Second Volume

With Discussion Guide

authentic VOICES

Second Volume

“How We Survive”
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Dedication

May this book bring hope and healing to survivors and their loved ones.
May we always remember those who have experienced childhood abuse and have not survived because of the abuse itself or because of suicide stemming from continuing mental health struggles rooted in the abuse.
May we honor the courage and resiliency of all who have been affected by childhood abuse.
May we each promise to work toward a world in which all children flourish and thrive.
Welcome

Every page of this book is a gratitude page. The gratitude practically sings from the words, images, and designs. But just to be sure, I’ll make our gratitude, my gratitude, as clear as I am able.

Our authors are the heart and soul that makes Authentic Voices not only possible, but life-giving; I will carry my gratitude toward them throughout my life. Our photographers and designers have honored each page with their gifts. Our PCAND staff, past and present, has embraced this project with enthusiasm and love. Our volunteers from the community, the social work program at Minot State University, the Women’s Leadership Program from the Center for Technology and Business, and elsewhere have given countless hours, ideas, and inspiration. The North Dakota Department of Human Services has wholeheartedly supported this project from its inception, providing fertile ground for years of growth. Rebecca Sharenow, my dear childhood friend, has created any number of awe-inspiring design projects to help spread the word. Heather Pautz, founder of Authentic Voices, has been at the heart of this program from the beginning. Brian Palecek, humanities scholar, has not only donated his unmatchable talents, but his gentle patience. Brenna Daugherty Gerhardt, of the North Dakota Humanities Council, has helped shape this project through her generous indulgence of time and conversation. Colleen Bredahl, of the Art/Art Marketing Department at United Tribes Technical College and her student, Amira Gunn, have brought these pages to life in a way we could scarcely have imagined; we continue to be wowed. Our photographers, Kristi Rasmussen, Julie Huwe, Jack Glasser, Carrie Mahpiya Hanska (Long Cloud), Samantha Kamphuis, and Ronya Hoblit, have donated the fruits of their labor and brought tender care to each page. David Swenson and Mike Glatt, of Makoche’ Studios, have lent their expertise and fresh enthusiasm to the telling of these stories in many forms. Renae Bitner, of the North Dakota School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communication Department, and Bonnie Hogan, freelance sign language interpreter, have donated hours upon hours of their time and have become the backbone of this work. My associate editor, Ronya Hoblit, has been a gift from the Spirit; someday, I will find a way to express the depth of my gratitude to her. My loved ones, as well as the loved ones of each of the authors, have helped sustain, strengthen, and celebrate not only what we do, but who we are. On behalf of all the authors of this book, I thank you for all you have given - and all you will yet feel called to give.

Finally, I’d like to thank you, our readers. Some of you have also survived childhood abuse; I am grateful you have survived, and I hope to hear your stories of surviving and thriving someday. Others of you don’t identify as survivors of childhood abuse, and yet you’ve opened this book, lending your compassion and conviction to this cause.

I believe we’ve all survived trials of some kind, from accidents, to illness, to natural disasters, to the death of loved ones, to historical trauma, to neglect and abuse. Some of these trials may be rooted in injustice, and others may be a function of life itself. One way or another, I welcome each of our readers into our circle of survivors. It’s an honorable place to be.

Karen Van Fossan, Editor
Bismarck, North Dakota
Our journey begins with survival. We continue to survive day by day, sometimes minute by minute. There are havens for us: church, spirituality, faith, friends, loved ones, art, therapy, music, and love. Love for others and learning to love ourselves. We learn how not to dwell on the past or make excuses for it. We learn to get past without forgetting. It’s part of who we are; it’s brought us to this place. We wouldn’t be where we are today without our scars. And our journey continues, day by day, minute by minute.

The difference between now and the beginning is knowing we are winners. We survived.

_in this poem, I am referring to all survivors with “us” and “we” because we are never alone; we need to remember that._
Raising Up the Will to Survive

By Heather Pautz

Come here. Lay down.
Let me show you something.
It’s OK. Don’t be afraid to touch it.
It will all be over soon.
Try to forget. Escape into dance and song.
“You Light Up My Life” and
“Music Box Dancer” saved you.
“Come Sail Away”…what you wanted to do.
“We Are Family”…the reason you didn’t (run away).

Be a “Daydream Believer” and
believe in “Rainbow Connections.”
Don’t hide when “If I Said You
Had a Beautiful Body” plays.
Don’t fear the devil will steal your soul like in
“The Devil Went Down to Georgia.”

So goes the rollercoaster of your youth.
Don’t breathe. Lay completely still.
Just listen to music.
Enjoy the theme songs “Believe It or
Not” and “Hillstreet Blues.”
Maybe he’ll believe you are asleep.
It’s OK to go to sleep. Just pray until sleep comes.
Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
Angels guide me through the night,
wake me with the morning light.

Just keep praying...
God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to
know the difference.

Find your voice and practice it.
Sing “Eye of the Tiger,” “Gloria,” and
“I’m Still Standing.”
Gain strength and courage to change the things we
can…together.
I hear your prayers, and I am with you.
You are not alone.
“Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)” and
“Break my Stride”
lend understanding and strength to
embrace the truth,
“Girls Just Wanna Have Fun” and “The Warrior.”

Embrace the “Rhythm of the Night” when “All She
Wants To Do Is Dance.”
“Shout.” “Everybody Wants to Rule the World.”
I am in control.
“That’s What Friends Are For.”
“Live to Tell” your “True Colors.”
“Respect Your Self” and believe “Somewhere Out
There” is a love for you.
“Faith” will get you through the “Hazy Shade of
Winter.” “Seasons Change.”
Enjoy “(Sittin’ on) the Dock of the Bay” and standing
by the “Wishing Well.”

Tell your Truth. You Survived.
“What a Wonderful World.”
Music and faith carried you through (1978-1988).
“Even though you meant harm to me, God meant it for good, to achieve this present end, the survival of many people.” Genesis 50:20

Suffering can have meaning and can bring life and hope, even healing and restoration, for others. God’s word meets us where we are if we allow it to. This very verse cries out to me and fills me with awe and a renewed hope! I finally understand what the purpose of my early life experience was - and what the purpose of the remainder of my journey is!

Freedom comes, as my past hurt, pain, and fear continue to dissipate with every connection to you, Lord. The darkness is replaced with joy and true peace.

Stopping the cycle of abuse is the catalyst for my survival journey. I have struggled for years with undoing all the damage that took place, including the self-inflicted.

Verses such as the following peel back the layers and allow me to not only survive, I thrive!

“Youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles.” Isaiah 40:30-31

That was one of my Grandma Betty and Grandpa Jack’s favorite songs – “On Eagles Wings.”

I am praising and thanking God for us survivors and our survival journeys. My big sis is part of my safety net. I feel more peace in life knowing she is there leading, loving, surviving, and thriving!

Here’s to surviving and thriving!
As you lay sleeping, I lean down to kiss your cheek and taste your salty tear. I gently touch your soft hair and you sigh deeply, releasing this day’s fear.

My beautiful son.

For the first time, I see you with my heart, and I weep. I know what your future brings and the pain your heart will feel. I have lived the horror your eyes will see.

Don’t worry son, you will survive.

When you need me the most, I will abandon you. I will tell you I hate you and mean every word. I will be demanding of you. I will test and drive you to exhaustion to prove yourself to me, but I am impossible to please. The stronger you get, the weaker I will say you are. The more encouragement you need, the more I will make you doubt yourself. The brighter the light that shines on you, the darker the shadow I will cast.

I am ashamed at how I will treat you.

But from this day forward, I will love you with all my heart. I will help you through to the other side, until we meet face to face. I am not your father from heaven or this earth.

I am the man you will someday be, who has come back to tell you you need not be afraid. You will not be alone.

This time, I will be with you the entire way.
Yesterday’s screams echo down a hall, painted red with fear.
With a silent voice, for help I call, but no one seems to hear.
Thick in the air hangs the stench of escape. It lingers on his breath.
The ancestor of psychological rape, he lives a painful death.
At hall’s end, there stands a door; in my hand, a key.
What lies beyond is the inner core, the answer to all that’s me.
In this room I can tell no lies, my soul scarred with honesty.
A familiar face that I despise, his tired eyes stare back at me.
Love’s twisted mirror now in shards, a reflection of tomorrow.
Queens of two from a house of cards will never know my sorrow.
From a tray of gold a bountiful yield, on guilt, I will not feast.
Beautiful light my protective shield shall save me from your beast.
The Weapons of Family War

2011

By Troy White

The treasure of trust, a guarded chest,
hidden where no one knows.
On its lid, our family crest,
a reminder of our foes.

Yesterday’s book, we hold so tight
in this fist clenched with rage.
The chapter of tomorrow in sight,
but we cannot turn the page.

Words we wield, the weapon of choice,
they are plunged deep in my chest.
Victory to the loudest voice,
these screams shall finish the quest.

The people they once were, the blade
that cut us when we turn.
My blood of blood shall carry the spade
that buries us as we burn.

A bitter kiss on today’s lips,
I taste the death it brings.
I tremble for the ones I miss,
numb from venomous stings.

