

Hope for Survivors of Childhood Abuse

A Healing Journey Towards a Fulfilling Life

By Sheila M. Stevenson

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PART ONE - INTRODUCTION

How to Read this Book for Maximum Benefit

Tips on how to use this book

Everyone who reads does so in their own unique way. How we read a book often depends on the nature of the book. Let me explain how reading *Hope for Survivors of Childhood Abuse* can benefit you.

This is an autobiographical book. I have shared my stories, my pain and triumphs, because I want to help others who have been, or are still, victims of child abuse. This book is for people who may be „stuck’ in their healing journey. It is also a workbook, and that portion of it was created for the same purpose.

The stories contained herein do not necessarily follow in chronological order. Each chapter has been written to stand alone, followed by a *Lesson Learned*, a *Helpful Tip*, and a *My Journal* section.

For those who are still mired in the depths of abuse and possible anger or depression, I encourage you to read one chapter at a time. When you finish reading a chapter, make a commitment to yourself to follow through with the three sections at the end of it. Give yourself an opportunity to reflect on the *Lesson Learned*. Consider how the *Helpful Tip* might be able to assist you. Then grab a pen or pencil and jot down your thoughts in *My Journal*. You don’t need to be a good writer. You don’t even need to be a good speller. You can even draw pictures. What is important is to just open yourself up to the process of healing.

Some of you will be reading this book because you want to better understand a loved one. While you may not choose to do the journaling, it is important for you to read the questions. If and/or when your loved one is ready to open up to you, they may choose to provide answers to some of the questions asked. Or, they may simply want to be able to tell their own story, in their own way, trusting that you will listen fully and non-judgmentally to them. They don’t necessarily need or want you to „fix’ things for them. They do need to feel heard.

Throughout this book I refer to God, because I am a Christian. You may adhere to another faith, so I encourage you to replace God’s name with the Deity or Higher Power of your choosing. If you do not practice any faith or belief in a higher being, I hope you will still consider the benefits to be found within these pages.

Why I wrote and who can benefit

This book has been written for three groups of people. And in the process of writing it, I experienced my own cathartic healing.

My primary focus is on the walking wounded, those who have been victims of childhood abuse. Over the years, I have met many fellow victims. Too many of these wonderful people are still living under the extended emotional influence of their abusers. Too often these victims do not see themselves as having any value, and they generally do not feel as if anything they have to say or do is of worth. I believe they are mistaken simply because they have not yet found a way out of the muck of abuse. My hope is that they will learn to heal, become survivors and make healthy and wonderful lives for themselves.

The second group I have written for are those who love and/or care for victims of childhood abuse. Hopefully, this book will help you to understand in some way what your loved one has experienced. Some victims can learn to heal themselves, but many more will need professional assistance with the process. For their sake, and your own, please do not attempt to be your loved one's therapist. Unless you are a professionally trained psychiatrist, psychologist or therapist, you are simply not qualified and you could inadvertently cause further harm. Even if you are qualified, let someone else conduct the therapy. Your loved one needs you to be their caring support.

Victims can be any age, ranging from small children through to the elderly. While most countries now have laws in place that require the reporting of suspected child abuse, it doesn't always happen. Millions of children have fallen through the cracks and are being abused even as I write. Millions more were abused years ago and have had to live all their lives with the ravages of abuse. It is never too late to hold out the heart and hand of healing.

The third group of people this book could prove beneficial for are the teachers, clergy, physicians, clinicians, and therapists who work with abuse victims. This book will provide them with a means of offering hope to their students, parishioners, patients, and clients. Hope is the first word in the title of this book, and an acronym I have created. It stands for **Healing Our Powerful Emotions**®. Every one of us experiences powerful emotions. Sometimes, they are warm and fuzzy and sometimes they are not. My emotions are my own, and as I learn more effective methods of expressing them, I become a healthier human being. This process does not happen overnight, so be gentle with you.

May you also become a healthier individual.

PART FOUR - MY CHILDHOOD

The Landlord's Son

His name was Richard*. He scared the heck out of me. He was a head taller than me, a lot heavier, and older by at least two years. I was 12. He had blonde hair and a ruddy complexion which flushed even redder when he was stimulated or angry.

'We're out of milk. Go get some.' That was my mother's order to me. My baby brother needed his bottles refilled. I wanted to scoot over to the local variety store, but my mother told me I was to go to the grocery store at the shopping centre because milk was cheaper there. As I headed out the door, she reminded me to bring back the receipt for the purchase.

From our duplex apartment in a suburb of Montreal, where we lived at that time, the shopping centre was a mile and a half away. It was late afternoon in the early spring. To get to the shopping centre, I could go one of two different ways. The longest route would take me over to the highway and then along beside it to the grocery store. Or, I could trudge up the unfinished roadway through the woods. It was getting dark, so in my naïve, youthful ignorance, I chose the shorter route through the woods. The road graders had been through to do some preparatory work which left mounds of newly turned earth and downed trees. I still remember the smell of the freshly disturbed earth all around me. It was kind of creepy to be walking there all alone, so it was with mixed feelings that I saw our landlord's son approaching me, at a run.

