

CHAPTER 9

The Power of the Mind

Warriors sailed to invade a foreign land. As they prepared to advance, their commander said, “Turn and look. I have burned our ships. There is no turning back. We win or we die.”

As irrational as it is, at some level I believed I won Miss America because of my long blond hair. It was the only part of me that was perfect and I kept it that way. What I wore was of little importance to me but how my hair looked was extremely important. As Jennifer was nearing her 5th birthday, I did something unthinkable. I cut my hair off. Well, most of it.

For reasons I didn't understand, while I was in Detroit for a speaking engagement, I, seemingly impulsively, rescheduled my flight home and made a quick stop in New York. Rita had done my hair for years for television commercials and she now worked in the hair salon in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. She knew how obsessed I was about my hair. When I sat down and said, “Please cut my hair off,” she knew she must have misunderstood. She just stood there. It was such an unexpected request from me. Slowly, she began cutting it off inch by inch. I said, “Rita, please grab chunks and cut it off.” She did and I left with very short hair.

I am hesitant to tell you how I felt after she cut my hair, because my thoughts were so bizarre. The only solace I take is from the story of Samson in the Bible. He felt the same way about his

hair. It was his power. No hair. No power. I felt, when I boarded the flight to Denver, that people would look at me and laugh. I knew I would never get another standing ovation after a speech. I had cut off what was good about me. It would be several years before I would understand the significance of cutting my hair.

Something else strange was happening. There were times when I had to get away from Jennifer. This is the child I loved so deeply. Every day we played together. Every morning when I awakened her and every night when I put her to bed, I sang to her, nuzzled her, cherished her. Suddenly, I had surges of feelings that I had to get away from her. I would call my sister who lived close by and say, "Please come get her. Take her anywhere...to the park...to the supermarket...anywhere. Please just take her." I had no understanding of my feelings.

I knew I would have to tell Larry. I have said so many unexpected words to Larry that I believed would end our relationship forever, but never have I said more difficult words than I said this particular night. I was sobbing. That gut wrenching, doubled over, throw-up-your-guts kind of sobbing. I was on the floor. He ran to me, got down on the floor and just held me. "What? What?" There was no way I could form the words. Ever. "What? Please tell me what happened." I just shook my head "No" and cried. "You can tell me anything. You know that. Anything. Please."

I knew he would have to know but these would be my final words. After saying them, I expected that he would say, "Please leave the house now. Right now. And never come back." Every part of me believed that would be his response.

As always when I tried to say such difficult words, the words came one at a time, agonizingly. "I...don't...love...her...anymore." With that, I collapsed in sobs. I didn't love her anymore.

I waited for his response. "What do you *mean* you don't love her? Every mother loves her child. If you don't love her, then leave." But he didn't say that at all. Instead, he held me tightly and said, so quietly, "It's okay. I will love her enough for both of us."

No judgment, even though he had no understanding. It didn't matter. He loved and accepted me no matter what. My eyes fill with tears every time I think of those words I will never, ever for-

get, "I will love her enough for both of us." Fortunately, these feelings about Jennifer didn't come often but when they did, they came quickly and I would be desperate to distance myself from her.

Although it would be years before I would begin connecting all the dots to the incredible puzzle that would finally explain this bizarre behavior, the next experience would be the one that would, in future years, help me to understand.

It began only weeks after that anguished conversation with Larry. I was 39. I had come home from a successful speaking tour and was talking with my secretary when I felt a sudden need to lie down. It was late afternoon and even the *thought* of lying down was incomprehensible. There was so much work to be done. I kept talking with her, fighting the feelings, but it was a losing battle. I felt my entire body being forcefully pulled down as if a huge magnet were drawing me down.

Since my office was in our home, I excused myself and lay down. I always slept in a tight fetal position. I would draw my arms and legs up and into my body until I was a tightly clenched ball. But that day, I found myself lying in the position of a dead person with my legs extended straight and my arms folded across my chest.

Within minutes, I realized I was unable to move. I wasn't concerned or scared. I didn't seem connected to the experience. I went into what felt like a very deep rest, aware at all times of what was going on around me.

I heard Larry calling, "Lynn? Lynn?" The last place he would look for me would be the bedroom. Taking a nap or resting was something I had never done in all the years he had known me. It took way too much effort for me to turn my head to acknowledge him. He stood over me with a look of surprise and concern. "Lynn? What's wrong?"

Trying to form words was laborious. Without a hint of concern on my face, I barely whispered, "I don't know, but I can't move my body." Immediately, Larry reached for the phone and called his cousin, Gary Friedland, who was our doctor. He was just leaving the office and offered to stop by our house on his way home.

