towel. After about a ten-minute wait the nurse returned empty-handed. "We don't have any towels right now" she told me. Great, I thought. This was enough to make a person crazy. In the end, she told me to use the bed pad off the bed I had been in, so that's what I did. Afterward, I figured I was as ready as I would ever be to meet with the psychiatrist in charge.

He was one of two psychiatrists who worked at Life Stress, and he struck me as being cold, humorless, and stupid. I told him the same story I'd shared with Group, and told him how embarrassing all this was, how I'd really learned my lesson, would go to counseling, blah blah blah... He seemed not to hear any of it. Instead, he diligently wrote in a notebook for quite some time, (but with only one pen, which was a great relief to me.) While he wrote, I wondered if his counterpart was any better at this game than he appeared to be. (My musings were answered two weeks later when the other doctor made headlines by committing suicide. Some Role model, I thought.) More importantly, while he wrote I wondered if I'd been successful in convincing him that I was fine, thank you, just fine, even though I got the impression that he didn't care one way or the other. Finally, he stopped writing-- the moment of truth. Well, not really, but an important moment just the same. He asked me if I had a "gambling addiction." Stunned, I answered truthfully for the first time. "No, I don't." "Ever blow your whole check at the casino?" He was persistent, if nothing else. "No, never; I've seen too many people go down like that. I'd never do that." I replied. Again, this was the truth. Then, just like that, he said that if I'd agree to get counseling he'd sign my release papers. I agreed and he signed.

Once out, I thought I'd be able to concentrate on coming up with a surefire plan, my Final Solution, but I was wrong. The first diversion was the outpouring of love and affection for me shown by my friends and family, accompanied by the shame I felt for hurting them.

After that came the stupid form, with all its dirty questions—the one with all the 'yes' answers that I had answered 'no' to—I couldn't get it out of my head. I kept hearing the questions being read in my head and seeing the lies I had told in the little boxes with each checkmark.

I started getting flashbacks of things that were done to me that I thought I'd locked safely away to a place in my brain where they couldn't ever touch me. I didn't realize that there could be no freedom until I admitted to myself that the things that were done to me mattered, that they could not be denied, or buried, or forgotten. Then I began to remember in shrieking detail how it all began, me pretending that I was fine, keeping secrets, and wanting to die. The details terrified me, it was like reliving every miserable bit of it, and the worst part was I could not turn the memories off, no matter how hard I tried. The memories owned me, consumed me, and made me unable to function. I finally made a call to someone I thought could make me forget again, help me bury it, keep it away from me.

I didn't want to talk about what was bothering me, and I was horrified when that was what the therapist insisted was what I'd have to do to ever be free of it all. Wasn't there an easier way, a pill maybe, or hypnotic suggestion, anything, to calm me down? Going back to those places, those people, was the last place I wanted to go. "There's no safety there" I told her. "Yes, but there's safety here, in this room, and I'll be with you" was her reply. "Trust me. You need to talk about this." Her name was Carol, and even though I didn't know if I could really trust her, or what she might think of me when she knew all of my dark secrets, I was desperate enough to take a chance on her.

I had gone to Catholic school from the first grade on. I loved my religion, the one true religion, and I adored the nuns who taught me all their Truths. When I was nine I decided to become a nun, but by ten my love for animals won out, and I decided to become a veterinarian instead.

All of the kids in my class had been the same bunch all along, give or take one or two along the way. I was known for my sense of humor (they called me Jolly Rogers) and for being the best artist in the class. I fit in. I was happy and secure in who I was, and I knew without a doubt that God the Father, Jesus, and Mary loved me. When I was twelve my parents sold the house I had been raised in and we moved from Tamalpais Valley, CA, to Novato, CA, about thirty miles away. I was enrolled in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade class of Our Lady of Loretto Catholic Elementary School, and it was there that my life went straight to hell.

Having never been "the new girl" before I had not thought of what that might mean. Once, in my old school, our Sister told us that we would be getting a new girl in our class; her name was Kathy and she had been born with a cleft palette. Sister explained

that Kathy had had several operations on her face, and that as a result of her birth defect and the operations, her nose and mouth would not look like the rest of ours. She then made it very clear that teasing or unkind treatment of any kind toward this girl would not be tolerated. Kathy soon became one of the most popular girls in the class.

I was not to be so lucky.

At first it was just snickers and name calling, and I couldn't believe that it was really directed at me. I decided to ignore it, for it was just a couple of boys. When I pretended not to hear them, it became a test of wills, and a few more boys decided to become involved. Still, I refused to acknowledge them. They didn't exist, and besides, the girls were friendly and nice. They told me they were just stupid boys—ignore them. I tried to ignore them, but the number of stupid boys grew every week, and soon it was the majority of the boys in our class who were participating in the fascinating pastime of 'making fun' of me. This majority consisted of 12 to 15 boys, and once they had 'packed up' like this, things changed dramatically, and not for the better.

