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Children



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Listen to the Children gives voice to the experiences of sexual assault survivors and the counselors with whom they work. It is dedicated to the belief that the pain of sexual assault and abuse can end and that healing can occur in individuals, families, and communities.

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Cover art by Lorena De La Cruz-Blackard

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Listen to the children.

[1995]

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pe

alone she cried

dear God at birth i had Your Light
to play and dream as was my right
then my daddy stole my light away
he said You don't hear bad girls pray

i try real hard to understand why
i must live with daddy's lie
my daddy says he loves me best
but when night comes i cannot rest

my daddy hurts me, God, please hear
i dare not shed a single tear
please, God, forgive me i know i'm bad
i'm sorry i make my mommy sad

dear God, why have You turned away?
is there something i can do or say
to make You love me once again
and stop my daddy's hands of sin?

i'm very tired and need to sleep
i feel so sad and ache so deep
it's hard to say "Your will be done"
when pain is what i know will come

dear God, please help my eyes to see
that others hurt, they're just like me
my daddy's touch has left me cold
dear God, i'm only 5 years old.

Judith Ann

Silence

People, look around you and open your eyes
listen as the abused children silently cry.
hear the pain in the words they can't express
have you noticed all their feelings they have
suppressed?

watch them at the playground as they play
see how they are timid and try not to get in the way.
notice them in the classroom... they tend to isolate
but if you ever ask they'll say "everything is just great."

and if you really look closely inside,
you will see there the pain they keep trying to hide.
they scurry about like "rats on a treadmill,"
always keeping busy to avoid having to feel.

they'll grow up to be children inside adult bodies,
always trying to escape their painful realities.
when will we ever understand that if our power we are to
reclaim,
each one of us must deal with our issues of pain,
shame, and blame?

each one of us must touch and feel "the pain" within;
then and only then.. can we release our little boy
and little girl, and grow up to be women and men.

Laura

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The Monster

There's a monster in my closet
and I don't know what he said,
but something makes me think he's
hiding under my bed.

He's waiting there silently,
he never says a peep.
just waits there patiently
for me to fall asleep.

then he climbs into my bed
being quiet as a mouse
whispering "be still or
you'll wake up everyone
in the house."

Then he does his dirty deed
while whispering in my ear
"be quiet I don't want anyone
to hear."

so she stills the cries that
threaten to come from her
small lips, as slowly out
of her body she slips.

She glances down at the child
lying on the bed and her mind
will always remember- the very words he said.
“Don’t ever tell anyone I came
into your bed... if you do I promise
you , you’ll wish that you were dead.”

He leaves her bed at early morning light,
and she will always remember the words he
said in the darkness of the night

As she slips into her body once more
she hears him close the bedroom door.
There’s a monster under my bed, oh how I
wish that I were dead.

The monster is so bad and I know he would be
mad, if I ever told you he looks just like
my dad.

Laura

Under the Stairs

“daddy’s home!”
big sister yells
my heart pounds
and
dolly is tossed aside..
“the bogeyman”
I whisper
“the bogeyman is home!”
but
before I can run
he is beside me
swinging me high above his head
(guess it’s just daddy today)
he rubs my back
(no daddy...)
and says
“mommy said you were
bad again while I was gone”
I look at her
but
mommy says nothing
and when daddy sets me down
I run downstairs
I hear his step heavy in pursuit
thump thump
thump pause thump
thump
pause thump pause

“go away

I was a good girl..”

thump

thump

isn't but the bogeyman
even looking
for his bad little girl today

I hear him turn on the TV and yawn
mommy yells “supper!”

I know it is safe

he won't hurt me (it's just daddy, not the bogeyman,
not the bogeyman, not the bogeyman, it's just daddy..)

I open the door
and look carefully to make sure
nobody can see me

and

brushing the dust from my pants

I stand up

and

step out from my darkness
under the stairs.

Judith Ann

What I ...

What I see...

Big brown face

Dark, black eyes.

Coming closer, closer.

Large brown hands touching
my waist, my shoulders,
entwining in my hair.

What I hear...

Things being shifted

as he pushes me

down, down, down.

Zipper being opened,
the rustle of clothes.

What I smell...

Hair oil, soap, sour breath,

coming closer, closer

to my tight lips.

Sweaty cologne, so strong!

And a smell I have never
smelled before.

What I touch...

Greasy hair, pitted face

trying to push...

away.

Trying to touch

anything to make him

go away.

What I taste...
Blood on my lips.
droplets of his
sweat rain down
on me.
His tongue
trying to make my mouth
his.

What I feel...
Something...pushing?
something hard and unyielding
on my stomach.
Going lower, pushing harder.
feeling...searing pain
feeling...pressure, tearing.
feeling...wetness, Blood???
feeling...pressure on my chest
feeling...no air in my lungs.
feeling...raw fear.

Paula Dennis

The Rapist

Scared, she turns her head to the wall.
She hears his footsteps in the hall.
There's a rapist in the house.
Tell no one...be quiet as a mouse.
"Tell no one..never try..if you do..
you will surely die.."
This is what he said to the child.
Then he gave her a snarling, sinister smile.

"lift your gown."
"let's be quick."
"Place your mouth upon my dick."
"suck real hard"
"don't cry a bit."
"be quiet, or you will be hit."

When it was over and he with
his evilness was through,
he said to her "goodnight honey."
"I love you."
"Goodnight, daddy." she said.
A child the age of two.
There's a rapist in my house,
Is there one in your house, too?

Laura

Daddy's Girl

I always wanted to be Daddy's girl.

But that was taken away from me as a little child .

I'll always remember the first time I felt that touch.

Even then I'd draw up inside.

You made me lose faith in all but myself

You tried to tell me you were doing nothing wrong.

I'd hide in my bed with the covers pulled up dreading the night.

Afraid and cringing knowing I'd have to feel the touch.

Why did you do this to me, taking away all my memories?

Now when I see a father and daughter I'm so afraid for her.

The memories would come back to haunt me.

Even as a grown woman the fear of your touch was so instilled in my life.

It took years for me to recover from what you did to me.

But I'm proud of who I am and what I've become

I rose above you and did it myself

I no longer wish to be Daddy's girl.

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“If I Should Die Because I Speak”

In the fall of 1961, when I was a 19 year old working, college student, I was violently raped by my doctor, J.S., M.D. He was in partnership at that time with M.Y., M.D. in the small town where I lived.

He threatened to hurt me more if I told. I went into a dazed, shocked state. Out of fear, shame and a need to function and survive, I dissociated from the pain and stayed silent. Dr. S. left town.

A few months later I went to work for Dr. Y., for whom I still had the highest regard. He was now “my” doctor, and I trusted him implicitly.

In 1965 Dr. Y. removed a cyst from my ovary. After that surgery I experienced intense fear and anxiety. These feelings continued and magnified day after day. I kept calling Dr. Y. to tell him how bad I felt. I said to him, “It has to be something to do with the surgery, anesthetic or other medication because I didn’t feel this way before!” He said, “No, it couldn’t be any of those things.”

I believed him (then, but not now). Still I got worse. I couldn’t eat; I couldn’t sleep. Everything felt very unreal. My left arm and leg started feeling as if I had no control over them.