By the time Gary arrived, the heaviness had lifted and I was up fixing dinner. He was surprised when I answered the door. I told him I was embarrassed and sorry we had bothered him. Whatever had been the problem was over and I was fine. He was concerned and asked that we call him immediately if I had any more similar occurrences.

When Larry came home the next night, it was a repeat performance. Unable to move. Call Gary. Up, feeling fine. Gary arrives. More embarrassment. This time Gary was more concerned and said it would be important to do some tests. I didn't call him the next day as I'd promised. I knew I was fine.

The third time it happened, the heaviness in my body was so extreme, I was barely able to whisper to Larry, "Please don't call Gary. Please don't." When Gary arrived this time, I was in bed, unable to move any part of my body. He took my pulse and my blood pressure and said, "We need to get her to the hospital immediately." My blood pressure had plummeted. My pulse was in the low 40's.

Paralysis. Physical paralysis. My body had shut down almost completely. If I had to go to the bathroom just prior to a paralysis spell, the need would disappear. I would not feel hunger or discomfort. I felt nothing. The spells would come and go. I could feel them beginning. It would feel like a heavy, dark cloud entering my body and within ten to fifteen minutes my body would feel like lead. I would be paralyzed. My head wasn't involved. I could open and shut my eyes. I could even talk, although speaking even a few words took incredible effort. Whispering a word or two was usually the extent of my communication. I wasn't frightened during a spell. I rarely had any thought. My mind was in limbo. Zoned out.

After two to three hours I would begin to feel the cloud lifting. I would start to feel some sensation in my body and I would know that within ten to fifteen minutes, it would be over.

One specialist followed another. Test after test. I know Larry went to the office sometimes but I can never remember a time when he was not standing by my bedside, especially when a doctor would arrive. Almost every doctor would sit on the side of my bed while conferring with us. The second he would sit down, I would

feel overwhelming anxiety, as if an earthquake were happening inside my body. I could not focus on anything he said. All I could think about was getting him off my bed. Each and every time, Larry would say, "Please don't sit on her bed." Some doctors would immediately stand. Some would pay no attention to his request. Most would sit the next time they came. Larry would repeat, "*Please, doctor, do not sit on her bed!*"

One morning, I was to have a CAT scan. This was still a fairly new and very expensive piece of equipment and hospitals shared its use. I was taken to a different hospital for a 7 A.M. appointment. As Larry and I entered the hospital, we saw Papa, Janey and Don Lozow (Larry's father, sister and brother-in-law) waiting. When I returned to my hospital, they were waiting for me again. As Larry and I approached my room, I suddenly collapsed into heaving sobs. I had no idea what was causing me to burst into uncontrollable deep crying periods. Gradually, the sobs subsided. Moments later, I heard someone crying in the hallway. I asked Larry who it was. He said it was Papa. Tears flowed from my eyes. I was incredibly touched that he would feel so deeply for me. I also felt guilty for causing Larry and his family so much concern. I turned to Larry and said, "I will do everything possible to get over this."

I was in and out of the hospital for almost three months, usually for weeks at a time. My parents were in Laguna Beach, California, at their vacation home. Although they were certainly aware of my situation, they neither flew home to see me nor did they call me, Larry or any of my doctors to try to find out what was wrong. The thought of not flying to Jennifer's side if she were hospitalized for *any* reason is beyond my comprehension. That day. That minute. Other than my parents, both sides of my family were concerned and attentive. None of us had any understanding of what could possibly have been wrong.

One test required an IV. I was not in paralysis when the needle was put into my arm. The second the needle went in, I felt the kind of anxiety that sucked my breath out. My heart started pounding so hard, I knew people would hear it. When the nurse left, I turned to Larry in panic and pleaded, "Get it out. *Get it out. Please get it out.*" Larry went out to ask the nurse if we really had to do

this test. “Yes we do,” was her response. “But only during the day, for three days.”

I began a mantra, “I can do this. It’s only for 7 (5, 2) more hours. I can do this.” When the first day was finally over, the nurse came in to disconnect the IV. She said, “We will leave the buffalo cap (the type of IV needle) in because the test will continue tomorrow.”

I couldn’t believe it. *No!* As she walked out the door, I said to Larry, “Get it out. Get it out.” Larry pushed the buzzer for the nurse who was obviously in no mood to be bothered. “Yes?” she asked in a disgusted tone. “Please take the buffalo cap out.”

“I’m sorry but it has to stay in.”

“She would rather have the needle inserted again in the morning than to have the needle stay in all night.” The nurse was brusque, “I’m sorry but the buffalo cap is to remain.” She walked out. Larry took one look at me and knew it had to come out. He had no understanding of why but this was non-negotiable. He rang the call button again, “I’m sorry but the buffalo cap *has to* come out.” Her angry response was, “How many good veins do you think she has? We can’t put it in and take it out each day.”