They were no longer content to tactfully tease me when no one was looking; they began to congregate on the playground before school and at every recess. When they saw me, they would converge, usually forming a loose circle around me. Then they would shove and kick at me. This was hard to ignore, and when the blows started landing on me I responded in kind. I found that I knew how to kick, and I soon figured out where the low blows go. Instead of showing them that in spite of my small size I was no one to mess with, my fighting back (and sometimes winning) upped the ante.

Looking back, I think that all they really wanted from me was tears. If I had acted like a scared little girl, cried and run to the nearest teacher or nun, they may have declared themselves the winners, and left me alone. By refusing to cry (at least in front of them) or to involve the adults, I somehow challenged them, and a silent, all-out war was wordlessly declared. The circle around me got tighter, and I was beaten on a daily basis, but with a new twist.

The nuns and teachers on the playground were aware of what was going on, because the boys were no longer trying to hide their harrassment of me. They saw the gang of boys following and encircling me. They heard the shouting and name-calling; saw them spitting on me. They knew that I was being singled out and targeted for harassment and violence, but still they did nothing. They even witnessed, on several occasions, a group of the most popular girls join hands and encircle me before the boys could get to me, in an effort to protect me from them. Each time the girls did this, they too, would be beaten and kicked. They soon stopped trying to get between the boys and me, and I didn't blame them. When the boys figured out that no one was going to intervene on my behalf, the situation spun out of control.

Whenever the opportunity presented itself, I would be hit, kicked, tripped, spit on, knocked down, screamed at, and called names. Every ball game became another way to attack me, and every kind of ball became a weapon. By the end of my first year in that

school, every nun, every lay teacher, and both priests knew at least some of what was going on. Not at any time did any one of them do anything to stop it. No one told my parents, no one talked to me about what could be done or what I should do. Because I didn't know what else to do, I continued to do the only two things I knew to do: I prayed, and I continued to fight. And I guarded the secret of what was happening to me at school with my life. I would have done anything to keep my parents from finding out.

My mother wanted me to be tough, and my father wanted me to be popular. Little did they know that I was both, but not in any way that either of them could have imagined. My father had been telling me since I was eleven that I was about to begin "the best years of your life." Junior high and high school, boy oh boy, it wasn't supposed to get any better than this. I felt that if they knew the truth about me, they would be disappointed in me, maybe even disgusted by me. More than that, though, was the feeling that to tell them of the hell I was going through would somehow make it more real, more serious than I wanted to admit, even to myself, that it was. I kept telling myself that nothing anybody did to me should affect me in any way. I would turn myself to stone, and no one could hurt me. My favorite song became Simon and Garfunkel's "I am a Rock." And so, I became the perfect victim, an accessory to the crimes that were being committed against me. I wouldn't tell, the teachers wouldn't tell, the girls wouldn't tell, and the boys could have their fun. As bad as the Seventh grade was, it was nothing compared to the Eighth grade.

The eighth grade was the top grade in Our Lady of Loretto. The eighth-graders were the leaders. The rest of the school were the followers, and it wasn't long before nearly half of the boys in every class, from first on up, were following the lead of the eighth grade boys. I couldn't walk by any boy of any age without being spit at or on, hit, chased, pelted with flying gravel, hit with a ball or called a name. To the little kids I was "monster-face." To the older kids I was "dog-face," or simply "the dog". Ironically, "dog" was my father's term to use for any woman he considered ugly. How could I tell him that's what I was? I continued to fight any seventh or eighth-grader who got too close to me, but I couldn't hurt the little kids, no matter what they did to me.

I no longer prayed; I no longer believed in God. I felt God had forsaken me. The circles around me continued with the boys in my class, but the violence became sexual in nature: all their blows were aimed either at my breasts or between my legs. Sometimes I would be ambushed on the way to or from school by two or three of the boys, usually someone would get hurt; most of the time it was me.

My parents thought I was clumsy and moody; they couldn't figure me out. I tried simultaneously to act like everything was fine, and to avoid any conversation in which they might inquire about how I really was. I avoided them as much as possible; when at home I stayed in my room with the door closed, played music, and cried. I was alone, and lived without hope. I longed to die.

As the physical violence against me escalated, so too did plots to humiliate me. One morning on the playground the circle closed around me, and someone threw piss, brought

in a thermos, on me. Another time a pocket-knife was produced, its short blade cold and shiny in the morning sun. “Kill the dog, kill the dog, kill the dog” they chanted. I looked into the eyes of the boy with the knife and said, “Do it.” The bell rang, and they dispersed. I wasn’t being brave; I just wanted it to be over.