In silence I wait, and retreat within
to heal my troubled mind.
The thickest blood forgives the sin
of the sharpest tongue, so kind.

To this day I cling with fear,
that tomorrow may never shine.
This page stained with blood and tears
I have conquered, and it is mine.
I lie weak at the bottom of the deepest well. Unable to stand, unable to climb, I pull myself to my knees. To lie there in the darkness, I will perish slowly. To attempt to climb, I will surely fall to my death. This is where I needed to be; alone, immersed in my tepid thoughts. My silent fears echo against the cold sweaty stone and attack me again and again. The silence is broken by the delicate sound of tears hitting tranquil pools of truth, evidence of years of strength that has overflowed its walls, slowly filling my sanctuary. I am shivering, numb, yet comfortable, as the small circle of light far above beckons. I crawl to the tiny thread of light that warms my thoughts and nourishes my soul. I reach out and feel the grit of a rusty metal rung and squeeze tightly to the hope it brings. My hands sliced raw from the eroded steel, I pull myself past the pain. Thick blood spirals down my arm and bathes my cold skin in a cascade of warmth. My legs shake as they support the weight of my life, but I am standing. My eyes fixed on the circle of light above, I begin to climb.

The blood dries and cracks, insulating me from the chilled air. With each step, the white circle gets bigger, and I feel the warmth of the sun. My hands no longer bleed, and they sweat with anticipation. Then, the circle grows black, as rain pours down upon my face and stings my focused eyes. My foot slips from the wet rung and I begin to fall, but my healed hands catch me. My energy spent, enthusiasm fades, as I only have the strength to hang on. The rain beats down upon me and washes the dried blood from my skin. The rain subsides, and I climb to the summit of light. Looking down the well, the darkness that used to consume me is now only a small black hole. There are days I climb back down the well and immerse myself in thought, where I need to be. Armed with calloused hands and wisdom, I know I have the strength to climb back out. Yes, there are days I may retreat, but I will never surrender. I will never give up.
There Will Always Be Rain
By Troy White

There’s a tear in my eye, though I know not what for. As impossible it is for me to cry, it has darkened this wooden floor.

A desert is what my eyes should be, a dried up barren land. There is no pain for these eyes to see. I have conquered it like a man.

But there’s a damn tear in my eye! What the hell is it doing there? This tear for you, I cannot cry. I’ve worked so hard not to care.

I rub my eyes with fervent zeal and scream “this can’t be true!” This isn’t the way I’m supposed to feel... at least, not about you.

Triumphant is the truth, at last, no longer can I deny. Though just memories from a doleful past, you live in each tear I cry.

I am the blood of your blood and salt of your salt; they taste both bitter, sweet. You, the keeper of my emotional vault, lay the combination at my feet.

The pounding hoofs are drawing near in the cadence of an ominous song. The rider that carries the scythe is here; your time on earth not long.

Inside your mind, you lived in hell, but to the Lord, this steed shall ride. To this humbled man I need to tell, I forgive you. I know you tried.

For in the end, there will always be rain from an ever-changing sky. I can see your sunlight through the pain in this tear, for you, I cry.
Healing a Broken Soul
By Sunwoman

There’s the past, present, and the future. My story isn’t much different from most. I was an abandoned and abused little girl.

I am looking out the window into the darkness, praying for God. Why has this happened? When is this going to end? I know when I grow up, these things will never happen to my children. I will let them know how much they are loved, and I will believe in them and protect them.

My past is difficult. I was sexually abused and beaten by family members, cousin, farm hand, uncle, high school acquaintance, boyfriend, and husband. Beaten, battered, and bruised. I have endured having to relearn that what was happening to me wasn’t love, that it wasn’t my fault, and that the threats of harm being revealed would never come to light.

I was such a scared little girl. I somehow split in two. I had a mother whose answer was “Boys will be boys” or “It’s your fault, you little whore.” Yes, when I was 11 years of age, that’s what she said.

When I was in seventh grade, I finally asked a friend, “What’s a whore? Do people love you like this?” That’s when I was told it was wrong and bad. Did this make me wrong? Bad? Dirty?

I spent many years with self-destruction. Yes, I wouldn’t eat, or I would overeat. I cut my wrist, cut other places where you couldn’t see. I felt like I was two separate people living in the same body. Me - quiet, shy, friendly. And the other - she was violent, hateful, hurtful, my stronger inner soul that was so angry. We both needed so much healing.

I am a survivor because I can tell my story without shame or guilt. After being hospitalized several times and lots of therapy, today I can handle a hug, a touch, a peck on the cheek, someone smiling at me. I don’t fear like I used to.

What also saved me was my children. I had to protect them. I have spent my life loving them, watching them grow. They have also been my strength and courage.

My future, you ask? Well, I met a man who is good to me. He has never abused me in any way. With him, I am not afraid. My heart trusts him. My family trusts him. We have so much in common. We love to garden, fish, camp, travel, and spend time with family, boating, baking, and cooking. My future holds so much. I have a grandchild who is my everything, one son graduating, and one getting married.

The sun has come out for me. The demons that kept me from living have died. God has rescued and saved me. What does the future hold for me? I’m not afraid to talk about the past anymore. I can give advice and pray for others. My dream is, someday, for all of this horror to be a thing of the past, to know that no other child will go through this pain and agony.

My soul once broken is now healing. I have a voice now.
A New Tomorrow

By Sunwoman

Years later, I was told my mother had endured so much as a child. Her past held so many deep, dark secrets. Mom was a stepchild, unwanted by all. Beaten, battered, and abused, left to live in a barn. This is the legacy she carries into adulthood.

I thought I was so blessed to be adopted into this family. A year later, my dreams turned to terror and were shattered. At 5 years, I stopped talking. Why, you ask? No one heard my screams for help or protection. I became that unwanted child.

At 7 years, I did all my chores perfect - or suffer the painful consequences. My fear of darkness - that comes from the root cellar, being locked in there for hours, with no light, human contact. The bruises on my back and legs - those came from a combine belt that we had to choose. My aching head - from being dragged around by my hair.

My childhood wounds took forever to overcome - and to heal fully, without living with hate in my heart. My saviors, you ask? My children. They gave me the strength to move on - for I needed to protect them from such darkness. They gave me hope for a better future. A future of undying love and acceptance.

My hope for the future - that we stand up for the weak and afraid, that someday no child has to live through the horrors of our yesteryears. Let’s be their voices - for we all deserve a new tomorrow.
You Think You Know My Life?

By Lovely Poison, age 21

You think you know my life?
You don’t know anything -

The pain of my past.
The ghosts that haunt me on a daily basis.
I’ve been to Hell and back more than once.

Searching for the love of a man through sex
since I was first touched in an inappropriate way.

Nine years of innocence
shattered by a man with misguided intentions.
Four years later, touched again by a father figure.
Breaking the silence wasn’t easy.
Once I did, I was punished.

Group home to group home to group home, I bounced.
Physical fights with the woman who birthed me
because she thought I was the enemy for sleeping with her husband
when it wasn’t consensual.

Years of counseling and soul searching
have made it so I can function in society like a “normal” person.

You think you know me?
You don’t know anything.
Somehow, during the abuse I had the courage to keep going and not give up on life. Something deep down inside of me told me that it was all part of a bigger picture. Somehow, I knew I could make it.

Don’t ever let anyone convince you that you are worth nothing. Your thoughts and opinions matter. And if no one is listening to you, maybe you’re talking to the wrong people.

As humans, we try to find deeper meaning in everything. The reason for hate is so we can know what love is. I am not bitter about all the hate I was exposed to as a child. All the garbage I had to deal with as a child has made me a stronger person.

Learn from an ugly situation and create something beautiful. Forgive but never forget.
I remember growing up in our small three-bedroom rambler with my brother and sister. I am the middle child and very close to my mom and dad. One of my favorite memories of my father was him rocking me to sleep in our big, soft, brown rocking chair in our living room; I felt so safe with him. I’m not sure how a child knows a bad touch from a good touch, but I somehow knew my uncle’s touches did not feel good; he scared me.

As I grew older, I realized the secret I was keeping was controlling my life. I wouldn’t want to go to family gatherings or holidays. He would be there. I wouldn’t play with my cousins much, and I always made sure I was around adults, where I felt safe. I developed a very bad self-image and would never dare tell my mother how bad her brother was. I never thought she would believe me. It turns out, she does believe me, and she reminded me of how I would never say what was wrong with me when she would find me crying for no apparent reason. I knew she cared. I just didn’t know how to tell; I didn’t know the words.

It’s been a few years now since I’ve been in therapy. There were so many days in the past that it seemed like I wasn’t really living, just existing. I now go to Adoration at church, an hour a week, with just me and maybe one or two others in a small chapel. It really helps me put things in proper perspective. I leave in tears sometimes, but that’s OK. My secret was just between me and God for so many years. He really knows everything!