Finally, Dr. Y. sent me to a psychiatrist, Dr. C, in a nearby town, who admitted me to the psychiatric ward of the hospital there. He prescribed four different kinds of medication --- thirteen pills a day.

One day Dr. S. walked into my hospital room. I felt enraged when I saw who it was! He told me that he was doing (or had done) a residency in psychiatry and was taking Dr. C.’s place for a few days. He came back into my room in the night and raped me again. He tied and gagged me as before, to silence my screams. This time he threatened me even more strongly. He said that he would hurt me, maybe kill me --- that he would fix me so that no one would ever believe me. (I had no conscious memory of this rape until about a week prior to this writing--middle of July 1995 , and I’m so terrified to be speaking of it.)

A short time after I was released from that hospital Dr. S. bought an electric shock treatment machine. He “loaned” it to his friend and former partner, Dr. Y., who admitted me to the small hospital in our hometown and subjected me to a series of shock treatments.

These “treatments” made me worse ---- more confused, fearful and depressed. Dr. Y. then had me committed to a state mental hospital. There I was kept in a “closed” ward, where for the first ten days I was allowed no contact of any sort with anyone outside the ward. During that time the doctor in charge of the ward committed sexual atrocities on me and some of the other women patients.

When my husband came to visit after my tenth day, I told him what was happening. He didn’t believe me! He thought I was making it up in order to get out.

The doctor who perpetrated these atrocities left while I was there. I think he was fired.

I was released from that institution after three weeks.

The next place Dr. Y. sent me was a teaching hospital affiliated with a well-known medical school in a large town. A different kind of shock treatment was administered to me there. It was to do with a drug, I think, and not electricity.

When I was discharged from that hospital I continued to be depressed, anxious and suicidal.

There was one more "stay" at the state mental hospital in 1969 that lasted about ninety days.

Until recently I managed to repress most of the feelings and memories of the traumas, coping somehow with worsening depression, headaches, fatigue and suicidal feelings. But in the spring of 1994 (having been divorced since 1981) I began a new relationship, and something triggered those old repressed memories. Little by little they are coming back to me, and no matter how hard I try they won't "stay down" or go away; neither will the gut-wrenching terror or the pain that I feel in my body and in my heart.

I have to admit that I cannot earn a living for myself or have a normal relationship.

I have felt that if I revealed these seemingly shameful things, even to myself, I would surely die or go irrevocably insane. If so, so be it.

Thank you for reading my story.

CJC

My Worst Experience With the Opposite Sex

One day when John, a neighbor about 60 years old, is outside I ask him, "Will you play hide and seek with me, John?"

He responds, "Where do you want to play?"

"In the chicken coop," I answer back.

It is such a good area for finding places to hide. John and I take turns hiding with one restriction: no climbing up to hide in the bales of hay. We play hide and seek for about twenty minutes. By that time I have had enough of the game. I am ready to go home for a snack.

As we start for the east end doors I am happy that John has played with me. Adults don't usually play like this with children. John suggests that I run to the doors and he will try to catch me. A little game of tag on the way out is great. I run and he catches me about twenty five feet from the doors. Tag is fun .

When John catches me he won't let me go. That is the start of my worst experience with the opposite sex.

John has grabbed me from behind. At first I am not bothered. I think he is just making more fun for me. After awhile when he won't let me go I start getting scared. He tells me, "Don't yell and you will be okay." That does not make sense to me, and therefore frightens me. So many thoughts start going through my mind as he says that one sentence.

I think, "What is going to happen to me? What have I done wrong? Is he going to spank me for something I don't remember? How do I get out of here?"

I wish it had been a spanking. At least I could forget that. Still behind me, holding me still with his arms around me and leaning over me, he pulls up my dress. I know now I am really in trouble. A sixth sense, maybe, makes me aware of what is going to happen. I sure am not going to get a spanking when the front of my dress is pulled up. He put his big, crummy, ugly hand down in my underpants.

He says to me, "Hold still and I won't hurt you." He then puts a finger in me. I start to struggle because of fear and pain. It feels like he has his whole fist inside of me. It hurts and burns. "You better hold still so it won't hurt," he tells me. He is a liar; it does too hurt even when I am holding still.

It was like evil enveloping me. All I could see was blackness and blood red at the same time. I felt terrified, cold, shaky, afraid, trapped, captured. I think, "What is happening is my fault. Oh, if only I didn't want to play, this wouldn't be happening. What is going to happen to me now? Please how can I get out of here?"

It seemed like ages before he let me go. In actuality it was probably ten minutes. John tells me not to tell anyone. How can I say anything? It is so horrible and is my fault. I have no proof that he has done something so terrible to me. I never lost consciousness, have no visible marks, and no scars that can be seen. My hurts and scars are plentiful inside.

I get away from him just as fast as I can run. I go into our bathroom. I try to pee the pain and horrible feeling away. It just doesn't leave. The next few days I spend so much time in the bathroom. It is hard to hide it from my mother. I was so afraid she would ask me what was wrong.

That wonderful play area was never the same again. Yes, I did play there even after what had happened. I looked all around first to make sure John was nowhere near there.

That happened when I was nine. I was eleven when we moved away from there. It was such a relief that I no longer had to be on guard all the time. When we moved away I thought that would be the end of such experiences from the opposite sex. How wrong I was .

Christina B. Morton

Feeling Dirty

Sometimes I dream about this brown eyed, 6 year old little girl. How spontaneous, innocent, trusting and interested in everything around her she is. And she always has a ready smile.

But my dream turns to sadness as I focus on that dreadful morning. The little girl awakens in a small wash-room. She feels apprehensive and fearful, not knowing what is happening. A big hand is over her face, covering her mouth and nose. Sensing danger, she tries to get loose, to run. But she struggled to no avail, she was trapped.

A feeling of helplessness and powerlessness overcame her. There was an indescribable pain and the tears covered her face. She had the feeling of her soul leaving her body and watching from above at what was happening to her.

The little girl was no longer smiling. Her innocence, purity and dignity were gone. A feeling of sadness overcame her and she felt confused. She found herself in the backyard digging a hole in the dirt. She wanted to hide, to disappear, to bury herself. She started to eat the dirt. It was as if she equated what had happened to her with something unclean.

Adria

RAPE'S PAIN

After my rape,
There were external and internal scars,
I wished he was on Mars.
He messed my hair.

I wished I could send him somewhere.
My dignity is bare,
How could he dare ?
There's rips and tears.

Blood is everywhere,
Can I be repaired ?
There's someone, somewhere,
Why do they stare ?

My thoughts are in disarray,
Let's see,
Something terrible has happened to me.
My thoughts weren't the same,
Am I to blame ?

He said, it was my fault,
For the sexual assault.
What could I have done
To never be his pawn?

Was it the clothes I wore ?
Or the way I walked on the floor ?
Or when I was near.
He always watches my rear.

He became aware,
I was just there.
He said his needs,
To feed.

He tried to make me heed,
I tried to plead,
He disagreed.
He grabbed me.

By the nape,
I tried to escape.
He threw me down, on the landscape.
Then I was raped.