One afternoon at recess I was walking across the playground. I didn’t know it but the leader of the pack and my worst tormentor, Bruce Byers, had come up behind me. He had a wooden baseball bat, and when he got close to me he lifted it and hit me as hard as he could. It struck me dead center in my back, and I dropped to the pavement as if I’d been shot. I felt the pain in my fingertips and toes; I couldn’t move my legs. The skin on my back was broken; I could feel the sticky blood. My face was on the ground with gravel in my mouth. In front of me, I saw the ugly black orthopedic shoes and the black robes of a nun’s habit. I heard her say to Bruce “put the bat down, put the bat down...” He still had the bat and was thinking about hitting me again. He’d just beaten me to the ground with a baseball bat right in front of a nun. They’d have to do something now, wouldn’t they? No. They did nothing.

I don’t know if he put the bat down or just walked away, but I do know that neither he nor any of the others were ever disciplined in any way, on that day or any other, for anything they did to me. When I could get up I had a knot the size of a golf ball in the middle of my back, and it stayed with me for a week.

I’ve tried to imagine how any adult, under any circumstances, can stand by and watch a group of children gang up on another child. Was it because the whole situation got out of hand so quickly that they were at a loss, almost from the start, to do anything to stop it? No.

Maybe they were afraid of the controversy that would inevitably ensue if word of what was going on in that sacred schoolyard made its way outside its boundaries. Maybe the tuition my parents were paying had something to do with it. Maybe they blamed me for what was happening—they treated me as if they blamed me; that was certain.

I know that I came to blame myself as well, for if no one would speak up and come to my defense, didn’t that mean that I deserved what I was getting? Didn’t it prove that the boys were right about me, and I really was the ugliest, stupidest, and most hideous freak on the face of the planet? To me it proved all of this and more, and only served to reinforce my determination to never let anyone know the hideous truth about me.

Ironically, at the end of the school year, a “Slam” book was passed around, with all the students names in it, in which everyone was encouraged to write something about their classmates anonymously. I dreaded seeing what would be written by my name. When I looked, holding my breath, there were some insults, but to my astonishment, more than anything else there was statement after statement defending me, with some even saying they admired my “strength” and “toughness.” If only they knew what those two years had really done to me. I was neither strong nor tough. I was shattered and empty.

As the eighth grade neared its end, I was faced with a difficult decision. I had to decide what high school I would attend. The nuns were pushing the only Catholic High school within 20 miles, Marin Catholic, but most of my class would be going on to the local school, Novato High. By this time I hated all things Catholic (especially God) with a red, violet, and purple rage, and the last place I wanted to be was in another Catholic school. But most of my class was going to Novato High. I decided to tell my parents that I wanted to go to Marin Catholic. They were surprised and not particularly happy about my decision. My grades had fallen dramatically in the last two years; the teachers had told them that I had not been “applying myself.” Tuition would be high, there were no buses to the school from Novato so I’d have to be driven both ways, and they’d have to buy uniforms for me. It didn’t matter. I had to go to Marin Catholic. I got hysterical over my decision, and my mother finally sided with me. I took the entry tests, passed, and it was a done deal. I was so relieved... At last I could escape the hell that was my life.

Wrong again.

Because of the distance to the school, my mother arranged to pay a boy who was a Junior to transport me to and from the high school. Another Junior who was a friend of his would also ride, as well as two of my former classmates from Our Lady of Loretto. I didn’t know which two until the first day of school.

More bad luck; the other two were boys whom had been part of the gang of my tormentors, although they had been minor players. At first I thought that everything would be all right; summer had given us all some space. I had blossomed over the last three months, and I no longer looked like a little girl. The braces I’d been wearing for the last three years had come off, too. None of it mattered. I was still the same girl, the one to be jeered at, and once my former classmates had settled in and made new friends, they were quick to start in on me again.

The major difference in this school was that all of the abuse on school property was strictly verbal, and most, but not all of it, was concealed from any adult or faculty member. And I was no longer “Dog-face” or “the dog”—I was christened with a new name—now I was “Tweedy Bird,” or just plain “Tweedy.” I had no idea who had come up with that one or why. Maybe it was because of my diminutive size, or my nervous demeanor, just like Tweedy always on the lookout for Sylvester. Being called any name not of my own choosing was still humiliating, but it was nothing compared to the previous two years.

Where it got began to get ugly was in the car.

Every once in a while, on the way home from school, Dan, the driver, would stop on the way home at a bookstore or some other shops. On these occasions, his friend Paul would go with him and our instructions would be to stay in the car. As soon as they were out of sight, I would be jumped. They were too mature to beat me anymore; instead, I would be held down and groped, their hands and fingers squeezing here, pinching there,

their hands crawling up my legs. Once in the fracas, a button was ripped off my blouse and the blouse was torn. None of these encounters lasted very long or progressed very far, and to them it was just fun; but the effect of it on me was devastating.