I’m an adult now, and I have been given a second chance at life. I’ve got my problems with
relationships, but I feel like I’m learning to work on me, and that I do deserve to be happy. The hardest part is accepting that the abuse controlled my whole life, held me back from who I could have been. I didn’t have the self-confidence to go to college and be a teacher, but I found a career I’ve loved and worked at for 35 years. I wanted a large family. I was unable to have children, but with the help of a fertility doctor, I have a wonderful son. I always had a weight problem, but with the help of doctors and a great exercise class for support, I have now lost 50 pounds. My family and friends have been a great support for me. There are still nights I don’t want to wake up in the morning, but nothing is so bad that the next day won’t be better.

A few years ago, I taught Religious Education at our church. I was lucky enough to get the second graders! The leaders gave me books and material to work with, but to me, the most important thing I tried to teach them was that they were never alone. If they were ever scared of other kids or even of an adult, if it doesn’t feel good, the way other people treat you, tell another adult. Don’t be afraid; Jesus is always with you!

Survival is day by day and week by week. It does get easier - but those occasional nightmares, and dreams that I don’t understand. I try to remember each dream and to figure out what it means.

My uncle has passed away now, and I wonder if I will have to see him when I die. I want to see my father and grandparents when I pass. Will he be there too? It terrifies me to think he might come for me, instead of my dad. Do people who hurt you go somewhere else? Did God forgive him?

I’m having many more good days, than bad. I allow myself to have crying times when I need them. I used to think I was feeling sorry for myself when I would cry a lot. Now I know how healing it can be. It’s OK to feel sad sometimes; it makes the next day always better.

One of my favorite places to visit for healing and spiritual transformation is Sedona, AZ. We have been vacationing there for about seven years now. It is so peaceful, and the mountains are so beautiful, I could look at the stars and sunsets there forever. I feel so free and safe from all harm and bad thoughts. It could be that it’s so far away from where all the bad that happened - or just the vortex energies throughout the colorful scenery. There is a chapel built into the mountain that I love to go visit. I’ll always love this place, where I finally came to feel free of the shame and the guilt I was holding onto for so many years.

Out of all this, I still have a great sense of humor. I learned early how to be the “clown” with many tears after the party is over. You really do get very good at covering up the pain inside. I still love to laugh and have so many good friends to laugh with. If I can keep laughing and keep my great faith in God’s plan, I will live out the rest of my life feeling I’ve done my best. I am a good person, and I do deserve to be happy!
Hope
By Ronya Joy Hoblit

I know why people go away.
I know why people stay.

Hope
That the next moment will appear with the gift of forgiving for oneself and for others.
That the past will not repeat itself and
    lessons learned will reap constructive skills and outcomes.
That the present is so interesting that one should bathe in it.
That the future will always be within one’s perspective.

Hope
That the next breath will not happen.
That pain will disappear.
That all the questions of why, will no longer matter.
I know why people go away.
I know why people stay.
Non-Violence
By Ronya Joy Hoblit

“But he never hit me.”
Her gaze was nailed to the floor.
Her mind was frantically cramming all the non-violence into the dark storage room just below her heart in the pit of her stomach.

She had known non-violence so persuasive, so powerful that she hadn’t heard her own voice for years.

Only the slamming of doors behind her, beside her, in front of her.

The cells of her body had survived on minimal oxygen as she held her breath out of necessity.

As she held her breath . . .

“I’ve been thinking of why I should get out. Because, you know, he never hit me.”

She took a ragged breath so deep and sharp, it startled her heart and the beat hurried to unlock the darkness.

Her eyes found their range.
Her voice spoke her mind.

“Non-violence,” she thought.
“Non-violence?! How could that be? What part of my humanity thought that was OK?!”

Non-violence!! You know, I always thought it was because he never hit me.”
"As long as the rivers flow and the birds fly..."

We, the People, remain having been
revered, rebuked, remembered,
remade, reformed,
re-determined, restrained,
reunited, resigned, reserved,
resettled, retold, reaffirmed,
reallocated, reenacted,
rephrased, repopulated,
recharged, re-strengthened.

We remain having been
revered, rebuked, remembered,
remade, reformed,
re-determined, restrained,
reunited, resigned, reserved,
resettled, retold, reaffirmed,
reallocated, reenacted,
rephrased, repopulated,
recharged, re-strengthened.

We, the people who call each other relative.
We, the people who call all living things relative.
We, the people who are universally relative.

We belong to our land and will stay from
now to ever.

We, the people
joined with all living beings of the earth,
sea, and sky
who revel in the elements of what
was millennia.

We breathe the air of our ancestors
while continuing to serve and
conserve our home.

The rivers still flow, haltingly, and the
birds still left still fly...
We have not gone.
We remember.
We remain.

We, the people
who call all living things relative.
We remain.
What is survival?
I have asked myself many times that very same question. When I was younger, I wondered if the pain would ever go away. I would spend time in the cemetery and pray. I would ask my dead relatives, “Where did it start? Which one of you started a chain that has continued through generations?” As time goes on, the pain has lightened, but each time I think about what my father did, I feel that same sick feeling, as if it all happened yesterday.

I think survival has a lot to do with who we align our lives with. I have had the magnificent opportunity to marry a wonderful man who is gentle and loving. I do not have to feel fear from him at all. I also had the opportunity to be placed in a foster home when I was just over 18 and a senior in high school. This foster family was nurturing and understanding. They helped me through so much, the fear of my father, the night terrors that were horrific to say the least. I haven’t had a night terror in over 20 years now, and that has a lot to say about surviving.

Today, when I talk to my siblings, I sense the same feelings from them. You see, I moved away and do not have to fear him showing up at my door, but they all live in the same area. On any given day, he can drive up to their homes, and they immediately have that flash of those awful days. In fact, one of my sisters sees him on a regular basis. She has found it in her heart to forgive him and help him in his old age. I know she really didn’t have it as hard as some of the rest of us, but I do not know how she can see him and feed him and not want to make him choke on his food.

The fact that I do not have children of my own helps in my survival as well. There will be no perpetuation of a cycle on my behalf. I love children, and not having children was not a choice, but I know in my heart that it was God’s way of helping me survive.

One other thing that I contribute to surviving is moving away. As I live so many miles away, no one knows who my father is. No one knows about that poor girl from North Dakota who grew up and went to school there. No one knows about what the entire family went through. I am judged solely on my own character and not my past or who my family is. It is in this that I find peace.

I will survive and keep surviving, as long as there is no more abuse. I am middle aged, and my father an old man. He probably couldn’t hurt a fly now, but his wrath for so many years has made it hard for anyone to care about him. When my mother died, we blamed him for what he had put her through. I hope he, too, blamed himself and lived with that for nearly thirty years. That would only make me feel better.

Am I bitter? Yes. In writing this piece, I wonder if I am still a bit of that young girl that endured so much so many years ago. It sure does bring back a lot of those memories of wanting to get away. It brings back so much that I tried to forget.

So, like I wrote in my poem, surviving happens second by second, all of my life.
Surviving Second by Second
By Scarred But Alive

Surviving happens second by second, never lifting your guard. It comes in people, places, and things that allow us to be who we are. It happens somehow, sometimes, without efforts so great. Yet sometimes, despite the efforts - the pain, the hurt, the weight Come in waves that overpower and are more than I can possibly stand. So then I search around me for someone with the ultimate helping hand. When that is not there, it is then that I turn to find a safer haven; I then look for strength and guidance from Mom and God in heaven. Faith and love can overcome almost everything we have to fear. It has been there for me, to help me through every year after painful year. I resolve not to let my abuser take anything else from me; He took so much so many years ago, and now I wait to be free. So I survive second by second, so many miles and miles away And wait to hear of this old man’s death - that glorious, glorious day. At that time and that time alone, when my abuser has died, Then I can shout so freely, “I AM A SURVIVOR. I HAVE SURVIVED!” Then my future will be mine and so wonderfully bright. I will have survived, and it will be the end of the fight. I will be the survivor, and there will be nothing at all left to fear. Thanks to Mom and God in Heaven; my prayers, they did hear.
‘Til Death Do Us Part
By Nikkie Boe Johnson

My ex-husband used to liken me to a ship without a rudder, lost at sea with no sense of direction. He would chasten my lack of punctuality, implying that the consequences of my haste made me an accident waiting to happen. I imagine he viewed me as a lost vessel cruising through life, riding out wave after wave, until each would undoubtedly crash upon the embankment and leave me washed up on the shore. In reality, his parallel was just my desperate attempt to remain one step ahead of the abusive memories that still haunted me from my childhood. True as his words may have been, I never once in the years of our marriage conceded the accuracy of his metaphor.

My ex-husband touted himself as a firm believer in tough love. I firmly believed that he just loved acting tough. He was aware that I had been sexually abused as a child, yet his harsh words and demeaning admonitions stripped me of my dignity – and rendered me just as powerless as the frightened little girl that I was more than thirty years before, standing half naked in a dark room anticipating the scarring intentions of those who would strip me of my innocence as well.

I spent more than twenty years building a fortress around that fragile little soul which my ex-husband managed to demolish in less time than it took him to finish a sentence. In the absence of my defenses, I cowered in the shadow of my own fear, hopelessly seeking refuge. His cutting criticism kept me trapped in the psychological confines of an abused child’s mind where his words slowly killed me.