My hands were bound,
While I was on the ground,
He yelled, "don't make a sound,"
I prayed for a bloodhound.

Or a coonhound,
Even a nasty dachshund,
I knew I was hellbound.
It was cold,
I smelled mold,
He scolded,
He almost blindfolded,
He had a foothold,
My heart was stone cold.

His acts will never be untold.
I was a mess,
He ripped my dress, I guess.

Will he never confess
My face was abscessed,
I can't stand the stress,
I hated his caress.

I wanted out of his path,
I needed a bath,
I felt my wrath,
----- the aftermath.

The hurt is the worst.
I felt an outburst,
I felt rage,
He needed to be in a cage.

His horrible face on a page,
Even the front page.
His safety, I would wage.

Some of the pain.
Went away,
All I have is shame,
He loved the game.
I had a fit

He said, "you know you wanted it."
My rape was an illusion,
More like confusion,
I have contusions,
And delusions,
I want permanent seclusion.

What did I say '?
To cause him to treat me this way
Was I wrong ?
Not to go along

He says, it was fun,
All I wanted was to run.
He looked well-fed,
I see red.

His thrill,
Caused me guilt,
He makes me ill,
I'm up to the hilt.

Him, I 'd like to kill,
My self esteem needs to be rebuilt.
I'd like to cook him on a grill,
Or run him under a drill.

How can I make him see ?
The way he makes me feel.
This is very real,
Trying to cope.

I have to look at that dope.
He says he can prove,
Without a doubt,
I wanted it.

Did I hang a sign,
On a line,

WANTED BRUTAL SEXIST THUG, FOR POSSIBLE RAPE?

Five Words I'll Never Hear

All I need to become real
is
for
Just one
person
to
Reach for my hand
Touch
My
Tired
Skin
Connect with my eyes
And
Say
The
Words
Nobody
Ever
Loved
Me
Enough
To
Say..

"I'M SORRY FOR YOUR PAIN"

**what is wrong with me
that nobody can love me?**

Judith Ann

Untitled 1

My senses are gone.
I am numb.
One can only dream
but never become.
Once hope is dead,
so am I.
To live like this
is to die.

Untitled 2

I'm scared to know;
I'm scared to see The Truth,
What happened to me.

My hands aren't mine.
My legs aren't real.
I try so hard not to feel.

Blood red, and Black
Too dead, too old
Too far away
So I am told.

No safe return
To my happy past.
No chance at all
That I will last.

Mary O'Brien

Sadness

My heart is squeezed
as if in someone's fists.
Tears tickle my face
I'm cutting my wrists.

I didn't want to
have to do this.
No one to say goodbye to
nobody to hug or kiss.

No reason to live
nobody to miss.
I didn't want it
to end like this.

Mary O'Brien

do not love me

no
do not love me
I'm not here

my heart, my soul
like a festered wound
painful, don't touch

a need to heal
a need for time
aloneness, oneness with me

trust is gone
time will heal
be my friend, no more

if you insist
i will see, your soul
and endure, your pain

listen
can't you hear it weep?
leave my shield alone

don't touch
please
stay away

Lynn Godsey

I wait--
I'm told it will get better,
So, I wait...
But it stays the same.

Sometimes I can't function
I try to make myself numb,
I barely pass from day to day,
I feel weak, stupid and dumb.

Paralysis holds me in place,
keeps me from moving forward with life.
I hate even to look at my face,
my life feels full of confusion and strife.

Where is the childhood that was stolen,
the joys of adolescence that were never mine,
the memories that are still hidden?
If it were not for these, I would be fine.

What I want is peace,
to believe I can be loved,
to feel and behave normally,
to believe in myself and know
I wasn't to blame.

Lela Capehart

Rough Roads

You can't make a map of
recovery from rape.
It's just not that easy.
The roads aren't the same
for everyone.
It's not that simple.

I don't like the mood swings.
I don't like not knowing how
I'm going to feel 5 minutes
from now.
I don't like being unsure of
myself.
I don't like feeling like I'm
hurting my family.
I'm even scared of my feelings
written down.
If I write them down I have
to deal with them.
It's like something - a part of
me is missing.
You just can't make a map of that.

Kea

Untitled

Life is day to day.
Don't know what I'll feel like when I wake up.
That is if I have slept.
Have to feed the children.
We all take baths.
Then off to school we all go.
We never know what mood I'll be in.
Little things trigger me.
Don't cry. Don't yell.
Don't climb on that.
Don't knock on the door.
Don't come up from behind.
This is me.
I don't laugh much.
I don't cry either.
Don't get too close.
Especially don't touch.
I might get quiet or I might yell.
With me it's hard to tell.

Rebecca Oppermann

Talking in My Head

Every day, every hour, every minute, every second,
there is talking in my head.
An argument ensues, and my life they do peruse.

Why the hatred, why the sorrow,
Can't we just stop this until tomorrow?

The constant battle between right and wrong,
Won't it ever be all gone?

The voices, the words, the shattered fragments of my life,
Why does there have to be so much strife?

What must be said, what must be done,
Or has the battle just begun?

Constant talking in my head,
Sometimes I wish I were dead.

The horror of the past comes alive to haunt me,
Still no one cares, much less wants me.

I suit up to face another day, and
Secretly wish I no longer had to pay.

Constant talking in my head,
Sometimes I wish I were dead.

Another day is dawning, new hope may arise,
Or another day full of unspoken cries.

Sometimes my head just wanders,
My life it does ponder.

The anger, the pain, the shame, the guilt,
Piecing things together is like a patchwork quilt.

The despair, the sadness, the sorrow,
I try to live for another tomorrow.

Constant talking in my head,
Sometimes I wish I were dead.

Colleen C.

A scared little kid.
Scared, confused, lost,
Helpless.
All these emotions
Plus lots more
Describe the
Scared little kid.
Scared --
Scared of finding out
What's really
Happening inside.
Scared of dropping
My defenses.
Afraid of being
Hurt.
I want to deal
With this
But I don't know
How to let
My defenses down,
To really talk
About how I feel.
Stop the world,
I want to get off.
That's how I really
Feel.
Confusion --
Confused about what
I'm feeling.
I have so much
Bouncing around inside
I really don't know
Where to start.
Stop the world,
I want to get off.
I'm tired of dealing
With all this junk.
Confused --
How do I drop
My defenses?
How do I deal
With my feelings?
I want to find out
Who the real ME is.

Lost --
I'm missing something,
But what?
What's missing in
My relationship with
My family?
Helpless --
I feel so helpless.
I don't have any control
Of what's happening
I want to deal
With my homosexual feelings
But I'm afraid.
Afraid to deal with them.
Afraid of dropping
My defenses.
Afraid of losing
What little control
I have left.
Afraid of being
Hurt.
Hurt --
I know that feeling
Very well.
I've been hurt
By a lot of
Different people
Over a lot of
Different things.
I feel so ...
Confused, hurt,
Empty, lost.

Eva N. Price

Written the day before I went into Twin Lakes Hospital for a month.

I Am

I am scarred and bruised,
By those men who did abuse.