Too late, I realized he was agitated. I could tell he was worked up about something, and I soon found out why his face was so red. He pushed me to the ground and began tearing my coat open. He was on top of me, pinning me to the dirt, ripping at my blouse to get it open and pulling up my skirt at the same time. I started screaming and hitting him, but his face got redder and he told me to, 'Shut up'. I could smell his sweat and his face was glistening. I kept pounding at him, and as I did he placed his mouth over my left nipple, and bit onto it - hard. He bit me again on the inside fleshy part of my breast. He broke through my skin and drew blood. At that point, my survival instinct kicked in and I kned him in the groin. He rolled off of me, groaning and swearing. At the same time, he was threatening, 'I'll get you later'. I took off like a startled jack rabbit, running as fast as I could while attempting to smooth out my clothes, readjust my training bra, and do up my buttons at the same time.

I was scared more than I had ever been in my life. My heart was racing and I felt as if I couldn't catch my breath. My breast was hurting real bad, and tears of pain and fear were running down my face. I knew that if I didn't carry on to the grocery store to buy milk, that I would likely get a beating when I returned home. I felt so alone and vulnerable. As it turns out, I did get smacked around when I arrived home because of the soiled and disheveled state I was in. My mother accused me again of being clumsy and stupid, and getting myself all messed up because of it.

I tried to tell my mother what really happened, but she accused me of „enticing the boy'. She told me this over and over throughout my childhood and teen years whenever a boy would dare to even look at me. There were no open arms waiting for me at home. There were never any kind words of empathy and understanding for me. I was confused and terrified, and only 12 years old.

Richard was working up steam and plotting his revenge.

Our upper level duplex apartment was quite spacious. There was a living room, three bedrooms, a large eat-in kitchen, and a four piece bathroom. The main entrance to our apartment was downstairs through a door in the side of the building which opened into a closed-in stairwell. At the top of the stairs was a solid door which opened into our hallway. There was another entrance off the kitchen. That door had a window in it and it opened onto a balcony, with stairs that went down to the back yard. Richard's parents were our landlords, and he lived downstairs with them and his siblings.

One day, I was left at home to look after my baby brother. I loved taking care of him. He smelled so sweet and new. His skin was soft and pink, and he was starting to coo and babble. He was a good baby, and he never really caused much of a fuss, so he was a joy to look after.

All of a sudden, I heard the downstairs side door open, none too softly. Then I heard Richard's voice yelling, 'I told you I'd get you.' I plopped my sleeping infant brother in his playpen, and the next words out of Richard's mouth sent me scurrying to the door. He said, 'I've got a key and you won't be able to get away this time.' I dropped to the floor and braced my back against the door, with my outstretched feet against the opposite wall. He must have seen my parents and my other brother leave in the car, and he waited just long enough to make sure they were out of sight. How long I stayed in that position listening to him rant, I don't know. I was crying from terror and panic, and my legs were shaking from the strain of bracing myself against the wall. But I knew if I stopped holding on, he would get through the door and hurt me, and possibly my baby brother, too.

No one was going to hurt my little brother if I could help it. I was as concerned for him as I was for myself at the time. I couldn't believe this scenario was happening. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, and just as Richard was threatening to go to the back door and break in the glass, I heard the bottom door open again. Then I heard my father's voice yelling, 'What the hell do you think you're doing?' All I could hear was a commotion at the bottom of the stairs. I was still braced between the door and the wall. Then my father ordered me to open the door. As my parents and brother entered, they could see I was crying and extremely distressed. My mother asked me, 'What did you do to entice that boy?' I was stunned by her question, given what she had just witnessed.

No 12 year old should ever have to feel as frightened, alone, and blamed as I did at that moment. Apparently, there was a heated discussion between my father and Richard's, and we moved shortly after this incident. Needless to say, I was wary of boys for a long time after that.

One day several years later, at my job, I saw Richard with a male friend and two girls. My heart jumped up into my throat and I struggled to breathe. On the inside, I was in an absolute state of panic, but my strong work ethic propelled me towards his table because it was in my section of the restaurant. He looked right at me, and obviously right through me. He and his friends placed their orders. I served them their meals, but wasn't able to completely catch my breath until they were finally gone. I was so thankful that he didn't recognize me, I cried.

Lesson Learned: *Many years after these terrifying events, I came across an article that spoke to the issue of „victims' of abuse. I don't recall the exact words or the actual reference. What I gleaned from the article was the necessity of being able to recognize myself as a victim. I also learned that my demeanor and body language often gave me away as a „target'. Sometimes a bully picked up on that aspect of my behavior or posture and, indeed victimized me again in some way. It's important for our emotional, mental, and even physical well-being to be able to learn how to move from victim mentality to survivor mode. It can be done. It's hard work, but absolutely worth every effort it takes.*

Helpful Tip: *Perhaps you have a trusted person in your life that you could get feedback from on how they see you presenting yourself to the world. It is invaluable information when given gently and kindly and, received without judgment or emotional drama. If you want the information, you need to be open to hearing it honestly.*

My Journal: *How did I behave or communicate during the time when I was a victim? Did I ever feel that I didn't know how to stop being a victim? How was I able to overcome that feeling? How do I present myself to the world now?*