At the dissolution of our marriage, I left the memories of my ex-husband’s actions behind; still, his words followed me. They taunted me at first, echoing in the back of my mind as a reminder of what little I was worth, following me wherever I went, never allowing me to get very far: “Do this. Don’t do that! Slow down! Pay attention! Be patient. Don’t be so selfish.” Drowning them out only left me gasping for air.

So I chose to listen. The harder I listened, the clearer their message became, and without the threat of his intimidating presence, I let his words sink into the parts of me that I no longer felt compelled to protect. Safe from the fear of feeling like a failure and the inability to measure up, I could transform his words into the advice they were meant to be; with them, I found the strength and confidence to grow. The same words he once used to belittle me now had the power to help me heal far beyond the pain they’d put me through.

I am now learning to slow down and appreciate things, be more considerate of others, and offer my help when I can. I treat others with more respect; I teach others to respect me. I am much more patient and becoming more forgiving. I have fallen in love. I have allowed others to love me. I have kept my walls down and my heart open. But most importantly, I have stopped running from the frightened little girl of my past. I recognize that she has survived, and it’s my turn to live.

My ex-husband never realized the torture his words put me through. I didn’t realize the freedom they would later bring me. Marrying him was a good thing. Divorcing him was better. But the best thing that came out of all those years I thought I’d lost were the ones it gave me back - and those it would make up for in the end.
A Mother’s Heart
By Watching the Balloons Float Away

I feel lost today.
And lonely.
I feel empty, out of creativity. No energy even to cry.
So lonely....
Why didn’t you protect me, why didn’t you love me, why did you let him...
And, then...
A phone call from my East Coast son who just called to tell me he loves me.
To share tales of his 19 fourth-grade boys.
Which reminded me of how they called me on my birthday and sang “Happy Birthday” to me.
A phone call from my West Coast, creative son telling me “got THE job”
and that I was part of the reason for his success.
A Facebook post from my future “daughter-in-love” - a new Ad Council spot, “Love Has No Labels,” that she was production assistant for.
Now I stand here with tears of joy streaming down my cheeks and my heart full of love...
So thankful for my “children”...
Knowing that eventually my heart will heal...
Here We Go
By Lynn M.

Q: If abuse has happened in other generations, when do you believe it started in your family?
A: My ma gave me permission to share a little about her side of family, but not to use names, as I promised her. My ma’s dad was an alcoholic and abused his wife (Gramma) and my ma, plus her baby brother. When my gramma was at work, Grandpa did sexual abuse with my ma.

Q: What has helped you get through?
A: I believe it was God that helped me get through my abuse. And it did help when my ma and real dad got back together. It changed my life. I went to counselors, talked about it, and learned from it.

Q: How do you survive?
A: One day at a time, throwing love and positives to God, family, and friends.

Q: What is your healing process?
A: Forgive to let it go. Throwing all my love to my family and friends to make them smile is part of my healing. What I do, I’m an actor (monkey) to cheer many sick deaf children, through Glide, while they are in hospitals - also, on blogs, I have many videos of songs or comedy shows (of the monkey) for deaf people to feel uplifted. This is part of my healing.

Q: How do you heal if you do?
A: I went to counselors. Dad and Ma showed me their love and care. We had very good communication. We chatted all the time to make me feel special and strong.

Q: Do you ever wonder if you’ll survive; if so, how did you get through it?
A: My faith in God.

Q: What would you like to say to children and parents?
A: To listen to each other; communication is very important. Talk about problems to solve them, and be there for each other.

Q: What is your wish for future generations?
A: To love and respect. To live and be a strong support. To laugh and be happy.

Q: If you worry, what do you worry about?
A: Love. But I’m not worried; love is too powerful.

Q: What do you dream of for yourself, for your family, or for others you care about?
A: I dream to have a happy life without abuse. I give my family a lot of love and support. Each of my sons had their own problems with bullying, but I am there for them and teaching them to be strong.
My Dad and More

By Lynn M.

My dad was there all the way to help me and my ma through counselors’ treatments and such, as I used to feel ashamed, with my eyes looking down. My hero father fought through a tough love that changed my life from my beginning with negatives, now to the positives; I learned to do right from wrong and to be able to speak out, have love for who I am, and not be afraid of people.

When I look back since I was little, it’s like going through a dream. I was involved with animals that guided me through to survival; I always wandered off on walks for miles through the country, singing. Such a lonely, quiet world. But animals came to me and were the only friends I had protecting me - dogs, buffaloes, horses, coyotes, and mostly I kept stray dogs that I would bring home with me. What was amazing to me was they wouldn’t let abusive guys get near me, or when bad happened to me, they went crazy-like. I believe the animals here work for God sometimes.

Now I have three kids and am married - a wonderful man who never hurt me or the kids with any kind of abuse like sexual abuse. I learned a lot through raising kids with a good life, better than I had.

I still love to go out hiking with dogs and do rescue to find missing dogs or help find a new home. I love, too, to do animal caretaking sometimes. I also enjoy doing writing and speeches throughout my state or through Facebook to help make people smile - and find how to love themselves. What’s more, I love being an actor monkey in a mask to cheer people, especially the children!
When I was a very small baby, I remember, I think I was still in diapers. I remember being scared, I vividly remember that. I was in the crib, and I was crying and crying, and I was kicking my legs. I was crying for my mom who was down the hall. My mom was fighting with her ex-boyfriend. I looked up, and I saw a shadow coming toward me with kind of an evil grin on its face, and it scared me. I tried to stay away from it. A young woman heard and came in and picked me up. She was smiling, and I was relieved to be picked up and given some attention. She was holding me.

After that, I don’t remember anything until, again, after I had been raped the first time, I was in the bathtub, and I was bleeding. I went in to take a shower. I was on the bathtub floor, and I was crying. And I felt her holding me. I just felt her so firmly holding me, and somehow, I didn’t hear at all, but somehow I could feel her heart beating.

From time to time after that, there were different events, and she was always there after they had happened. I was hiking one time. I became lost. Well, I wasn’t really lost, but I was quite far away from where I’d left, and it was time to go back. I was bit by a scorpion, and I fell down, faint. When I woke up, there she was again. She gave me food, and she gave me something to drink and took care of me.
I went back home, and the next day, after I got out of the hospital (I’d been checked), my mom and I were in the truck, we left, and I spotted...I could see somebody there. There was a man and a woman, and they were singing. I said, “Mom, look at that couple over there. Look at them.” Mom didn’t see anything; I think she just didn’t see it at all, so we kept going. But in my mind, somehow, I thought, Why were those people there? I wasn’t sure.

Then, at some time later, I’m trying to remember when, my step-father was working in a shop; he was a mechanic. And at home, my step-father and one of the workers came over and both did things to me. They raped me; I was sexually assaulted. And then after that was done, I ran outside to the river. It was right in our backyard. I ran down to the river, and the river was flowing really fast. There had been a storm or rain or something, and so the river was going by quite rapidly. I was tired of being abused; I had had enough. And I decided I was going to drown myself to get rid of my pain, so I went under water, and while I was in the water, I remembered all the things that had happened to me, and I could see the woman. She was like an angel in the water, even though it was dark under the water, and I couldn’t see very much. But somehow, I could see her. There was a woman with beautiful eyes, and she looked Native American, Navajo. And I remember seeing a lightning bolt, and I woke up on the ground. I don’t know how I got out of the river onto the ground. But I was underneath the tree, and I was safe.

Time went on, and I didn’t think too much of that. But then my real father showed me a picture.

He said, “This is your great-great grandmother. She died some time ago.”

And I thought, What? I was so taken aback. Probably, it was her spirit that was helping me. And I still see her from time to time, not as often as I did when I was younger.

Now, my son has said he has seen a spirit as well. I don’t know, but it could be that the spirits are following my boys and looking after them.
Imaginary
By Karen Van Fossan

I still believe in my imaginary friend. I don’t see her with my eyes anymore, but I tend to think that’s because I’ve lost track of the way of seeing her, not because she actually went away. Listening to my soul sister and brother survivors, I’ve come to understand, for the first time, that my imaginary friend was connected to my survival.

I’m often called an idealist. My imaginary friend came from this idealized world - where love was love, period. Even as a child, I couldn’t remember, five minutes after we’d played together, any of our activities; they didn’t take place in the realm of remembering. I inhabited another world with her, lush and teeming with life, a world that this one could be, if only it could reach its potential.

My imaginary friend helped me practice the art of love, which, I believe, is the art of life.

Origins 1

We sit in the green of the tree, side by side, cheek pressed to cheek.

“Yellow,” I say. “This morning is yellow.”
Mmmm hmmm. The voices sing.
Do we make noises? Yes, we make noises.
We fancy like songbirds. We whistle like boys.
We throw off our shoes, and we jump in the river.
All of this dancing water is here.
The water-ones splash us. They tell us, “We found you!”
Of course, they found us.
They carry us down, where water is heavy, and words look like air,
and bodies are thick, and hair is a snake, a river of snakes.