I wonder at the age of nine, how many rapists, had raped me those times.

I hear the child crying deep within, to rid these mortal sins.

I want to go back to when I was nine, and tell that child, I love you all the time.

I am scarred and bruised,
By those men who did abuse.

I pretended that I was to blame, because I felt so ashamed.
I feel numb in body and soul, no laughing or crying, even my smile has lost its glow.

I touch my body, in the mirror I see all the faces of those who abused me; with hate so strong, I didn't think that death would be wrong.

I worry night and day, how I've become this prisoner and slave; in this jail with no chains or bars, and yet I stay because of scars. Against my will, my will was taken, how could I feel so forsaken.

I cry a tear not for me this time, but for the child I left behind.

I am scarred and bruised,
By those men who did abuse.

I understand that life stops for no man.

I say that Jesus wept.

I dream of times long ago, where love has yet to make whole.

I try to be at peace you see, for this child now lives safe within me.

Did I go to counseling to escape?

At first I might have.

But now I'm facing the pain, and I hope to work through it.

I may be scarred and bruised, but what I do with my wounds, "I now can choose."

ABC's

A is for the answers i cannot seem to find
B is for my body that wasn't always just mine
C is for my cries that no one could hear
D is for the daddy i used to hold so dear
E is for his eyes that looked at me so queer
F is for his fingers that used to explore
G is for his games i didn't want to play anymore
H is for his hands that held me so tight
I is for my imagination where i took flight
J is for the jealousy i didn't understand
K is for his kisses, not knowing where they would land
L is for his lap where he liked for me to sit
M is for his mouth that lied quite a bit
N is for near as he lay with me in bed
O is for on top of me, and wishing i was dead
P is for the prayers sent up with a plea
Q is for the quiet, i can't tell of his deeds
R is for the rest when he left me at last
S is for the secrets buried of the past
T is for the touches i think will never heal
U is for ugly as that's the way i feel
V is for the voice that would not ever say
W is for the worries i'd be taken away
X is for the extra he seemed to want of me
Y is for yesterdays i can't bear to see
Z is for zero because that's what i most want to be

lisa

Lurking in the Dark

As a child, when my bedtime arose, so did my precautions. With my window locked, I crept in bed knowing where my fathers gun rested. Insecurity and recollection of the evening news kept me awake, as my eyes followed every shadow and my ears pierced closer to every sound. I was afraid of what was unseen - beyond the window; beyond my control. Today, as an adult I am still haunted by the unseen traumas.

“Dear Lord, please protect me through the night. Amen”

Crying, Just Because

After the rape,
I felt like I was crazy.

I always had it in the back of my mind.

One time, my friends and I went to Putt Putt and just before I hit the ball I started crying, bawling. My friends told me to "Chill Out."

I remember one time we went to see the movie "Dumb and Dumber." After a scene which was supposed to be funny (when the bird head falls off) I cried and kept crying for the rest of the movie.

My friends told me to "Chill Out." I was confused. I was crying and they were telling me to chill out. Did they care?

One day I sat on the couch at home watching "Prince of Bel-Air" and started crying for no reason.

Now I know I had a reason to cry. I also know its okay to cry. It's better than holding it all in.

Tears let out feelings and emotions. I now know that if you've been raped, crying is okay, just because...

Anger

Anger is an expression
of the way you feel
when you are upset by the rage
pointed in your direction.

The anger inside
I keep locked within so tight
knowing in hopes with all my might
I could find a way to stand up and fight.

The mass of anger
I long to release
Is when I feel my heart in turmoil
could I finally cease.

The time I think
I could finally say my mind.
I seem to rationalize
By making things kind.

The increasing anger
I've known throughout my entire life
Has to stop to rid myself
Of the internal tears I hold inside.

With all my prayers I saved
For that tomorrow
Will be a new day
Filled with joy and not sorrow.

I know I have a lot of anger
That I have built deep down inside
And I know I won't have time
to express to you what's on my mind.

Please help me let my anger out.

Jackie

Painful Temple

Anger tears down my temple of peace.
Seething pain and uncontrollable aches
Brought on by unforeseen rapers of love
Bring me to this moment of RAGE!!!

Why do the stars never mend?
Always the demons return to pretend
To heal the temple
Only to further desecrate its holiness

I've heard there is a balance
That is found deep within
The within known as the Holy of Holies
And now it's my heart which only God can mend

Wanda K. Albrecht

If I Say the Word "Incest"

if I say the word "incest"
connect soul to memory to mouth
I become once again a child
paralyzed
shamed
soiled
invisible in the shadows and
unable to run
from the trembling spasm
of my father's caress..

if I say the word "incest"
I see him above me
feel his demon heat inside my body
rotting away my young mind
with his seed
and
degrading my fear
with his laughter..

if I say the word "incest"
someone is going to
unlock the secret
I live hostage to
every minute of every day

I can't tell!

I can't tell!

I can't tell!

God will not forgive me
nobody will love me
I don't want to be alone anymore!
he will be in me again
and I will be unable to escape
the living death of remembering..

if I say the word "incest"
connect soul to memory to mouth
 somewhere sometime
someone will look closer
 and reveal the disgrace of the
 ancient child
 that sighs wearily in my haunted eyes..
 someone will tell on me
someone will say it was my fault
 and
then the world will know that
the bloodstain on the bathroom floor of my memory
is all that remains
of his dead baby.

Judith Ann

The Inner Child

If you look closely inside the body of this man
you will see a small, scared little boy
wanting to take someone's outstretched helping hand..

He is filled with fear, anger and certainly despair
he desperately wants to believe that someone really cares.
His rage he tries unsuccessfully to contain
bound he is by feelings.....
ones he cannot name.

He wants to be nurtured and held close to someone's chest.
I ask you, who knows how to hold the little boy best?
The answer is the person in whose body he does reside....
the man who hides his inner child inside.

The man mistakenly never lets his child out to grieve,
he believes no one his inner child would receive.
He never ever lets his child out to play, no one he believes
would accept his child today.

The man puts up walls to hide his vulnerability
denying his inner child only denies his masculinity
a man..he is so lonely ... so scared to look inside
so frightened to embrace his inner child and no longer hide

Inside the child lies waiting... patiently for the day
when the man will acknowledge, accept and love him and let
him out to play. I ask you, fearful man is this that day?

Laura

Here's To You!!