Larry said, “Please call Gary (our doctor). Now. Or I will.” She returned and removed the buffalo cap.

Why was I so frantic? Although neither Larry nor I had any understanding, at the time, Larry never once—even with a look—said, “C’mon. You can get through this, it’s just a buffalo cap. Don’t make such a big deal out of it.” Larry always defended me. It is inexpressible how significant it was to have Larry defend me, without question or equivocation.

The December holidays were nearing, so the doctors decided to release me for a few days. The paralysis spells were continuing to come and go but I pleaded to be released to be with Jennifer. She was in kindergarten and was about to participate in her first holiday program. Jennifer was so excited we were going to be there. She sang her songs over and over. I made sure our camera had new film and that we were among the first parents to arrive. I wanted to be sure we had good seats. The program was held in the gym where long rows of fold-up chairs had been set up. We sat in the

center of the third row. The kindergartners would be the first group of students to sing.

Just as the program was beginning, I was overcome with dread as I turned to Larry and said, "It's starting." We knew we had about ten minutes to get me home to my bed. Just as Jennifer was coming out with her class, we began climbing over about 20 parents' legs, whispering, "excuse us, excuse us," trying to get home before the spell started. Larry asked a friend to bring Jennifer home when the program was over. I'm sure she wondered why we were leaving just as Jennifer's class was entering. I felt guilty and crushed that I had to leave Jennifer's performance, but I had no control and no understanding.

I was hospitalized again. On New Year's Eve, a dear friend, Leo Goto, brought a scrumptious, catered dinner to Larry and me and Janey and Don, who shared the evening with us.

After more tests and consultations, a group of doctors walked into my room one afternoon. Not one, not two, but four physicians standing literally shoulder-to-shoulder in front of my bed. Nan, Papa and Larry were in the room with me. One of the doctors turned to Larry's parents and said, "May we speak with Mrs. Adler privately please?" I said, "This is my family. Whatever you have to say, it's fine to say in front of them."

It was obvious how uncomfortable the doctors were. They knew I was not going to appreciate what they were about to say. I'm sure that's why so many came in together. They were right. I did *not* appreciate what they said, "We have done every test imaginable and we can find nothing physically wrong. We're sure you will want a second opinion, but our strong recommendation is that you see a psychiatrist."

No wonder they walked in together. They were going to tell me I was crazy and that it was all in my head. Although therapy is common today, no one I knew at that time had ever been to a psychiatrist. In the '70s only weirdos went to therapy, only people who couldn't handle their own problems. I was smart, successful and very "together." I didn't have any mental or emotional problems. I was very much like my mother in this way. I was happy, bright and cheerful. It sounds strange to say it but the paralysis

spells or crying episodes were simply a strange interruption in my day and not anything I thought much about. I did not welcome the doctors' report. Of course I would get a second opinion. The thought of flying to another city was numbing but not nearly as numbing as the thought of going to a "shrink."

When we arrived at the Mayo Clinic, we found ourselves sitting on what I remember as church pews. Long benches. Waiting for our turn. After about thirty minutes, Larry had to ask the people seated on either side of us if they would mind moving and soon I was stretched out in the "dead person" position, in paralysis. I was taken from the clinic to the hospital where several different doctors examined me and then I was given a written psychiatric test. After several days, a psychiatrist walked in and in less than five minutes of conversation said, "I recommend you go into psychiatric treatment."

His brusque way antagonized me, as did his recommendation. I said, "You've talked with me less than five minutes. Give me one good reason why you feel I have any more reason to see a psychiatrist than you do." He said, "Well, I'm here and you're there!" That made me smile. I said, "Good point!"

One of my sisters lived near the Mayo Clinic. She came to sit with me each day. She was a bright spot amidst a baffling diagnosis. It would never occur to me that incest could be the cause of the paralysis.

We returned to Denver. I couldn't imagine I was going to see a "shrink." How humiliating. What did my mind have to do with paralysis? What if someone saw me?

Larry began his search. Only the highest credentialed psychiatrist would be considered. The list was finally narrowed down to three men. I would need to meet with each one to make the final decision. I just wanted to get it over with. We settled on a doctor whose office was only blocks from our home.

Although I was no longer hospitalized, the paralysis spells continued on an almost daily basis. Since I had never been in therapy or psychoanalysis, I had no idea what to expect. The only thing I cared about is that he had an "in" door and an "out" door so no one would see me coming or going. No one could ever know I was in therapy.

