

Sacred Secrets

verian barker

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shedding the shackles of my shame

Introduction

As she reflects, she chuckles a little. It is the kind of laugh that exudes confidence. Being so self-assured is new territory for her. She didn't know how to be this way when she was growing up. Her environment was one of perpetual fear; awaiting the crazed outbursts from an abusive father who would summon her mother and her siblings whenever his perversion demanded, and beat the hell out of them all.

After these lickings, her mother would cower with them, and reassure them that their daddy was not really a bad man; that one day the Lawd was going make him better. Years of this betrayal by the ones who were supposed to protect and love her had replaced her dignity, dreams and ambitions with a package of survival instincts and coping skills that ranged from promiscuity to drugs.

Now she gets quiet; pensive; reflective. My life was tough, she says, but I know that I have been able to overcome more than twenty five years of crack addiction to give my siblings hope. We did not have great role models in our parents and, in turn, we were not great role models ourselves. But I have been restored to show all of my

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family members that there is hope when there is God in your life.

She chuckles again. By now I know that when she chuckles she is deep in thought.

We can't keep drowning our pain in activities and substances that alter our reality, she continues. You know, we were taught to pretend what happened to us did not happen. That was my mother's way of dealing with her abuse, and she conditioned us to do the same, so that she didn't have to face the fact that she failed us. Mother demanded that we kept our abuse secret; within the family; where it was safe and understood. She would tell us we were too young to understand that we don't have to tell everything to every body 'cause it wouldn't their business. Even now, she pretends that the beatings she received were mere pushes and shoves, and not the savage beatings that they were. She shakes her head with incredulity, as she continues.

So, for years, we acted as though our lives were normal; that our social challenges were just a normal part of growing up, and the fact that there are so many incarcerations and felonies amongst us has nothing to do with our nurturing, but is a result of poor choices we deliberately made when she, Mother, done raise us so good.

This time, when she chuckles, it is not with mirth, but with a sad kind of realization. She looks directly at me. We are supposed to drag this burden around with us; act like it's alright, because pretense has become our defense. But I've learned that pretending that we have no pain will only allow the haunting memories of that pain to wreak havoc on our minds. We have to confront our tormentors; whether

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it is our loved ones or the activities and substances that we engage to run from torment. We have to know what our demons are to be delivered from them. Mine was drugs and all of the ills that came with that. But, I had to confront them, then position myself for the miracle of deliverance I sought. After we pray, we have to act. I had to act by relocating to get my miracle, and was delivered from the grip of crack cocaine after more than twenty five years of using.

She chuckled again, this time tilting her head slightly to the side; staring way off into the past. I could see from her expression that she was retrieving the experiences that had caused the torment she referred to. She said, hmm, a couple of times and continued to stare way into the past.

Finally, she said, maybe I should start this thing at the beginning. That's the only way to tell it.

I agreed, and settled in to listen.

Armed And Dangerous

Around that time, my father had brought a gun to the home. He said that he needed it to protect us. Mother was petrified, but did not say anything to him. Instead, she did what she always did. She called on the Lawd to make my daddy have some sense, and to see that having a gun in the house was a bad thing; especially since he didn't have one good nerve. The Lawd did not answer, so my father kept the gun.

The gun became another tool of torment for my father to use against us. His threats to kill us escalated with the presence of his thirty-eight. He seemed to want it in his sight when he sat in the living room, alternating his moods, muttering to himself, scowling and snarling, chuckling calculatingly, staring in to an

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invisible tunnel of darkness that made him angrier by the minute. Mother would rush us into the bedroom every time he placed the gun on the coffee table.

One day, her fears became a reality. I don't remember what preceded it, but, suddenly, my father began screaming at Mother. He told her to take us all to the bedroom, that our hour had come, that he was going to end the shit right then. She grabbed all of us, seemingly at once, and shoved us into the bedroom. My father came in with his gun in his right hand. Mother started screaming and he back-handed her across the face. She stumbled a little, but got up and said, please Ty, don't hurt the babies. He seemed not to hear her and pointed the gun at each one of us, one by one, saying I ought to kill all of your mother fucking asses, as he shifted his aim from one child to the next, repeating his actions every time he got to the last person.

I started to pray, asking God to save us from our father. He stood there, waving the gun, screaming threats, as his face switched from one evil grimace to the next. We were all screaming by this time, and he kept telling us to shut the fuck up, that he didn't want to hear shit from any of us mother fuckers, that he was goin' kill us right then. We were all huddled in one corner, with Mother clutching Vi, my baby sister, to her. My father had that glazed look in his eye; the one he would have right before he lunged at us. I sat there, waiting for the gun to go pop, waiting for the bullet to fly from the barrel of his favorite thing, his thirty eight, into Mother, then me, then Ty, just

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like the order in which he beat us every day. Then he dropped his right hand to his side, and walked out of the bedroom saying, y'all ain't even fuckin' worth my motherfuckin' time. None of y'all ain't shit, anyway.

None of us moved for at least thirty minutes. Mother was crying and calling on the Lawd, asking him to heal my father who, she was telling the Lawd, had done lost his mind. Ty, Freda, and Perry had somehow crouched up next to me, while Derek, Nikki, and Vi seemed to be pasted on to Mother. They were all crying hysterically.

I was not. I was just praying that when he left on his motorcycle that night for his nightly cavorting, he would have an accident that would kill his sick ass on the spot.

Though the accident didn't happen that night, it happened shortly after, and the two weeks that he spent in the hospital recuperating after that accident, in which he broke an assortment of limbs and bones, were two of the best weeks I had spent in California, yet.

Grandma's Prophecy

My father's mother, his sisters and several assorted family members lived within very close proximity to our house. Like the rest of the neighbors, they knew he beat his family daily and, just like them, they chose to stay out of it because they knew that he would retaliate by doing some crazy shit, like pulling his gun on them, or going to their homes and threatening to kill them all. They often spoke of how embarrassing his behavior was to them.

One day, his mother, my grandmother, came to our house during one of the regular brawls that he had started with my mother. In his mother's presence, he continued to slap Mother, accusing her of not doing something or other. My grandmother ran up to him to make

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him stop and, with all the strength he could muster, he shoved her about twenty feet away. I ran over to where she had fallen stunned, and I tried to pick her up. It's alright, Baby, she said to me, and stood up, wobbling, grasping at the air, as if trying to hold on to something to support her.

Then she looked directly at my father, with squinted eyes and said to him in a grating, low snarl, lips curled fiercely back over her dentures, God said children must honor their parents. She was choking up now, trying to rearrange her skirt that had rolled so far up that she was visibly embarrassed, because the foot of her knickers was showing. Then, in an even colder tone, she continued: what you done did today, will come back to haunt you one hundred, hundred fold, so you better watch out real good 'cause you goin' reach with a nasty, nasty death. That is the wages for being ungrateful and puttin' yo' hands on your mother, and don't you never forget it!

Daddy smirked and turned around to continue beating Mother.