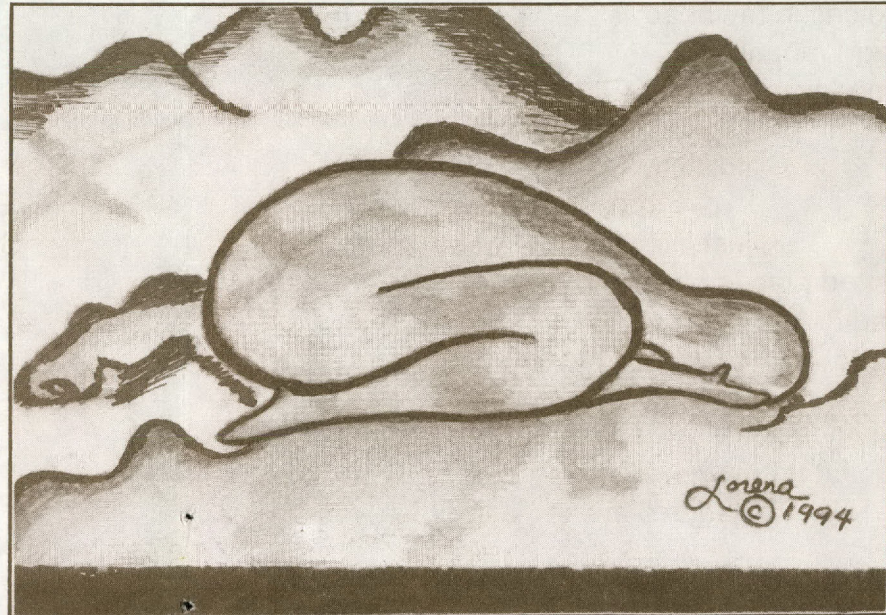
Now I lay me down to sleep
In a man-made hole, six feet deep.
The God of Abraham calls it a "sin"
"Sin" is living in this hell he put me in
The burning sun touches the sky;
A burning tear escapes my eye
He doesn't see, nor does he care
This God hates me, and that's not fair
He made me worthless, like the stain on my shirt
He filled me with pain, agony, and hurt
I call upon him in a time of need
He doesn't hear- doesn't see
He left me alone, and my life's full of shit
He left me to fall in a bottomless pit
He let them all hurt me and put me to shame
Day after day, more of the same
"Put it here, put it there, stick it in anywhere
Slap her face, piss in her hair, force it in
and tell her you care!"
I deserved it, it's the price I pay
But it's still God's fault, he made me this way
So here's to you, God, and your gates of pearl
You didn't rain on my parade
You pissed on my world.

Kristi Moore

Fear

I fear
day, night
dark, light
noise, silence
alone.

Jackie



What It Feels Like to Remember Him

maggots of abuse
crawling out of my brain
a visual reality
that I can't erase..

they multiply
and
swell as they devour me

fluttering in mute rage
then
wailing in protest
at their release
from within the chambers
of my soul

I hear
collective voices in my head
husky and moaning
just like when I was a kid

I sense
collective touches on my flesh
hazy and fumbling
just like when he was a man

fragmented pieces of memory
scurrying to fit together
shivers of fear
racing up and down my spine
vaguely familiar man-scent
permeating my nostrils
daddy's eyes ... ash-blue eyes ...

I try to close my mind
but it's no use
the memories keep slithering forward
groping... fondling... teasing..

I remember his whisper
I remember his night
I remember the curse
he left as he grunted his pleasure
and then
disappeared inside me
never to leave again
I remember his whisper
"you're a very sexy little girl"

Judith Ann

Mental Quicksand

I step lower
into the slate gray chasm
of hopelessness that is
water-logged sand covering my head
and pouring into my lungs..

I begin to panic
because I know
once again
I am trapped
in mental quicksand..

I feel the familiar
slight change in texture
a black hell of smooth consciousness
luring me closer with unblinking seduction
soaking through every gasping pore of my skin
scraping metallic fingernails
across the chalkboard of my sleep..

it methodically
gleefully

strangles me

and

I choke with weak resignation knowing where I must go..

I try to breathe
but its stench
overpowers my senses

I try to move
but its ghost-hands
immobilize me

I try to believe
that there is one reason
I should fight this
but in the end
I take another step
down
into this solitary world
I am exiled to function in
and then
giving in to the release
of convulsive hysteria
I step back up to where I am real for one brief moment
and understand fully
that this is what it feels like to
be buried alive.

Judith Ann

**Before You Can Heal...
You Must First Survive**

Surviving is not doing what you want to do,
when you want to do it,
in order to have a better life.

Surviving is doing what you have to do,
when you don't want to do it,
in order to have any kind of life

Surviving means putting yourself last,
when you most need to be first --
walking the line between selflessness
and
self-destruction

It is a full time job
24 hours a day
7 days a week,
with no chance of vacation or sick leave.

Survival is omniscient denial
and
blind acceptance

It is the pill you don't want to swallow, but cannot give up.
First you don't think you can deal with it,
then don't think you can deal without it.

Survival is the dormancy before the acceptance of change--
a traumatically induced pupa state.

It is a thickly calloused cocoon,
protecting, comforting, and nourishing,
showing no outward signs of maturity or growth,
while unbearably constricting the life within.

It is the first step...
but not the last.

Whereas, before you can heal,
you must first survive;
in order to survive, you too must heal.

You have taken the first steps...
don't let them be your last.

Jim Jordan

The Right Thing

I want my life back, and I think it's time
that I take back all that's rightfully mine.

I'll recover my pride and I'll tell you my name
But you'll have to promise it's not me that you'll blame.

I've spent my life helping others to share the pain in their
hearts.....

it just isn't fair, that I should be left all torn up inside,
afraid to share, because of my pride.

I know it's not right that I can't tell the truth
about what I learned way back in my youth.

It wasn't my fault, but I felt so ashamed,
I knew that I would lose if my abuser was named.

I tried to believe what you told me was true.....
After all, you said it had happened to you.

When I took your advice and decided to tell,
Life as I knew it became a living hell.

My family abandoned me right from the start,
and that was just the beginning of my broken heart.

I blamed them for everything bad in my life,
and held them accountable for all of my strife.

Now, my abuser is dead, and I'm still alone.
Why didn't someone tell me I'd be left on my own?

Now I'm alone like I was at the start,
With only my secrets breaking my heart..

So if you want to tell, be sure that you know,
That some people will stay, but others will go.

Whatever you do you must understand,
Most won't agree that you must take a stand.

So know the consequences, be always apprised.....
Don't be like I was and end up surprised.

Though many may swear it's the right thing to do,
You just have to do the right thing for you.

If you tell, or you don't, need never fear.....
You won't be abandoned --- AMAC is here.*

Tracey Reed

**Editor's Note: AMAC refers to support groups for adults molested as children.*

Seven Survivors

Riding piggyback with his hands in my pants.
I felt like I couldn't stop it from happening,
My uncle sitting on the couch,
Nervous and sick to my stomach--every time
Anal sex.

Sitting on the floor of my bathroom,
huddled against the toilet.
I didn't like it at first,
but learned to "love" it later.
Leaving my body and
seeing through the cracks in the garage
as the sun came through the wood.

"We just can't tell, it has to be a secret."
"I wish I would have had something to do with
getting you pregnant," he said.
I remember my brother telling me his friend's
sister ran around naked in front of him,
as if that were perfectly natural.
To myself I said, "I will try to get away
from the 'touching' by making myself unavailable
and avoiding 'tickling sessions.'"
"Give me yours."
"I'm going to kill you."
"If you do this I won't hurt your sisters."
"If you tell we'll both get in trouble."