It was just like the movies. I lay on a couch and he sat behind me. His participation consisted of, “Uh-huh” “Uh-huh” “What did you think about that?” “Uh-huh” “Uh-huh.” What was he doing behind me? He always had a paper and pen when we began. Maybe he was doing crossword puzzles. Why didn’t he ever have a conversation with me? There were many times when I wondered if he had a pulse. I found the entire process to be useless.

After two, perhaps three sessions, he finally had a suggestion. To say I was startled would be a gross understatement. He said, “I want you to go home and smoke marijuana. It will help relax you.” Marijuana? I had never even *seen* marijuana. To my knowledge, I had never been around anyone who had ever done drugs.

As children of the ’30s and ’40s, we were brought up to do as we were told and to respect our elders, especially doctors. Okay. That’s what I’ll do! I called a young man I knew very well, who was fresh out of college, “Do you know how to get marijuana?” There was complete silence. He was stunned by my request, not because the thought of marijuana shocked him but because I asked for it. With a definite hesitation in his voice, he said, “Yes.” I said, “Is there good, better, best?” He said, “Yes.” “Can you get me ‘best’?” “Yes.” “Quickly?” “Yes.” He delivered the marijuana within the hour.

When Larry came home from work, I couldn’t wait to tell him what an amazing experience we were going to have. Well, if I was square, Larry was cubicle. He rarely drank, he didn’t smoke and I knew he had never smoked marijuana. The second he walked in the door, I bubbled over with my news, “Dr. Uh-huh wants me to smoke marijuana.” And I showed him what I had.

Never in 24 years of knowing Larry had I seen him so angry. His face locked into a Winston Churchill bulldog rage; the veins on his neck bulged. I could almost see his brain trying to comprehend a doctor telling me to do this. His teeth were clenched, his body stiff, his face literally red with rage. I can understand why cartoonists show smoke coming out of an angry person’s nostrils and mouth. Trying to control himself, he said, “Never. Never. I will *never* smoke marijuana.”

“But Dr. Uh-huh says this will help me. It will help me relax.”

With rage pouring out of every cell of his being, he said, “Well, that’s just *fine!* Then *you* go ahead and smoke it. I’ll just sit here and *watch you.*”

“Won’t you smoke it with me?” With teeth still so clenched, he could hardly get his final word out, he said, “*Never.*”

I was so disappointed. I thought maybe we had found something that would help me get better, and I would do anything to get better. Larry was vehemently opposed to any form of drugs and he knew how dangerous it could be to turn me onto anything like marijuana, especially at that very vulnerable time in my life. To this day, I can’t believe he didn’t grab the marijuana, throw it down the garbage disposal and say “*Never!*” I remain in awe of his stand. “I will not. You can do whatever you choose. I will be with you, should you choose to do it.” Above all, he would want to be there to look after me. I didn’t smoke it.

Larry couldn’t wait to go to my next appointment. He was still so enraged, he could barely spit out his anger at Dr. Uh-huh’s *very* inappropriate and *illegal* recommendation. Dr. Uh-huh was very sorry he had ever suggested marijuana—especially to the woman married to this attorney!

The physical paralysis was inconvenient but it was a peaceful state. If I had begun smoking marijuana during this time, I *know* that I would have begged for anything stronger to make the feelings of terror, rage and overwhelming anxiety go away when they began to flood my life in upcoming years. Forget high-minded belief systems; forget the, “I would never do *that,*” philosophy. When the pain is so bad you know you will have to die, I believe most people would consider doing anything to relieve it. Anything. I am so grateful I did not choose drugs and did not add this complication to my recovery.

One of the many things that continued to astonish me about Larry was that he never told me what to do. In his incredible wisdom, he knew that I needed control, perhaps more than anything. I never had control as a child. He understood that in the marrow of his bones. Even when I would push him to the brink, as my wanting to smoke marijuana did, he never tried to control me.

The paralysis spells continued for twelve years, from age 39 to age 51. They became a normal part of our lives. When friends would come over to play with Jennifer, she would say, “Mommy’s having a spell”...as if Mommy had a headache. We just accepted the inconvenience of my shutting down completely for several hours on an almost daily basis.

My doctors couldn’t figure it out, nor could my highly credentialed psychiatrist. It was, perhaps, ten years before I put the puzzle together as to why my body had gone into physical paralysis at age 39. My insight may have been sparked by something a doctor said to me. One of my doctors was my uncle by marriage, Dr. Joseph Friedland. He was one of Denver’s most respected, kind, loving physicians...and Gary’s father. The day I was being released from the hospital, he came into my hospital room to tell me “goodbye” and, just as he was walking out the door, he turned and said, “You know, my darling, I wonder if this has anything to do with your turning forty.” That comment brought a smile to my face. Maybe a Miss America was finding it difficult to age gracefully? Little did he know how I welcomed being older. I just never wanted to be young again!