“Am I drowning?” I ask.
But still I am happy.
The voices sing. Mmmm hmmm.
I buck to the surface. I toss up the water.
I spin in the water.
Together, we spin.
“You’re alive!” they cry. “You’re alive, you’re alive!”
And I answer, “Yes!”

Origins 2

In all the world, she and I are the ones who know this stretch of river, warm, so warm, folded as the river is, between these walls of limestone rock that push, like old faces, toward the bank.
Sunlight shines like pennies, turning circles on the water.
Trees push the river.
Sparrows dive the surface.
Nothing alive can keep away from this river.
She puts her hands on her tiny hips. “Want to know what I love about you?”
I am bouncy in my legs. I say, “Tell me!”
“Guess!”
“Nnnn...I can’t guess...I can’t guess!”
We smile until our lips could touch our ears.
But then she runs away from me. “I’m not going to tell you. I’m not going to tell you!”
I grab her left and right, laughing all the while.
We jumble through the water, splashing through the mud,
laughing among the crawling things.
We run and run. Forever, we run!
“Weren’t you going to say what you love about me?” I cry.
She tosses the water up, up, high above our heads.
She says, “Everything!”
**Origins 3**

I pull at the roots, alone today.
With all my might, I yank.
This will be my supper here. This will be my pile.
I am digging up the cattail roots and stinking wild onions.
Also, there are bottles.
Green and brown and clear and blue.
Shards of glass that tear my hands.
I pull at aluminum cans now.
Plastic bags.
Styrofoam bits.
Every kind of trash there is, every wasted thing.
I stack them into a pile, a tall and heaping pile, next to my pile of roots.
And now
I can’t remember which pile to eat.

**Origins 4**

I lay here in the swampy place, begging the spiders to carry me off.
But the spiders do no rescues, so I have to walk the swamp.
The gases rise like eyeballs. The murky water scares my thighs.
The shadows say, “I’ll kill you next.”
“You can’t,” I say.
It’s true, they can’t - my body isn’t here.
No, my body isn’t anywhere.

**Origins 5**

Frogs are leaping out of me.
The fish swim out of me.
A thousand, a thousand are coming out.
Get them into the river, or they will die.

**Origins 6**

The frogs, the fish, they lead me in.
They take me home, below the roof of the murky water.
I follow where they lead, to the muck, the underneath, to the ones I left behind.

**Origins 7**

“Ahhh,” they say, my yesterday people. “Now we have this child of fire, this blazing orange, this red, this hot.”
They smile on me.
On me, they smile.
They sing to me in voices of river, of bluest water, of morning sun come shining down.
They pass me, arm to arm, and heart to heart, and face to face.
They say, “My dear.” They say, “Our dear.”
Many voices pour from each, and many arms wave out from each.
They talk to me in secret tongues, and sing with the voice of endless water, and wash, wash, wash away the hurting in their arms.
Then, as one, they smile on me.
“You have come again,” they say.
Many shades of hair caress their friend - me.
Alive.
Building Resilience
By Rhonda Lura

A shattered road was paved before I was born. My mom had a history of abuse with her ex-husband who she had two children with. He shot her in the head and left her to die and then shot himself. I considered my mom a survivor since she lived through this tragic event, and it completely changed her life, becoming partially paralyzed and having to relearn everything.

Years later I was born, and my dad was already out of the picture. I am not sure when my mom met the monster who would leave me with a childhood full of nightmares. My mom had two children with him.

As a little girl, I watched my mother wear the bruises, take the constant name calling, and try suicide multiple times. As far as I could tell, she never once tried to fight the abuse, shut out the words, or say, “Please stop.”

Is this how I was supposed to survive? Ignore the feelings, go numb to the pain, and shut down like my mother did?

What my abuser didn’t know is that I hid a knife under the mattress of my bed, and at night I would try to end the pain by pushing the knife into my stomach until I felt a different type of pain. I would fall down and cry - because how could I be so weak and carry so much pain when all I wanted to do was end my life?

Even though I hated school because I was bullied by a few mean boys and spent most of my time at recess swinging by myself, it was better than being anywhere near the monster. I did have some friends, but for some reason parents wouldn’t let their children come to my house to play. I wonder if they knew what was happening in that two-story, brown and yellow house that looked so dark and scary.

I did have an angel in disguise; her name was Bernice. Whenever I was able to go outside, I would run to her house. She was an older, widowed woman who always left her door open for me. She was the one person I could open up to and tell anything. Bernice taught me so much and made me feel like she actually cared. She knew what happened to the little girl who lived in the house across the street from her. Coming from a small community, she never got involved, or maybe she was scared of the monster and what he might do to her. All I know is without her, I probably would have succeeded in ending my life, but she gave me hope.

As I became older, I started to devise a plan to run away. After I had every detail down and the money I needed, something in me told my mom about my plan. I told her, “This is the last time you will ever see me. I will never look back, but only forward.” I don’t know what happened, but she made the decision to tell the monster she was leaving - and this time for good.

I was so excited for a new beginning. What I didn’t know was that I had another battle to fight. My mother started drinking nightly and would bring a man back home every now and then for herself or for her daughter. I am not sure what she told these individuals, but when they saw me and realized I was just a girl, they left. I grew tired of the behavior my mom displayed from the alcohol. Once again I had to be the adult and stayed up and took care of her while she was sick from all the alcohol. I started missing school, failing classes, sneaking out of my room at late hours of the night, and fighting with my mom daily. I would pray to God and ask him, “Is this really the future you have planned for me?” Being a firm believer that everything happens for a reason, I moved out at the age of fifteen and became
an unruly child of the state of North Dakota.

At the age of sixteen, I met my father for the first time. Everyone had always told me that I looked like him. I was so excited to have a real dad in my life who made me a lifetime full of promises to try to make up for all the years he was gone. One of the biggest promises he made was that he would be at my high school graduation. This meant the world to me just to graduate and to have him there and be proud of me. I remember walking out on that stage to get my diploma and finally realizing this was another broken promise. This went on for many years.

When I became an unruly child because I wouldn’t move back in with my mom, I was given another chance. I babysat for a family who became my foster family. I am thankful for them opening up their home to me, but I know I came with a lot of baggage and lots of counseling. I was thankful to live with them until I graduated.

I had my first child, Skyler, at a young age and then got married and had another child, Stetson. I was so terrified that I would treat my child the way I was treated, knowing that abuse was a pattern. I fell in love with that beautiful little boy the day he was born and realized that I could never put my children through what I went through, and that I would spend the rest of my life protecting them. During my first marriage, I realized I was starting down the same path as my mother, though I’d promised myself when I was a little girl I would never let myself be like her.

Eventually going through a painful divorce and having to live alone, I started to feel like everything was caving in and I was making a lot of bad choices. The monster, now inside me, told me I was nothing, and nobody would ever want me. Maybe he was right, and maybe life would be better without me in it.

God must’ve heard my cries. I finally met the love of my life. Brock has been my husband for eleven years. He helped me realize what it was like to love like in the movies, feel the goosebumps, my heart beating fast every time he walks into the room, and knowing he is my soulmate. We have two children together, Jonathan and Mercedes. When my daughter was born I felt everything was complete. I promised my children I would be the best mother I could be and every day I would try to be a better person. The only thing that was missing from this picture was trying to figure out who I really was and why did I go through all these experiences? I joined a Bible study group to help become a better person and to figure out who I was. I’d always done what everyone else did so I could fit in. I hated conflict and would cower and definitely had no backbone.

This is when I realized I have four beautiful children and a husband who loves and respects me, so I started a long journey of digging up all those horrible memories that I worked so hard to repress. Learning to forgive everyone who left their marks on my heart, I had to learn to love myself and that I was done being a victim. This has not been an easy process. It would have been so easy to give up but with the strength of my husband, God, and our children, I have been given my voice. I will continue sharing my story and using my voice to help others begin their healing, finding their way, and their voice.

If this has left you wanting to know more, my dream is to someday write a book about my whole journey.

I want to share a quote that seems so fitting from Carl Bard:

“Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new end.”
Fear of exposure when revealing what abuse really is - it is raw and painfully true. The pain and anguish of the hidden abuse is made worse by keeping it inside. Fear stopped and bound me as its prisoner. Hopelessness took hold of me. I had no control - fear of exposing the invisible, open wounds known only by you and me.

Worrying that everything good will be taken away again - it keeps us isolated in pain. In denial of ourselves and denial of others, we are blind to the truth by fear. The abuse has the power with our fear.

I expose the fear and the pain and the memories that remain - for my healing. The power of love is stronger than fear.

I choose love. I can control my healing recovery. With love, I forgive myself for all that the abuse has done to me. I ask the powers of healing to release me from the fear, anger, and negative voice - to fill me with love, hope, and courage, for healing energy and clarity to make good choices.

I still believe the good healing spirits do come to help me - even through nature’s energy. I’m actually going outside and hugging my tree! It all does comfort me.

