

## **Forthcoming memoirs, *Walking With Winter***

Excerpt from my memoirs: *Walking With Winter* – Reflections on child abuse, madness and recovery

### **X. The Minefield of Memory**

I haven't worked on this memoir for nearly a week. Triggered by a conversation with my financial advisor, a woman who has been a pillar of support for me, I fell into profound despair. It was about a house I wanted to buy. Waterfront property, two levels—the downstairs the original cottage which makes for a great, separate apartment, the upstairs with glass everywhere. This house wasn't just a house—it was a vision. I could imagine my son coming up with his friends and hanging out in the downstairs totally private apartment and surfacing only for food. The joy that bring me is monumental. I could imagine friends and artists and writers also staying in the apartment paying, perhaps, a low fee to help with expenses, with some communal meals. I imagined family coming—what's better than Southeastern Maine in the summer?—and I imagined entertaining. This was huge for me and in a manner of minutes it was taken away from me as my financial planner told me in no uncertain terms that I could not afford it. The financial markets are in havoc, my husband's worth very uncertain and I know full well that this is causing him great pain.

I was totally devastated. Wiped off the planet into the ether zone of despair. My doctor and I thought that perhaps my financial planner sounded like my mother—reprimanding, denying anything I might want. The despair hung in there like a bad hangover. I was debilitated by it. I could not stop crying. I crawled into a fetal ball clutching my dog for hours on end trying to figure out who could take me to the psych ward so I wouldn't do

myself in which was the only thing—truly, truly—I was capable of doing. I kept wondering *why?* I kept thinking *die. Annihilate the violated,* my only placard.

Then the night before last night, I suddenly doubled over in pain, a kick-in-the-gut pain. I staggered to my reading chair, curled up once again in a fetal ball, rocking, rocking with pain. In a flash, memory descended. Vivid, detailed, brutal. The worst ever memory. It was way beyond the reaches of hell and I was in it. Gripping myself with one hand, I crawled over to the computer. Using one finger, I slowly wrote to my doctor, describing this horrific memory. With my other hand I clutched my gut. I needed one person—and Susan was that person—to bear witness to my tale. I will never tell it again as it would destroy my family. It's a take-it-to-the-grave memory and I graze it and raise it here because I know there are many people keeping the evil secret and taking-it-to-the-grave because putting it out in the light could just about do them in as well as their families. I'm talking about volcanic violence, how it suddenly erupts with such destructive force it kills everything in its path. I am now dwelling in the aftermath of that path. I am holding a pen in my hand because God put it there and I intend to use it.

In between that burning-on-the-crucible moment and now, a friend wrote me telling me it is possible to heal from such trauma and abuse. I do and do not believe in that possibility. I do know one has to cross the minefield of memory before the healing can truly come and that we, the abused, the traumatized, receive these memories one at a time and only when we are hopefully ready to receive it such that it does not obliterate, incinerate the already brutalized us. Such explosive memories shatter the cells, one by one. They make the addiction to violence so prevalent in our country look like child's

play. Evil is real, terrifically, horribly stranger-than-fiction real and I am intimately acquainted, no not acquainted, but bred by it.

This much I will say. I was not quite eight years old. The violence done to me was perpetrated not by my mother, but by Father. It took place in my play house. It was summer, the air heavy as honey, the birds cruel tutors and dust motes ground into my eyes like grains of sand while Father slowly tore apart, limb by limb, my life-size doll, my Patty Play Pal. Hunks of hair were ripped out, eyes dug out with a jack knife, thighs yanked apart like a wishbone, then decapitated by his bare hands. She was, I was told, and EXAMPLE of what would be DONE TO ME if I didn't comply with his every command. Enough said. Again, it was in my play house. My little rental house has been described by many as a doll house, therefore a play house. The house I wanted was a real house. A place where that severely abused child could feel safe. Hence it was paramount. Hence it being taken away from me with such a definitive no put me back in that play house. The despair I felt and was paralyzed by—the lair of despair—was the despair of that child and how many things are sadder than the despair of children? Catastrophic memory. Catastrophic despair. One must experience it in order to release it. We cannot heal from that which we do not remember and such memories come at a very high cost. The stakes are sky high as this kind of remembering comes with a tidal wave of pain. It puts psychic survival at great risk. Madness becomes appetizing. Death the final entrée.

Yesterday, the day after, I was filled with deer-in-the-headlights fear. My skin felt ripped off. When I ran some errands I white-knuckled the steering wheel, wasn't sure I could handle the car. In the evening, a friend came over and held me tight. That anyone can touch me amazes me. My husband didn't and that made that little girl feel safe. That I

was capable of mothering and doing it so lovingly amazes me even more. I nursed my son until he was nearly three years old. He slept mostly in the family bed until age ten. He was held. He was snuggled. He was thoroughly and still is totally loved totally unconditionally by both my husband and me. I wrote in a poem about him that “each second without him is a decade.” There’s a fine, refined irony here—not being with him day-to-day ages me while living in this land of light and air and water takes years off me. Go figure. At this moment I am totally present to what I am writing. I have crossed the minefield of memory hopefully for good and I am aching to bloom where I’m planted. I want to eat, drink, sleep healing and then I want to bring this healing to others. I will not be silenced by my dead demonic parents. I will not let them drive me mad for good or do myself in, also for good. Even so, I am and will always be severely damaged. Even so and in spite of that damage, I am a powerhouse. Another fine and refined irony and I’m taking that little girl’s despair, all of it, every last bit of Little Bit’s despair and sending it into the universe as prayer. Despair as prayer. So be it and Amen.