One night as I was trying to find peace in my bed, I had the insight. Of course. That’s why I went into paralysis at age 39. The question Uncle Joe had asked had been brilliant. The paralysis had everything to do with age. But not my age! When I was 39, Jennifer was turning 5, the age I was when the violations began. Her *age* was triggering the memories *and the feelings*, as another part of me used every ounce of energy to repress them. This head-on-collision, this conflict, resulted in physical paralysis.

And that’s why I had cut my hair only weeks before my body went into paralysis the first time. Jennifer’s age was triggering the feelings of how bad, unlovable, dirty and guilty I was. I would feel so unworthy that I would be driven to cut off the only “good” part of myself. Even as a young girl, I set my hair every night in tight bobby pins. My hair was the only part of my body that my father didn’t touch or violate. It was the only part of me that was still good. Pure. Virginal. Without any conscious knowledge of why, I cut off the only part of myself that that was good; then I was all bad.

That's why I had said I didn't love Jennifer anymore. It had nothing to do with her; it was her age that was triggering all the horrific repressed memories and feelings. When I looked at her, I was feeling *me at her age*. That's why I would have to get away from her.

And that's why I had extreme trauma when a doctor sat on my bed, because that's the way my father began the nightly routine. That's why I found the buffalo cap intolerable, because I didn't want anything inserted into my body. Any part of my body.

Now, when I address doctors, I suggest that a patient's *inappropriate or irrational behavior* could be a major clue to deeper issues (such as past trauma) that may be related to physical problems.

Recently, a woman told me she had been in a car accident. When the police and ambulance arrived, even though it had been a minor accident, there was concern about her back so she was put on a gurney and strapped down. She said, "The second I felt the strap tighten, the second I felt myself being held down, I began screaming, 'Don't hurt me. Don't hurt me. Don't hurt me.' At age 35, the memories of being raped were sucked out of my past and thrust into every pore of my mind and body."

I suggest to doctors, nurses and emergency care specialists that instead of thinking, "This is a crazy woman," they should think, "We'd better find out what is going on here. We are obviously dealing with a deeper issue." Talking with her just briefly, to hear her fears and gently offer comfort in an emergency situation, can be invaluable.

Larry and I would talk about how amazing the mind is; how omnipotent the mind is. As a child, my mind had split in two to protect me. Then, as an adult, it brought me down into physical paralysis as the feelings were trying to break into consciousness. Amazing. Now I knew why. That knowledge made it easier to endure.

Gratefully, it never occurred to me that if Jennifer's age were sparking the memories and feelings, then maybe her age would continue to impact me until she turned 18. If I had thought about that, I might not have survived the healing process. I always be-

lieved I would be over it in six months. I just had to make it through six more months and it would be over.

While I was hospitalized, my mind was blank most of the time. There was only one daydream that kept flashing into my mind. My father was lying in a casket and I was standing over him saying, "Too late. Too late. You died...and we never spoke of it." Over and over I would see that scene.

I knew that when I was released from the hospital I would have to confront my father...not because I saw a connection between incest and paralysis but because of the impact of the daydream. During non-paralysis periods, I would play it over and over in my mind: what I would say, how I would say it. Just *the thought* of confronting my father was terrifying.

During my sixth session with Dr. Uh-huh, I said, "I need to talk to my father. I'm 40 years old and we have never talked about it. I always pretended I was asleep." My need to talk to my father had become obsessive. I had to "speak the words." The Dr. made one of his rare comments. If I live to be two hundred, I will never forget his one-sentence answer: "Not for at least two years of seeing me every day, five days a week." I couldn't believe what I heard, "Not for at least two years of seeing me, every day, five days a week!"

I immediately began to count down how many more minutes I had in my exactly 50-minute session. He had totally missed three vital issues by responding to me in that way. He was not responding to my desperate need to reach out to my father. He had no understanding that he would not be controlling me and he had no clue that I had no intention of seeing him for more than a couple of months at best. I was going to figure out whatever I needed to figure out and then get back to work and life!

I left his office, walked across the street to a phone booth and called my father at his office. "I need to talk to you." "C'mon over." "No. At home" (meaning the home in which I had grown up). I barely stopped for stop signs and traffic lights. I sped to the house. I had to get there before he did to be sure the doors of the house were unlocked and open. I had to be sure I could get out quickly. Of all the feelings I had about my father, terror was one through ten.