How can I thrive? I will persevere to survive and even succeed to become a champion of my life - to heal my spirit, to become whole, real, and free! With huge amounts of patience as this healing doesn’t have a time limit, I am so thankful! With everything good in me, I will endure with the true light of love. This is for you and me.
In remembering my feelings of when I was a young child of 3 to 5 years old, memories came and nightmares of running, being chased with big hand grabbing at me, feeling of extreme fear that I was dying. Other times I was drowning, my head just above the water and then going under, my feet flinging, unable to feel the bottom. I couldn't breathe, I passed out.

I had memory lapses, feeling confused, disoriented, not remembering how I got where I was. I had strange feelings I didn't understand, feelings of terror. I heard screams inside my head, trying to scream, but no sound came out of my mouth. My throat hurt and burned, fighting for air.

I remember, when he caught me and held me down, I would stop breathing and look up at the sky and the trees, and I would leave my body and mentally go. I was told that as a child I had a lot of nightmares, and I was afraid to be alone. I clung onto my sister, and she would carry me everywhere until I was too heavy to hold. I was sick a lot.

As an adult, I still had night terrors and nightmares, and I became hospitalized with severe stress, anxiety, and panic attacks. With skilled professional help, I started accepting that my nightmares, fears, and memories were real; after many years of trust they were revealed and validated. My memories came in fragments, not in neat order, some just segments and parts that didn’t make sense. At first, my hearing and feeling memories terrified me and made me doubt my mind, my sanity.

My niece and I were best friends, at five and six years old, in our play space in the upstairs closet. He locked us in, and then he went in and put one of us out at a time. I could hear her cry through the door, and I couldn’t help her. Afterwards we cried holding each other; we promised not to tell, as we were told, so he wouldn’t hurt us again. But he did - wherever he found us, in the barn and other buildings on the farm. He used manipulation and betrayed our trust.

He abused my older sister also. She thought she was the only one, and that he wouldn’t do it us younger ones. She thought she protected us. I heard her crying in the loft of an outside building, and I called to her, but he yelled to go away. I felt helpless. I couldn’t help her either. We did what we had to do to survive, to save ourselves. We developed survival skills to stay alive.

We are not to blame for being abused. Always know that YOU ARE NOT WHAT THEY DID TO YOU! I am so glad you are here, too!
Her Voice of Protest
January 1, 2015
By Linda Salverson

No, I don’t want to. STOP.
Don’t touch me. That hurts. Quit.
Leave me alone. I want to go.
Go away from me. Let me go. I can’t see.
I’m too little for that. STOP. I want my sister.
I want my mom. I need help. I want to run.
Don’t talk to me. Where is everybody?
I can’t breathe. HELP. Save me...
I am trying. My mom needs me.
I need to go potty. I won’t tell. Put me down.
I won’t cry anymore. I promise.

Truth in the Light
August 1994 and 2004
By Linda Salverson

Even though alone,
you are but one source of light.
Stay true to the light,
breaking more light,
and you will become a force to be recognized.
One place I was safe was in the kitchen with my mom. I wanted to help and be near her, baking and cooking for all of us.

She wanted us to go play outside.

For safety, we would hide in the tall grass along the lake and flatten down the weeds and cat tails, to play and braid grasses. It was our refuge. We would pretend to wait for the girls from the Bible stories to come and find us, like they found the baby Moses in the basket in the reeds by the water.

My favorite places are still near water, the lake with the tall reeds rustling in the wind, and resting against the trees. Near the ocean with all the sounds of nature, that’s where I feel peaceful and safe. I’m learning to be balanced, centered, and unafraid. The abuse and memories of abuse and the fear can’t hurt me anymore.
Daughter, My Daughter

February 27, 1996

By Linda Salverson

Why have they no empathy, no understanding of what he has done to my sweet little girl?

From the age of three and so trustingly... she went with him, first freely.

“But mom, he’s their son,” she implores me.

She has immense understanding of the depth of love and what some will do.

With no awareness of her own need for love and understanding, she asks for nothing.

Their denial of her being violated, impairing her to her core with deep physical and emotional pains, appalled me.

Becoming aware of their knowing and denial of his other child victims spoke volumes to me.

These layers of abuse will not go unnoticed or be in vain for my daughter.

With help, she has made huge gains, and she deserves so much more, much more.

Given the opportunity, all she asks for is validation, a recognition that it is real - and not endure further pretense of “nothing happened,” and “It’s all over and done with now.”

Oh! If only it were so simple! Ignoring it doesn’t make it go away; may they realize that someday.

Now my concern is for my daughter, to acknowledge her voice, ensure her security and a safe place to live our lives, not just saving face!

To learn the truth, the real true love, doesn’t hurt and deceive - to relearn trust to believe in good... for my daughter.
Reclaiming My Spirit
February 14, 1990
By Linda Salverson

There is a reason for my sadness. In the midst of all the madness, sits a little girl... her body all wrapped up into a curl. Protecting herself, despite the struggle, strife, and hopelessness. She turns to look at me... Sadly she asks, “What have I done to them that they would do this to me?” “Nothing,” I say. “Nothing at all. You were a child, and you took the fall. Though unfair and unjust - you lived through it all. I am glad you, now, have heard my call.”

In trying to reclaim my spirit, I discover she has preserved her soul. She has remained perfectly intact. “You’ll be fine,” I say. “In fact - you’re perfect, just perfectly wonderful.”

Scattered Dreams
1994
By Linda Salverson

As sudden as the fall leaves just dropped to the ground, all my dreams came crashing down in tiny pieces scattered all around. Then the wind kicked up and blew them to safety where they will be waiting for me some day, some way... Until I’m ready to pick them up and start again.
Silence is Not Healing
By Lenny Hayes

Expert Witness Testimony before the “Attorney General’s Advisory Committee on American Indian/Alaskan Native Children Exposed to Violence: Ending Violence so Children Can Thrive” on December 2013, in Bismarck, ND.

I speak today as MY 6 year old boy who is being traumatized. My little boy is sitting in the corner with his head between his legs. He looks up with no face, messed up hair, and tattered clothes. My little boy is scared, and feeling hopeless and helpless. My little boy is asking why? My little boy wants to scream, yell, and be heard, to be listened to, to have someone witness.

The ones who are to be my protectors are the ones who are hurting me. How do I tell them to stop? How do I yell for help when I am being told to keep quiet? “Shut up or I will hurt you even more!”

I am a boy who wants and needs to play, with no worries. I am a boy who is supposed to ride a bike. I am a boy who is supposed to laugh and giggle. I am a boy who is supposed to enjoy the sun beating down on my face. I am a boy who is supposed to play in the mud. I am a boy who is supposed to dream. But instead I am a boy who is scared even to go to sleep because I am afraid I might wet the bed. If I wet the bed I will be beat, again and again. I am victimized almost daily with physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse.

I am in a corner and my body is being touched and groped. How do I say “stop?” I close my eyes, and my tears begin to flow. I go to a faraway place with my mind… a safe place, a happy place, a place where I don’t have to feel what my body is experiencing. After it’s over, I am lifeless, and I begin to come back to my body once again. Many times when I am being victimized over and over, I am looking down from the ceiling, and I can see my body being taken advantage of. I am saying…. “poor little boy, it will soon be over.”

As a young adult I carried shame, anger, frustration, and hurt, and lashed out at others. I made bad choices in which I abused alcohol to try to make the pain go away. I carried the mental, spiritual, and emotional scars of being physically and sexually abused. I did not want others to look directly at me in my eyes because I was afraid they would see the pain of my past. I made bad choices and was in dysfunctional relationships. The only life I knew was to be abused as an adult - the terrible dreams I experienced and still do at times, the many tears I shed as I talked and experienced my pain all over again. I knew in my heart that in order for me to heal from my pain, I first had to learn to embrace it, look at it, feel it, and heal from it.

One day, I saw the little boy that suffered and still suffers, I stretched out my hand, and
reached out to that little boy, he looked up at me, sideways at first, as if seeing a bright light that was too much to take in, and he reached back to me. I gave him my healing hand. He gave me his pained heart. Together we walked, talked, healed - well, healing towards a more whole person.

The journey of healing was not all happy excitement and joy. The path of healing was, is, painful, very painful, but I made it through.

I am no longer a victim, I am a survivor! I am a survivor of physical, emotional, mental, and sexual abuse. A survivor doesn’t mean that I just am acknowledging it but that I am choosing to grow, learn, and move forward.

Surviving means that I know my triggers.

Surviving means asking for help when I need it.

Surviving means that I don’t take away what has happened to me but learn to forgive my perpetrators.

Most of all, surviving means acknowledging my little boy when he comes out to play. Surviving means talking to my little boy and saying, “I am here and I see you! You will be OK, little boy, and it’s my turn to take care of you!”

Now as an adult who has looked at my path of healing, I can now be a helper, a healer. I am a listener. As a mental health therapist I bring forward understanding, compassion, empathy, an open mind, an ear to listen, kindness, and love to the children and adults who are struggling to heal. Within my role as a therapist, guide, mentor, and member of a circle of practitioners who see historical trauma and have also experienced it, now I am a believer that all little children can and will heal from trauma - with those who can reach out to them, to witness their stories, experiences, and bring them through their own healing journey.