Why did you do this to me?
Do you really know all the pain you have caused?
It changed my life forever
I want to "whup" your mother fucking ass!
I wish you could realize the impact
the abuse had on my life;
IT was ABUSE and NOT NORMAL!
I wish you had a concept of how bad you hurt me!
When you were fondling me,
I knew it was happening
and I haven't forgotten it.
It had a negative impact on my life:
You are very sick,
even though the rest of the world can't tell it.
I want you to take responsibility
for your action and get help!
You are scum and I hate you
for what you did to my family;
not just for what you did then,
but what its doing today.

The Gift

Do you see her?
The girl in the sunflower dress.
She is everything
to everyone
on the outside.
The parade of people
behind her
make no secret
of their adoration.
To them, she is a
bronze goddess.
Untouchable.
Unreachable.
She is like a gift
wrapped in silver
and gold
adorned with ribbons
and wonderful things.
Oh, what a present to receive
while still unopened.
But when the package
is opened, what is inside
does not reflect
the beauty of what is outside.
When stripped,
all that is inside is
pain
defeat
loneliness
rejection.
All the things
that make a person
bitter.

The years of anguish
have left her
unable to love.
Oh, what a disappointment
the naked gift inside is.
Like a delicate rose
with thorns on the inside,
she stabs at herself
until there is nothing left
but grief.

Katie Phillips

Men!

My boyfriend so desperately
tried to make me happy.
He filled me with trite sayings,
which I found to be quite sappy.

I know he's trying,
and cheering me up is hard.
But he says all this silliness
and calls himself a bard.

I just don't like being touched.
I don't like being kissed.
I push him away,
so now he thinks I'm pissed.

How can I explain to him?
Should I tell him the truth?
(My father raped me when I was a youth.)

I've made him so confused,
which I don't feel is fair.
I'll tell him what has happened
and pray that he will care.

But why do I even try?
He let me down again,
gave me that look, and said,
"I suppose now you hate men."

Mary O'Brien

Survive

A precious gift
torn from me.

Taking me from innocence
to confusion

by a sheer stroke
of violence.

Mean and hateful
and without remorse.

Leaving me on a deadly
and awkward course.

Left to me to correct,
to sacrifice,
over and over again,
myself,
to make things right.

Deep down inside
I pull back up
the inner strength
that was given me
to survive.

Regardless of what it takes,
I'll work,
I'll cry,
I'll get by.

Only I know
that what I have
here inside,
no one will ever break
the Spirit I hold
in my heart
to Survive.
And Survive,
I Will

My Spirit Will Fly

Darkness, pain, hurt, fear
Tracing the path of a single tear.
I'm scared to talk today
So instead I walk away.
What will they say when they know?
Will they be like others and say it's all a show?
The Light I see seems far away
I know I won't reach it -- not today.
There has to be someone to care,
Someone who'll help me make it there.
With the group the light seems suddenly near
They reach out to help and it's very clear.
They are not strangers to the pain or fear
They too have felt that lonely tear.
By helping each other, we'll make it thru
The road may be long, but they know that, too.
And now I must stop as I'm starting to cry
But tomorrow will come and my spirit will fly!

Cyndi

My Enchanted Daydreams

I close my eyes
And let my images of life
Go before my eyes
And let my daydreams come true.

What a wondrous place I have
Filled with moonbeams and starlight skies.
I can recapture my youth in every twine
That's my magical world that's beyond

My enchanted world would be
A mystical place and have no flaws.
Where I'm the only one
And I'm not afraid or worried
I am caressed in my heavenly world.

I feel like I could fly
Like an angel with beautiful wings
I can float in those big fluffy clouds.
And still see that splendid moonlight.

It's a place where I can find love
Where two hearts can beat as one
And recapture the innocence of each moment
That can't be found outside my dreams

I'm carefree and away from pain
Of my so called life each day
I can be an angel and fly away
I'm immortal or whatever I would like to be when I close my
eyes and daydream.

Jackie

Hope

The dark gloom,
sometimes is like a tomb.
with the heaviness all around
where pain, fears, and tears abound.

I know there's a way out,
where I can stand in the light and shout.
Happy to be alive,
at last, glad I did survive.

I'm on the right path at last,
although I can't walk very fast,
healing lies ahead,
I no longer wish I was dead.

I look toward being whole,
even in the depths of my soul,
to be one with the hurt little child,
free to love, live, play and be wild.

With the past in the past,
dead and gone at last,
never again to haunt me,
at last, at last, I'll be free.

Lela Capehart

Grandpa raped me, but I am here
To say - I'm learning how to cope with fear
By taking courage in fear's face
And working at a forward pace.

Knowing that I can defeat
These disgusting feelings from his deceit
And I will learn to trust again
When I have dealt with what has been.

Each step I take is moving forward
Away from my grim past
But at least I'm living in today
And the pain is lessening - at last.

Thanks to the help of those who care
They're loved far more than they can know
And to a loving God who leads the way
Down paths that I must go.

Family Vows

Till divorce do us part.
Don't talk to anyone outside the family.
Incest is best.
Why go outside the family, it's right here.
I raised you now take care of me.
Children are to be seen and not heard.
Daddy's can play with their little girls.
Mommy does whatever daddy says.
If you're self-reliant you're not important.
Do as I say not as I do.

My Vows

Till death do us part.
Friends outside of the family are treasured.
Incest has to be stopped.
I have to have my own life.
I live for myself, not my family.
Children are people too.
Daddy's need to keep their hands to themselves.
Mom's need to stand up for themselves.
Do unto others as you would have done to you.

Rebecca Oppermann

Dad,

I once trusted in you fully. You were always in my mind. I couldn't wait to see you between the long spans of time. "Daddy, Daddy," I'd cry, "I've missed you so much." But yet, "Good-bye," one more time.

All the time apart. Most of my young life--but you were still Daddy and I loved you with all my heart. I too want the happy memories, and a warm family and heart. But now there's a broken bridge between us. Where did it start?

Did it start in the bathroom? Or on your bed one day? As long as no one knew, "everything will be okay?" But for you I was a "Thing That Should Not Be." You thought I'd forget or pretend the rest of my life, but I am a survivor, a victim no more will I be. You were my Daddy and in my heart you'll always be, but in my life I'd think I'd be safer alone and standing on my own two feet.

Chris

She Stands Alone

I'm not the same any more,
there is this very strong woman
emerging from within.

This woman, though still new to me,
wants and will take a stand.

This new woman feels with such intensity
that it is explosive.

She wants to know the truth,
though, at first she timidly
raises her head to speak.

She does not want to be stopped.

She does not want to be told what to do,
she sees herself in flight
to worlds unknown -
excited and frightened at the
same time.

In search of herself, she fights
the demons from within,
Nothing can stop her.

She's in a strange land and
knows not where she is going.

She only knows that there is a strong
driving force which
leads her to
a
new life
a
new existence

Elaine E. McGrady

MUTE NO MORE

One of the things that happens when a person is sexually abused is that they are overwhelmed with shame - shame that does not belong to them but shame nevertheless.

Shame makes them keep the secret of what was done to them.

Shame drives them to forget what has happened, to close the door on the overwhelming pain of their abuse.

They block the memories of the pain and the shame.

The sad result is that in blocking their pain they also block their spontaneity, creativity, and joy.

In keeping the secret they still their own voices-
--- voices that long to cry out -- in anger and in grief.
---voices that also yearn to laugh and to sing.