As I unlocked the heavy, ornate, black metal, front screen door, I released the self lock, left the front door open and went into the breakfast room so I could be seated when he came home, forcing him to sit in the chair farthest away from the exit door.

He came in and sat down on the far side of the table, which had always been his seat. I'm sure the look on my face told him this was going to be a very serious conversation. I knew what I wanted to say but I hadn't thought about how I was going to start the conversation. I took a deep breath and with my eyes lowered, I said, "This is the most difficult thing I have ever done." I was unprepared for his response. He pushed his chair back, stood up and said, "I'll be back in a minute."

The staircase was near the breakfast room door where I was seated. He walked by me and went up the long, winding staircase two by two. I listened carefully for a phone call to be made or a toilet to be flushed, but he came back immediately. I knew he had a gun. It was in his pocket. I didn't think it—I didn't wonder it—I knew it.

He had guns everywhere. In his car, near his chair in the sunroom, in his bedroom and in his office. Now he had his bedroom gun in his pocket. There was a coldness that could turn his incredibly penetrating light blue eyes into steel gray. No emotion. Just cold. Calculating. A detached meanness. I knew he could have coolly shot me or himself or both of us without another thought. Most probably both of us.

Nothing would have stopped me from talking with my father that day. It was time to speak the truth no matter what the consequences. There are many ways of dying. Dying a day at a time is the most agonizing. That's the way many survivors live—dying a day at a time. Unless and until we walk right into the terror, it becomes our life sentence. If we can walk into the terror, most of the time we can walk *through* it. It's always a risk because sometimes there are serious consequences. Each survivor has a different journey and terror is resolved in different ways. Certainly, there are safer ways.

It never occurred to me to back down because of the gun. I was 100 percent committed. Fortunately, I did not come in anger.

I came in love. I know that seems incomprehensible, but my suppressed rage (certainly one of the reasons for the paralysis) would not geyser up for another eight years. If I had come in rage, I believe the consequences would have been dire.

I said, "When I say 'I love you' I want you to know I have many other feelings." I also remember saying, "You knew 16 years ago, when I was in Los Angeles talking to D.D., that something life-changing happened but you never asked me what it was." His response was brief and honest, "Maybe I didn't want to know." *He knew!* The second he said that, I knew that *he knew* what the discussion with D.D. had been about so many years earlier.

I went on to tell him the four positive things he had done for me in my life. I had them listed on a paper. I realized that everything I had listed had taken place when I was a young adult, between 17 and 24. He had supported my desire to sit with John when D.D. gave a sermon on him, helped me with my Miss America speeches, kept my horse alive when he was too old to ride and the caretaker wanted to kill him and, most of all, facilitated the divorce.

I don't remember how I phrased what his sexual violations had done to me. Maybe I didn't need to. He certainly knew what I was talking about. He never tried to deny anything. I never expected—*never dreamed*—that he would, but I now know that most violators blatantly deny any and all violations. Let me clarify. I never expected him to deny the truth *to me*. To others, he would have denied everything. That was understood. That is always understood. Does anyone really believe a father would stand in public and say, "I pried my daughters open for eighteen years." Never. If you choose to confront your perpetrator with someone else present, don't even hope for validation.

He said one thing that stopped me cold, shut me down. I have no idea what he said in the seconds or minutes that followed—until I could bring myself back into the conversation. He said, "I haven't kissed your mother for 25 years." *He hasn't kissed my mother in 25 years?* How is that possible? My mother said, on an almost daily basis, "I've had 45 years of a perfect marriage." I just couldn't find a place in my mind to accommodate that sentence. It sounds

crazy now but if you grow up as a child believing something, it is very difficult to alter that belief. They have a perfect marriage! He never kissed her. My father never kissed my mother. It just didn't make any sense. In the years to come, as the truth of my life unfolded, it would all make sense. Devastating, mind-crushing sense.

The other sentence I remember word-for-word was "If I had known what it would do to you, I never would have done it." That was the sentence of the day. Those were the words I would embed in my brain, my soul, the core of my being. He never would have done it if he had realized. How desperate a child is to cling to any semblance of hope that a father really does love a daughter. That a *day time* father really does love a *day time* daughter. I clung to every word of that sentence. He wouldn't have...he would have cared enough for me not to have...it was the thread of hope that kept me going. My father really did love me, the day child. He told me so, didn't he, when he said if he had known the lifetime trauma he would cause, he wouldn't have?

To face the truth—that my father cared absolutely nothing about me, that he only used me—would have been intolerable to bear. To accept the truth that I grew up without one person loving me, without one person caring, really caring about what happened to me, would have crushed my soul completely. I was far too vulnerable, hating, shaming, blaming myself to face the naked truth of the emptiness of my childhood. I would be 56 years old before I could face that truth head on.