I’d like to say thank you for allowing me to tell my story today. I tell my story not because I am looking for others to feel sorry for me, but because I believe if I could help one person, I am happy. I believe that the Creator has sent people to help me heal, so I am giving back to the Universe.

I want to dedicate this speech to ALL the children who have died because of trauma and to the ones who are experiencing it right now - and to the adults who are not living due to the struggles and challenges of facing their own childhood trauma.

I am witness to your stories!

As Wayne Dyer has said, “With everything that has happened to you, you can either feel sorry for yourself or treat what has happened as a gift. Everything is an opportunity to grow or an obstacle to keep you from growing. You get to choose.”
Elders and Validation

Told by Lenny Hayes to Karen Van Fossan

I had talked to my friend, an Ojibwe elder friend, and I asked her to help me. I felt this was the last process for my healing, so I went to her house, and she talked with me. She prayed over me, and she asked if it was OK if she sang an Ojibwe healing song over me.

One of the most powerful things she said to me was, “You need to thank that little boy for taking care of you. Because he gave you many gifts in order to protect yourself. And now you need to tell him that you need to take care of him now.”

That was one of my healings.

I knew, then, that I could move on with my life.

But what was most validating is the speech, the one I sent you. That speech, for me, was very validating because I have always talked publicly about my abuse. But this was more validating because it was somebody who was in a much higher power position than me, Senator Dorgan, who validated me by saying, “Rest assured, Mr. Hayes, your story has been heard.”

So for me that was very healing.
My Mother

Told by Lenny Hayes to Karen Van Fossan

My biological mother was one of my perpetrators.

People always ask me, “How can you forgive her?”

One of the things I always talk about is that if I didn’t learn how to forgive her, I would be carrying a lot of hate, anger, and rage with me. And I wouldn’t be able to be at the place that I feel that I am at now, which is a good place.

And so I remember the day that I actually forgave her.

I was living in a different place than where I am living now. But I got up and made coffee. The day before, I had gone to therapy and I talked a lot about my abuse and stuff.

I remember sitting on the deck. I used to love to go out on the deck and drink my coffee and just sit there and meditate or whatever. But I remember going out there, drinking my coffee, and all of a sudden, I had this overwhelming feeling of happiness, and I couldn’t figure out where that was coming from. The most amazing thing was, I opened my eyes, and I saw things that I had never seen before - like really thought about it.

And what I mean by that is I actually saw squirrels playing.

I saw birds flying and chirping.

So for me that was very healing, because it was just an overwhelming feeling of happiness. I remember right after that feeling, I thought, *Wow! I can actually see the beauty of nature. I can actually feel the beauty of life.*

I remember calling up my sister, and I called my other sister, and I said, “You know, if I died today, I would die happy, because I forgave my main perpetrator. I passed along the healing part - because I believe that if I had never gotten to that place of healing, I don’t think I would be where I am at today.

Because I don’t hate my mother.

I don’t have to love my mother, but I don’t hate her. I still love her. She is my biological mother. She gave birth to me, but I love her with boundaries.
White Butterfly: Story of My Healing  
*Told by Lenny Hayes to Karen Van Fossan*

I was so happy, and I could not believe this happened to me.

I had a friend who was helping me to learn about the sweat lodge and how to prepare the fire. So this person went off and said, “Watch the fire. Take care of it.”

And this was in October of 2012. I was sitting by the fire, and I was praying, and the fire was burning. All of a sudden, I opened up my eyes, and – remember, this is October – it was a white butterfly that landed in front of my feet.

And then it went and danced around the pit of the fire, and then it disappeared.

I remember telling my friend about it, and I was like, “What does that mean?”

And he said to me, “Lenny, you are at a place where you have done some tremendous healing. And so what happens is that the Creator sends spirits to help you. I believe that all the childhood trauma that you went through, the answers just came, and the Creator threw them in the fire. Remember, a butterfly means transformation. So seeing that white butterfly - that’s...you.”
If You Are Going to Be Silent, You Are Not Going to Heal
Told by Lenny Hayes to Karen Van Fossan

I really strongly believe in the historical and intergenerational trauma piece, so when I talk about survival or healing, one of the things I was facing was my trauma. It took me quite a long time. I went to really intensive therapy for about ten years. It took me about six months to even start to talk about the abuse. I remember my therapist would tell me - she never pushed me, but she would say, “Eventually, you really need to talk about this.”

Rape. That is what happened to our people, our children, our culture, our spirituality. We’ve been raped in many different ways. Physically, we’ve been raped from our land. A lot of things have been taken from us. People need to hear that. That is what is happening to our people.

As a therapist, I received advice from a friend, “Remember; you’re carrying 500 years of pain. Your client is carrying 500 years of pain. So you carry both pains. Always go home and do something good for yourself, even if it means simply taking a bath, a walk, watching a movie.”

It’s not my work; it’s the people’s work. So I always keep that in mind when I am doing any type of programming or any kind of work that I am doing now with the Two-Spirit/LGBTQ community. I have learned to accept things. I mean, it took me a while to even accept that I am a national two-spirit leader. It took me a lot of time to accept that, and I accept that in a humble way.

One of the reasons why I do this, too, is that people need their stories to be heard, and that a lot of our people might have healed from trauma and need to come forward and tell their stories - because that gives permission for others to come forward and tell their stories.

I really, really believe if we can do that, we will promote more healing in our community. I know it takes a long time to get to the place where I am at. It took years of really intense therapy to get to where I am at.

So that’s why I am hoping and praying that more Native people will tell their stories.

I think about all the children who have experienced physical abuse...sexual abuse. One of the things I think about is also the ones who have died. I am connected to my spirituality and my culture and so I think about ancestors and what our ancestors went through.

When I talk about children, children need to be heard. Our families never talk about the things we had experienced, and I get it. I understand where that comes from.

But I feel that if you are going to be silent, you are not going to heal. Silence is not healing.
A Note from the Editor

It would be tough to say which parts of the “Authentic Voices” public readings are my absolute favorites: hearing the wisdom of survivors, watching the faces of listeners, sharing a laugh at the book-signing table, or maybe the conversations. Having been moved by many conversations among survivors - those who wrote for the first book, as well as those who found us later - I invited authors of “Authentic Voices 2” to share a conversation in print. I asked authors if they’d like to meet each other via email and then converse.

Nikkie Boe Johnson and Ronya Hoblit (who initially asked to remain anonymous) both said “yes.” I heard from Nikkie first.

A Letter from Nikkie Boe Johnson

Hi, Karen!

I’m up for anything. I am just interested in joining with others to make our voice a little louder. The more we’re heard, the more good we are doing. I am proud of “Anonymous” for stepping up.

I am sending a piece I just wrote. If you think it sounds appropriate, send it along. I am excited to hear from her as well!

Thanks,

Nikkie Johnson
The Ones We Choose to Find
By Nikkie Boe Johnson

I’d never choose you from a group.
You’d never pick me from a crowd.
Sometimes we don’t know we’re lost
until we realize we’ve been found.
But it takes something much greater
than a simple visual search
to find someone among the ones
still searching here on earth -
amidst the crowds and varied groups
for another bravest soul,
afraid not of the consequence,
to have their story told.

Yours, my friend, may differ,
perhaps greatly from my own,
but in collaboration,
neither one was told alone.
And for that simple purpose,
we can stand together strong,
to help the ones who still are lost,
and to our group belong,
so they can tell their stories, too,
and maybe in the end,
they, like us, who once were lost,
will find themselves a friend.
A Letter of Response to Nikkie
By Ronya Joy Hoblit

Dear Nikkie,
What a joy it was to read your poem, to see and feel the thoughtfulness you brought with your words of support and truth. Victimization is division. Healing is a reunification of fact, esteem, and proper perspective that will leave a scar, emotionally always and physically sometimes. But it is healing, and part of that is what you know and write about as friendship. Your words are restorative, and it is my speculation that you are a good friend, whether to many or to a few, whether chosen or found. Thank you for your voice, your heart, your fortitude, and your wisdom.

With gratitude,
Ronya

Afraid Not of the Consequence
By Ronya Joy Hoblit

“Afraid not of the consequence, to have their story told”

Not from the rooftop’s jagged edge
nor in recessed shadows and altered voice.

Not through guilt choked tears
nor emotionless confession of their sins.

Not in response to anger’s extortionate cost
nor from the faulty foundation of shame.

No more fear, my friend, no more.
Tell your story and do not forget it is not your guilt, your shame, your fault.

You were a child.
Tell your story in your own voice.
The voice that soothes others will now bravely chronicle its own truth.
As you disclose, the air will shift, change direction, take on life.
The knowing nods, gasps of self-recognition, breath exhaled in relief and inhaled in newfound strength.
The only whispers now are of admiration, not secrecy, not denigration, not humiliation, nor fear.
If consequence there must be, let it be that of bold and compassionate voices.
Let those voices be the sound that reverberates veracity up and down the halls of justice for all.