During this time I did a pen and ink drawing. In the middle of the paper is a naked girl/woman. She is crouched, her legs drawn up against her belly; her arms are clutching her head, which is bowed tightly down. There is no ground or foundation beneath her; she is simply there. She looks both defeated and as if she is trying to protect herself from a bomb blast. Beneath her, and to the right are the words, written in my old microscopic (zippedy-doo-dah self-esteem) script: "There is no Mercy" For me this drawing expressed perfectly the depth of my misery, and after finishing it I felt some release. But release soon turned to panic and fear, because, what if someone saw it? They would know. They would know what was happening to me, and I couldn't, I wouldn't let that happen. I modified the drawing to make it more benign; to disguise the truth it told. I drew beautiful flowers all around the figure, I filled the page with flowers, and made it almost impossible to read the message I had written. There; that was better. The secret was still safe with me.

After enduring two years at Marin Catholic I announced that I would not be going back, and I renounced Catholicism . My mother was both angry and confused. What about all the money they'd spent on getting me in there, at my own insistence? She sounded like a travel agent for Guilt Trips, Inc. but I was adamant—I wasn't going back. I'd take my chances at Novato High. Or I'd kill myself, whichever came first.

I began my Junior year scared as a rabbit at Novato High. But everything was different. Nobody bothered me; it was as if they didn't even remember me, or what they had done to me. I should have been relieved, but my thinking was so twisted by then that I took their lack of interest in tormenting me as further proof that I was as insignificant as a speck of dust, and reinforced my feelings of worthlessness.

As the year wore on, I relaxed a little, made new friends and was able to take an art class for the first time in my life. The nuns at Marin Catholic had refused to let me take any electives in retaliation for my disrespect of the religion that I had renounced; they forced me to take Theology classes instead.

When I was 17, my family moved to Lake Tahoe, far away from Marin County where I was raised, and I finished my senior year there, without any problems. But it was too late; the problems were inside me, they were very much part of who I was, and I carried my self-hatred everywhere I went.

My parents wanted me to go on to college, but I refused. School had come to have an obscene meaning for me; everyone would know I was a freak; I was convinced that I'd never fit in. So I took a job as a maid in a motel instead, kept my secrets, and pretended to be FINE.

At 18, a friend raped me, and from that time on, the stage was set. I began my adulthood full of self-loathing and lacking anything that resembled confidence or self-esteem. I had terrible nightmares of the Zodiac killer after I was raped. It was always the same dream, night after night-- he would crawl in through the window over my bed and stab me to death. I attempted suicide when the dreams became unbearable, but I took too many pills and threw them all up. I was disgusted with myself-- I couldn't do anything right.

And still, I kept my secrets.

When a stranger raped me several years later, again I didn't tell. All those tortured years, I never told. To tell would be to admit that they all had hurt me, and to admit that I was a damaged person seemed the biggest failure of all.

But what had been done to me for those four years and all the years following continued to hurt me, and to poison every 'normal' relationship I tried to have.

I married a man I loved with all my heart, and left him and his four beautiful daughters whom I also loved dearly, not because I didn't love him, but because I thought he didn't love me. I thought he resented me, and because I loved him so much, feeling that was unbearable, so I flew away from the truest happiness I'd ever known, and lived like a person in exile.

Later, there were abusive boyfriends who terrified me and hurt me. I was thrown against walls and my fingers were broken. They gave me more pain and more secrets to keep, and reinforced my core belief that I deserved what I was getting. After all, I was ugly, stupid, and worthless, wasn't I? In fact I was none of those things, but I had yet to learn that.

Counseling was brutal, painful, and frightening, but it saved my life. It gave me back the life I had lost in that schoolyard so many years before. It let me see myself for the first time as I really was, rather than what I thought I was. It gave me the courage and confidence to accomplish whatever I set my mind to.

I've regained my faith, my spirituality, but it's not the faith of Catholicism or any other organized religion. I live by the principles of Ahimsa, or harmlessness, and try to apply these principles of kindness and compassion to everyone and everything I come in contact with. In Christianity, it's The Golden Rule--"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

I no longer blame myself for what was done to me; I blame the nuns, teachers, and priests who knew and looked the other way. Maybe I needed to experience all that I did in order to evolve to the person I am today, and to have compassion for all who suffer, regardless of their race, religion, gender or species. I'll never know why I was singled out, but I know now that it never should have happened. I can only tell my story and hope that the telling inspires readers to be kind and considerate of others. I hope my story

demonstrates to parents the sad fact that many, if not most children who are being abused, no matter in what way, will keep the secret. Why? Because they have swallowed the shame and made it a part of themselves.

If telling my story can save even one child from going through any of the things that were done to me, then that's reason enough to tell it.