Our conversation was over. He stood, reached into his pocket, and pulled out the gun. If you showed me 2,000 guns, I could immediately pick out the small khaki colored gun that lay coldly in his open palm. He looked me right in the eye and said, "If you had come in any other way, I would have killed myself." His message was very clear, "If you are even *thinking* about exposing me, take a good look at the consequences."

And people wonder why children don't tell.

As he headed through the kitchen to the garage and I headed the opposite direction toward the front door, he had one last minute question, "Who have you talked to about this?" "Larry. My sisters."

“Have you spoken to your mother about it?” “No.” “Are you going to?” “No.”

As I got into my car, parked on the side of the house, he sped by me in his black Cadillac. Always speeding. Always driving way too fast and recklessly. In his car and in his life.

Most people have no understanding of how complex the long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse can be—especially if the violator was a family member, priest, coach...trusted friend. These pedophiles weave their way into our lives. Most are charming, talented, respected family and community members. They are not the bearded, stubble faced Charles Mansons. They don't make us hate them, they make us hate ourselves. We don't want them in prison. We live a lifetime in a kind of prison difficult to describe.

When, in July, we left for our one month vacation in Laguna Beach, I knew I would never go back to therapy. I had had 53 sessions; 52 too many. Why I had continued seeing Dr. Uh-huh, I'm not sure. I think the anxiety of going to a different psychiatrist was the major reason. I hadn't made the connection yet between incest and paralysis and if he had, he wasn't talking. He didn't talk much anyway. In the years to come, when I would work with gifted, sharing, giving therapists, I would realize what a waste of time Dr. Uh-huh was.

I did not call Dr. Uh-huh when we returned. He called me. I told him I was feeling stronger and that I would not be returning. (Well, the second half of that was true!) He said it would be necessary for me to come one more time. Ever the victim, I said, “Okay.” It was a very short session. He said, “If you do not keep coming, you will not get sleeping pills.” Oh, he was good. He knew there were only two things that I had to have in order to survive another day, Larry and sleeping pills. The thought of not having either was truly unthinkable. I looked straight into his eyes and said, with quiet rage, “I will always find sleeping pills.” I always did and I never went back to him.

There were so many times when I felt guilty, as a mother, for things I could not do with or for Jennifer, such as having to leave the holiday program before she came on stage or not being able to shop with her in the mall because the background music that played

and the general hubbub of people milling around sent my stress level over the edge. My normal anxiety level, at this time in my life, was constantly on red alert. But I never felt guiltier than the night Larry was out of town (a rare occurrence) and I tucked Jennifer into her bed. She was about six. I sang to her and kissed her good night. As I walked out of her room, her words to me were, "Mommy, would you leave your door open, please?" "Of course I will Jennifer." "Promise?" "Promise."

I couldn't leave my door open. I knew it when I said it. I tried. I tried so hard. Several hours after Jennifer went to sleep, it was time for me to turn out my light. I left the door open but the terror I felt with an open door was too extreme. I had to not only close the door but lock the door. I felt so guilty, as a mother, that I would lock my bedroom door, but it was that or lying awake all night in terror.

Many soldiers who fought on the front lines during a battle still jump if they hear a car backfire or a gun being unexpectedly fired. Living with the fear of the night for thirteen years embedded in my child-teen brain that the night is not safe. It is difficult to change what is bored into the core of a child's belief system.

I managed to still give speeches during this time but my schedule was greatly reduced. Each year my life would shut down a little more, as hysterical sobbing increased, usually with no understanding of why I was crying. As night terrors took over the nights even heavy sleeping pills wouldn't knock me out. I would lie awake, watching the door, knowing that if I didn't watch the door, I would die. The feeling was far beyond an intense foreboding of impending violence and doom. I believed I would literally die.

During this time of recovery, I wasn't remembering the memories and feelings, I was living them. When memories and feelings are split off and stuffed deeply within the body, it is necessary to disgorge them and feel them as if they are happening in real time. This was not a voluntary decision. When the memories are triggered by a child's age, a medical procedure, a sexual experience, sound or smell, the memories and feelings are instantly felt and no amount of willing them away or decision to "just get over it," will work.

D.D. knew about my terror of the night and, in my late 40's, he gave me what was, perhaps, my greatest challenge. (I seemed to have so many of those.) D.D. said, "Every time you close and lock your door you are re-patterning your belief system that you are not safe. You need to stop doing that. Tonight when you go to bed, leave the door open. Just do it!"

"Okay, I will." The words were so easy to say. The prospective deed incomprehensible...but I was determined to do the "work" of healing. Peace. Joy. Calm. Healing. These are not gifts. These are hard earned blessings.