No one can change the fact that the sexual abuse occurred.

But grieving their losses can restore the survivors' voices and their choices.

I know it is so.

I lost my voice and my joy to childhood sexual abuse.

Through counseling I have reclaimed my right to cry, to scream, to speak out and to sing.

Liz Cantu

No Longer a Rug

Before I started counseling I talked with an Elder at my church about counseling. I had questions that needed to be answered. I called the Women's Center one day and a counselor called me back and I have been coming since that time. When I first started I was afraid to really talk about how I was touched. As I kept coming, it got a little easier and now I have told my story in group.

There are a lot of roads that are new to me that I never thought I would travel. I have learned about the lies that the abuse taught me to believe. I didn't love me for 30 years, but now I like myself. And that is a big step for me.

I didn't know who I was for a long time. I used to be a rug, but now I know I don't need to be walked on to be a friend. I am standing up for myself more. I am trying to reparent myself and my kids with positive messages.

I know what its like to feel low, unloved, disrespected and even suicidal. Now I'm learning what its like to feel better. I'm learning to trust, learning to pay more attention to my fears and joys. I guess I never really dealt with my feelings so I felt like a rug. The more I feel the more I stand up for myself instead of letting people walk on me. I no longer feel like a rug.

B. Lee

To The Child Within Me,

I've kept you safe all my life but now that's not enough. You want your story told and to be free from deep inside me. Your voice is louder than mine, your strength overwhelms me. You're strong because of what happened to the little girl. Your virtue, youth, and trust were stolen from you, so you hid yourself, ashamed of who you are or were. But now you're freeing yourself because your punishment is over.

All these years, I blamed you for what happened, but it really wasn't your fault. You were the victim! You paid a high price for the love and tenderness that you always longed for. Karen's life started out by being given up by her natural mother - being adopted from a children's home as a six month old by a woman who really wanted to be a mother but never really knew how to. You keep asking me where was everyone - I don't know - they were there - she had to know - why didn't someone stop the abuse?

Then your parents were divorced so you had no role models to teach, love and respect you. So you and I grew up the only way we knew to survive - do what it takes to love, learn, and grow. So I did... and strived to be the best I could be, but along the way I lost you, the child. I grew, or I thought I did, but I forgot you and kept you inside and protected where no one could hurt you. But by never letting you free, I kept myself locked up, never really feeling the love, trust, and respect I so desired. So from last week, I learned that I am so sorry for what happened to you but I don't blame you or myself since we are the same person. So I'm learning to let you have the freedom you want and growth you deserve.

Thanks for being you!

Once upon a time there was a me, a little Me, full of hopes and dreams, laughter and smiles, giggles and tickles, a love of the sun, and trees and ice cream and kitties. A little Me bursting full of life and love and trust. Nothing stood in the way of little Me. She loved. She hated. She laughed. She cried. She felt.

Little Me was whole. Little Me was happy.

Little Me became big Me too many years too early. Nobody really remembers when little Me quit feeling or why little Me stopped smiling. Nobody wants to tell little Me exactly what happened. Nobody wants to tell big Me either. Everybody thinks big Me is doing good considering what happened to little Me but nobody will say exactly what did.

So big Me hid little Me so far from the world, big Me forgot where she was. Big Me could hear her crying every once in a while when the world got still and the pain quit growing. Big Me heard her tantrums when little Me tried to warn about mistakes being made but big Me made them anyway because big Me wasn't really sure if that was little Me or the stupidity everybody wanted to prove.

Big Me felt the pain and anguish of little Me dying. Big Me got scared. Little Me was supposed to be protected and safe. Nobody had meant for little Me to suffocate. Everybody was just trying to do the right thing.

Then one day big Me said "Enough anymore- I've been big Me for too long. I can't take anymore. The world is sucking out all of my air, all of my life." Little Me had begun to suffocate. She wasn't heard. She wasn't listened to. She was hidden so far away she couldn't even stick her head out for a breath of fresh air.

So big Me stopped and started to dig very carefully to not hurt little Me but quickly to get her some air. Some of the shovelful were thick and heavy, some of them were light and easy. But each shovelful brought big Me closer to little Me until one day they were close enough to pull little Me out.

Big Me placed little Me on her shoulders so little Me could help steer the way. This way little Me could get all the air and sunshine she wanted. She could even have a balloon. Little Me said to big Me, "Know what? I'm as big as a giant now. We're a GIANT Me. We're bigger than we ever were before." Big Me thought for a moment and said, "Little Me, you have fun up there because you'll never have to climb down. This way we are taller and stronger than everybody thought we'd be and nobody ever wanted us to be this strong." And big Me carried little Me through life on her shoulders and little Me laughed and giggled and let big Me know when there were things everybody hoped they would trip on and things nobody ever wanted them to do.

The End

Wendy Player Akos

Choices

Today I choose to be happy..
I will visit with a neighbor who is suffering,
I will take time from my day to smile at a stranger,
and
I will reach out a hand of friendship
towards someone who might feel alone..

Today I choose gracious living..
I will accept my defeats as well as my victories with style,
I will replace negative thoughts with positive affirmations,
and
I will open my mind to changing directions..

Today I choose spiritual healing..
I will humbly ask my God to guide my life-path,
I will be patient with others
even when I cannot understand their choices,
and
I will pray for a forgiving heart
towards those who have hurt me..

Today I choose new attitudes ...
I will quiet my own inner-chaos long enough
to hear another person's point of view,
I will take the risk to say "I love you" to someone
who may not seem lovable,
and
I will become stronger, even though I realize
that to feel this new strength I may be required
to suffer more necessary pain..

at the beginning of this day
as
the moon sighs her last breath
and
the sun bursts through the storm clouds
I will
bow my head in silent gratitude
for all that God
has given me
and
I will grow...
and I will grow...
and I will grow.

Judith Ann

Summer Sounds

I

Do you hear that?
Summer Sounds ...
I'm breaking down the walls.
There is no compromise.
I let myself grieve,
For my loving parents is only a fantasy.
The fantasy dies.

I'm holding up me head,
and I'm skipping along
green, grassy knolls.
Clouds of sheep in the skies.

Sustained by the sweet smells
of the fruit-air
and drinking the tears
from my childhood cries.

And I smile at the death
of the pain and sorrow,
the hope of no tomorrow
and the endless lies.

II

I resurrect my body
and give it back it's life.
I lose all the sadists
by losing family ties.

I'm alive! I'm free!
I'm a child for once!
As innocent as a flower
attracting butterflies.

I say to me fears,
to the loneliness,
and my loveless childhood years
all my endless goodbye's.

And to my lost hope
and my suicide rope,
to all my stifled gasps
and pitiful sighs...

For once I breathe freely,
as I begin my new life
with a whole new course
and a new set of eyes.

Mary O'Brien

After All This

I never trusted or believed,
I always needed proof.
I have waited and wondered if this thing called
love would ever enter my heart.

But it wouldn't come to me... so I thought.
And now, after all this, I see its always been
in me, but I couldn't see.
My vision was blurred, my mind was scorched
and my heart could only bleed.