When I went to bed the night of his ultimatum, I left the door unlocked and open. I was in bed perhaps thirty seconds when I jumped up, closed the door and locked it. Within moments, I knew I would hear it, the scuff of footsteps in the hallway leading to our bedroom (similar to the long hallway to my childhood room). The terror of the night was still running my night life. My father wasn't coming to get me any more. I knew that in my brain, but no amount of intellectual reasoning comes into play during flashbacks. Every night, when I went to bed, I lived in flashbacks. If my father had raped me in a barn every single time, I would never step foot in a barn again, but I couldn't avoid the scene of the crime because it was always my bedroom.

I was determined to break the conditioning. The next night I tried it again. Same results. The third night I made a commitment to do it, no matter what. I left the door wide open and during the entire night, I rested deeply while watching the door. About every 60 seconds, I would quickly open my eyes to look at the doorway. One of the amazing aspects of surviving a childhood of torment is the coping skills we develop. I had learned how to think of nothing. The *feeling* was terror but, as a child, I had learned how to keep my mind blank. I had done it! I hadn't closed the door. I felt enormous satisfaction. I was also exhausted from not sleeping. The fourth night, I watched the door for about two hours and then I said something to myself, words that would become my mantra—words that I had lived by on previous occasions. But somehow actually saying the words, in my head, had an incredible impact. I rolled over, turned away from the door, locked my body into the

tight fetal position and said, “If I die, I die but I don’t want to live this way anymore.” That was as powerful a statement as I had ever said to myself. My belief system—the *feelings* were that if I didn’t watch the door, I would die. I don’t ask you to understand that. I do ask you to honor the fact that those were my *feelings*.

I had made a deal. I might die. I understood that but I was dying a night at a time doing it this way so I made the decision to risk my life to break the chain of terror. I knew the only way I could break the pattern was to walk right into it.

The first few nights were difficult beyond description, but little by little, week by week, I began to find more peace with the door being unlocked and wide open.

I have had many nights since then when I have, for a variety of reasons, been thrown back into that night time terror. I had a night like that not too long ago and, as I began watching the door, I caught myself and repeated the phrase, “If I die, I die, but I’m not going to live that way anymore.”

It was the same feeling as when I confronted my father and knew he had a gun. Although I didn’t say those exact words, it was what I was feeling. Whatever the consequences, I am going to do this because I cannot live in this nightmarish world forever.

I now sleep with my door open, at home. That is an enormous victory for me.

When writing this book, I spent many nights alone in Vail. One night I heard noises that sent that old terror back into every pore of my body. I caught myself immediately and knew I wouldn’t honor the fear by getting up and checking. My commitment still stood. I wasn’t going to play the nightly game of checking, ever again.

I wish I didn’t have to tell you what happened in the spring of 2002. I would like to have survivors know that every single bit of anxiety and fear ended for me because I did the work of healing. There are still times, however, when situations are uncomfortable. That became true in Vail during the spring. The ski season had ended and no one—not one person—was staying in our condominium building. Most of the restaurants had closed. Vail felt like a ghost town.

At night, even with the “white noise machine” I always use, I was listening, knowing I was the only person in the entire building. Even the sleeping medication I take at night so I can fall asleep, didn’t work so I called the off site manager and asked to have huge dead bolts put on the inside of the front door and my bedroom door. He asked how large. I said large enough so that no one could get in without breaking the entire door down. He said, “The fire marshal will not allow ones that large because then they can’t get in, in case of fire.” I said, “Those are the ones I want. Please.” He said, “No one has ever tried to break in...” I said, “Please don’t tell me how safe the building is. This has nothing to do with rational thinking. This has to do with my perception. I have to perceive that no one could get through those doors without big axes.”

He knew “my story.” He said, “I’ll have someone put them on right away.” Now, when I go to Vail during the off-season, I feel safe and sleep well. It was a simple way to give me peace. Do I feel like a failure because I’m more comfortable with huge bolts on the door? No. Do I feel like I should go back into therapy because when I am alone in a building, I feel safer with dead bolts? No. I’m sure there will always be times when I will take an extra precaution for whatever reason.

I remember reading that Barbra Streisand was too terrified to sing in front of live audiences so she didn’t for twenty-two years. She finally walked right into the fear and gave concerts we will never forget.

For survivors, the *only* path to sanity, peace and healing is to face our fears. I used to say to Larry, “All I ask is to feel just thirty seconds of peace within my being.” Now I live with a calm that is difficult to describe. I know there is light at the end of the tunnel for survivors who are willing to do the work of healing because I live in that light now.