And after all this it only seems to be dreams.
How could I keep my eyes clear?
How could I stop the burning in my brain?

The only thing clear now
is the stitches that are in my heart.
Every time someone loved
me they put another stitch in my scar.

And after all this, I haven't died.
I didn't die of the pain that dripped from my heart.
Every stitch will heal as I accept
the fact that it was all Real.

Which means I and my feelings are Real.
And Now, after all this, I can live with me.

Chris Waltman

To All of Us

I dedicate this poem to:
Cathy, Lisa, Beverly, Phyllis,
Jana, Yolanda and Tammy.
And this is Jackie
This is all of us.

I am the chatter in the clouds above.
I am the lucky one that can see each
 one in their own light.
I am the beauty that you see above us.

But don't forget
I am the fabulous stars that shine so
 bright each night.
But I am the joy in each sunrise and sunset.

I am the youth that lives inside
And I am the talking you
hear that comes from within.

But I am not joking when I can say
Each of you have touched me so deep inside.
I will not forget the friends
I made with each morning I rise

Chatty Cathy
Lucky Lisa
Beautiful Beverly
Fabulous Phyllis
Joyful Jana
Young Yolanda
Talking Tammy
Joking Jackie

Jackie

Monday

one walks heavily in and we sit and
she pours out bottles of tears as the anguish
in her facial contortions articulate her pain.
I listen, head inclined, with open body posture;
I nod and "mm hmm" and reflect feelings and
ask open-ended questions.
We schedule for next week
and she leaves.

Another enters and we sit and
she describes with excruciating precision
the heart pounding terror of waking up to
a man in her home with a knife to her throat.
I listen, head inclined, with open body posture;
I nod and "mm hmm" and reflect feelings and
ask open-ended questions.
We schedule for next week,
and she leaves.

Another enters and we sit and
she spills out a story of betrayal by a
parent and looks to me for answers to the
"Whys?" and "Why Me's?"
I listen, head inclined, with open body posture;
I nod and "mm hmm" and reflect feelings and
ask open-ended questions.
We schedule for next week,
she leaves and I
eat my lunch.

Another enters and we sit and
he describes his isolation and his fear of life
and thoughts of death and
anger at the abuser.
I listen, head inclined, with open body posture;
I nod and "mm hmm" and reflect feelings and
ask open-ended questions.
We schedule for next week,
and he leaves.

Another enters and we sit and
she tells of the unshakable nightmares and how her
Mom thinks she is using this to get attention.

She wonders if she will ever trust again.
I listen, head inclined, with open body posture;
I nod and “mm hmm” and reflect feelings and
ask open-ended questions.
We schedule for next week,
and she leaves.

Another enters and sighing deeply
berates herself for the depression
she battles since the 6 years of ongoing
sexual abuse by her step-father.
She wants to know if there is really hope.
I listen, head inclined, with open body posture;
I nod and “mm hmm” and reflect feelings and
ask open-ended questions.
We schedule for next week,
and she leaves.

I pack up my things and head home and away
and fix something to eat.
I try not to listen.
I sit head reclined and
reflect on the day,
and as my body posture
closes
my eyelids overflow
and a saltiness
touches my lips.

For Amy

You surprised me at lunch with the intensity of your feelings.
Wet Asian eyes, eyes dark as pools.
translucent in your vulnerability, available to cry in public
you said (I am so sad).
only a woman can really understand these feelings,
we who hear about rape and violation on a daily basis.
We who work with the survivors.
you said (I don't know what is wrong with me)

Tears leaking from your depths,
seeping like ground water from an old well,
from an old wound,
wet slashes about your eyes.
You were confident that I - a woman- could share your sorrow,
the shared sorrow of so many other women.
I wanted to, but couldn't, tried, felt myself holding back
It was like jumping rope with no rhythm, just didn't work.
I could only listen.

I was in a happy mood that day, cheery and buoyant-
disconnected from the pain of the world.
Still, I was aware of my limitation, felt some slight guilt
for wanting to stay safely wrapped
within the cocoon of my personal joy,
for choosing to keep some distance.
Aware of both choice and limitation.

Things have a way of catching up, coming full circle,
none of us is immune to pain in this life.
Feelings shift, positions change.
We are all affected by different stories at different times.
Some hit harder than others for no logical reason.
But, then, the heart is not always obedient to logic,
It can be wayward, mysterious, with hidden needs of its own,
trapdoors that open and close of their own volition.
open and close within the doors of denial.

I, feeling pain later, hearing too many rape stories,
wanting to cry (for no reason)
feeling the wounds that both connect and separate us.
isolation sharp as a spear.
I need a friend to talk to... I thought...
(I don't know what is wrong with me.)

Eileen Cowan

500 Count, 2-Ply

Fresh, soft, white and inviting
the pleats emerged from
the hard-cornered cardboard.

A slight tug
and it released into her hand,
the last of its kind.

Oh, the heaviness
of an empty klennex box.

No Paradigm

As we completed our time together
I was reminded that we have no real paradigm
for the counseling relationship.

Prophet, priest, mentor, mother,
teacher, coach, confidante, guide?
All catch glimpses of the truth.

I guess you'd have to be there
to understand.

A Mysterious Process

Long corridors darkened by closed doors
allowing little sunlight to reach
the passerby.

What goes on behind these doors
is a mystery to those on both sides.

Inside
wounded souls share secrets
releasing them from shame-cased cocoons.

Outside
the onlookers see caterpillars go in,
and butterflies emerge.

Barb Sewell

A Dialogue

Questioning;

How can you counsel people
day after day?

Listening, caring, attending...
Isn't it hard?

Answering;

It's not easy,
just like climbing a mountain
isn't easy,
but sometimes the climb
is worth it.

Questioning;

What keeps you going
day after day?

Listening, caring, attending...
Don't you get discouraged?

Answering;

You should see
the climbers...
They are enough to inspire
anyone.

Barb Sewell

How to Keep a Victim Silent

Say,
"You know you wanted it.",
"No one will believe you."

Say,
"You'll break your Mom's heart;
you'll destroy the family."
"It could kill her."

Say,
"People won't believe you,
because you waited so long to tell."

Say,
"People won't believe you,
because you took off your own panties."

Say,
"You were too pretty to be a virgin,"
then wink, and tell her she wanted it.

Say,
"Boys will be boys."
"When are you going to get over it?"

Say,
"I know your body responded."
If her body responded, say, "see you liked it."

Say,
"What did you think would happen if you
snuck out of your parents' house at night?"

Say,
"They don't get you 'till they get your mind."

Say,
"You are just using this for attention."

Say,
"Why did you go with him?"
"Why were you alone with him if you didn't want it?"

Say,
"Why did you let him?"

Say,
"Why did you wear that?"

Say,
"You were drinking, weren't you?"

Say,
"I thought you liked him. "

Say,
"Why didn't you fight?"

Say,
"Did you scream for help?"

Say,
"Where are the bruises?"

There are many ways to silence a victim.
To give a victim voice--
listen.

*Barb Sewell
Melodye Brooks
Wanda Flenner*

Texas Department of Health
Office of the Attorney General
Texas Association Against Sexual Assault

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