*A Letter of Response to Ronya*
*By Nikkie Boe Johnson*

Ronya,
Your writings, in addition to being uplifting and inspiring, are very sophisticated and poetic. Your words unite beautifully, and their message is so clearly expressed. It is hard to describe, but after reading what you wrote, I felt like someone out of nowhere came up beside me and added support to whatever burden I may have been carrying. I think what Karen has started is amazing. We are not only reaching out to others, but we are being given the opportunity to help each other heal, remain strong, and continue to move forward.

I just turned 41 years old last month. My ex-husband was verbally and emotionally abusive, but it has been several years since I’ve experienced any type of physical or sexual abuse. I do feel that
I have made huge strides in my healing process, even just over these past years, but there are days my memory can quickly be triggered and my thoughts and feelings revert back to my past. Your work gave me something to substitute those painful memories with - the fact that I am not alone. I know there are so many others out there who have experienced the same kind of tragedies we have, but honestly, this is the first time I have ever exchanged my own writings with another person who understands the true meaning of their words.

Thank you so much for joining me in this awesome opportunity Karen has offered to us. I want to do everything I can to prevent anyone from having to go through what we did, as I am sure you do. I know together we will. I am just excited to begin our journey.

Sincerely,
Nikkie

A Note from the Editor

Nikkie and Ronya have begun an email correspondence, about life, about this and that, about things that have nothing - and everything - to do with surviving.

Meanwhile, Ronya shared this poem called “The Quiet Place” with Nikkie and me - and you.

The Quiet Place

By Ronya Joy Hoblit

There is a place quiet
where horizons blend
and breath comes easily
a place where rain is gentle mist
where light is filtered emerald
and comfort is your skin.

There is a place forgiving
where judgments do not sit
and truth rests comfortably
a place where journeys pause
where souls can make their bed
and renew themselves as dreamers.

There is a place accessible
where decisions are made
and time is spent with Creator
a place where love is without price
to me and you
to all before and all who follow.

The quiet place within your heart
where love survives the pain
and celebrates each triumph.
Discussion Guide

By Brian Palecek

1. This book and project are called, “Authentic Voices.” What is the significance of the word “authentic” in a survivor-led initiative to prevent childhood abuse? What is the significance of the word “voices?”

2. What are some moments in the book that seem particularly “authentic” to you?

3. Are there one, two, or more “voices” that speak to you? What speaks to you in particular?

4. It can be challenging to read a book like this, even though it’s focused on survival and healing. What pieces or passages were especially challenging for you? What made them challenging?

5. Are there any pieces that left you feeling especially hopeful?

6. Anonymous uses the collective “we” to talk about survivors. What do you think Anonymous intends to convey with this word? How is each “we” important to you?

7. Heather Pautz in “Raising Up the Will” refers to many songs. What is your special survivor song?

8. Leslie Brunette in “Divine Reversal” refers to a quote from the Biblical story of Joseph in Egypt in the Book of Genesis. What quote from a sacred or spiritual text or a wise teacher has comforted, consoled, or empowered you in your survival journey?

9. Leslie Brunette ends her piece with the two words “surviving and thriving.” How do you feel that these two important words should be used? What are their meanings for you?

10. Troy White in “My Beautiful Son” has written a complex piece with voices that seem to contradict each other. Who do you think these voices are?

11. In “The Room” Troy White has written a poem with four line stanzas, meter, and a rhyme scheme to tell a frightening story. What does this poetic form contribute to the way we read and experience the meaning of this piece? Does it make a difference in how we experience it?

12. Troy White’s stanzas in “The Weapons of Family War” include many powerful images and metaphors that relate to family conflict (family war). Choose a stanza and explore the way that the images and symbols in that stanza relate to suffering and surviving family conflict but also surviving and thriving.

13. Troy White in “The Days of Retreat” includes disturbing images that could be real experiences of violence and mistreatment but could be symbols that represent experiences. Choose a few specific images and reflect on how the images could be symbolic or a literal representation of the experience.

14. Troy White’s poem “There Will Always Be Rain” is a rhyming poem which resembles a ballad. Find a melody and rhythm that you and your partners can sing or chant. Then explore “rain” and “tears.” How is weeping or crying like a rain? Can crying be healing? How does it feel to really open yourself to the feelings in these verses?
15. In “Healing a Broken Soul,” Sunwoman refers to “healing” in the title. What are signs of healing in the piece? What are some experiences of healing you could share or write about in your life?

16. Sunwoman’s piece “A New Tomorrow” has two parts, a very painful and detailed story of abuse and mistreatment, but also of hope and renewal. What are the “saviors” that Sunwoman describes? How have children saved you and brought hope to you?

17. In “You Think You Know My Life?” Lovely Poison begins and ends the poem with the same questions. How much can we know the lives of others? How much should we know?

18. In “Words of Wisdom for the Reader” Lovely Poison asks us to learn from “ugly situations” and to “create something beautiful.” Look over and reread the pieces in this book. What are some of the most beautiful things that the writers have created?

19. In “The Next Day” Bonnie K. describes her spiritual practice of Adoration. She writes that it helps her “put things in a proper perspective.” As you read the pieces in “Authentic Voices,” what helps you put things in proper perspective?

20. “Hope” by Ronya Hoblit begins and ends with the same rhyming line. What can you share from your own life of about “going away” and “stay”?

21. The piece “Non-Violence” by Ronya Hoblit uses short lines and line breaks to express many things. How do the line breaks affect the meanings and feelings in this piece?

22. “We Remain” by Ronya Hoblit tells of the trauma experiences by an entire culture or people through history. The indigenous people of this continent did not vanish but “remain.” What stories of the survival of Native American people are especially significant to you?

23. The title of the piece “Surviving” by Scarred but Alive says in one word the theme of this book. What stories could you tell of your own survival?

24. “Surviving Second by Second” by Scarred but Alive follows a different style of writing by the same author. This poem uses long lines and rhymes. Does that make a difference in how we read and experience this piece?

25. Nikkie Boe Johnson, the author of “Til Death Do Us Part,” gives us a detailed story of a troubled relationship. What details are particularly painful to you? What details give you hope?

26. Watching the Balloons Float Away in “A Mother’s Heart” describes very specific moments when the writer feels “healing.” What are some moments of healing for you?

27. “Here We Go” by Lynn M. uses a question and answer format. Choose one question and respond to it in your own way.

28. “My Dad and More” by Lynn M. tells of animals who have been helpers to her. How have animals contributed to your survival and thriving?

29. “Spirit” by Lynn M. tells a frightening and terrible story, but the title is “Spirit.” How is this simple title connected to the story? What different meanings do we have for “spirit”?
30. Karen Van Fossan’s piece “Imaginary” is made up of sections called “Origins.” How does the imagination in these sections help her to practice the art of love which is “the art of life”? What is the role of imagination in your experience of the “the art of life”?

31. Resilience is a word that is used a lot in our culture for the ability to deal with difficult and destructive situations. How does Rhonda Lura’s piece “Building Resilience” illustrate building resilience? What can the reader learn about building resilience in oneself? Rhonda ends the piece with a quote about “making a brand new end.” Is this a useful idea for you? How do we make “new ends” for ourselves in our survival struggles in life?

32. “Authentic Voices” includes eight pieces by Linda Salverson. After reading “Healing by Exposure,” think about how exposure can be both frightening and healing.

33. “Screaming Inside My Head” by Linda Salverson is filled with frightening memories of abuse. Choose one memory that is particularly disturbing to you. Why do you think it affects you the way it does?

34. Compare “Her Voice of Protest,” a short piece by Linda Salverson, to the longer piece by the same author, “Screaming Inside My Head.” How are these two pieces different and similar? How do both express an “authentic voice”?

35. After reading “Safe Places” by Linda Salverson, list and share some places where you feel safe. Can you identify with the safe places described in Linda’s piece?

36. “Truth in the Light” by Linda Salverson is one of the shortest pieces in “Authentic Voices.” It does not include any obvious references to childhood abuse. What are some ways to relate this piece to the themes of “Authentic Voices”?

37. “Daughter, My Daughter” by Linda Salverson is an address of a mother to a daughter. Imagine that you are writing a piece to someone you care about. Give it a title like this piece, for example, “Brother, My Brother.” What would you be trying to say?

38. “Reclaiming My Spirit” by Linda Salverson begins with two rhyming lines: “There is a reason for my sadness/...” Imagine yourself as a child sitting in “the midst of all the madness.” How can you use these kinds of memories to reclaim your spirit?

39. “Scattered Dreams” by Linda Salverson reminds us that surviving and thriving are related to lost and rediscovered dreams. What is one dream that has come, gone, and returned for you?

40. Lenny Hayes, an enrolled member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, shares five pieces in “Authentic Voices.” In “Silence Is Not Healing,” Lenny writes a list of five qualities of surviving. Go through that list and discuss each one separately. Can you list another way to “survive”?

41. “Elders and Validation” by Lenny Hayes closes with a quote from Senator Byron Dorgan of North Dakota who says, “…your story has been heard.” Do you feel that people with authority, public officials, business and cultural leaders, and other persons of power and influence hear the authentic voices?
42. In “My Mother” Lenny Hayes speaks of forgiving his perpetrator. He describes the experience as a surprising moment of happiness. What is unique to you about his description of this experience?

43. In “White Butterfly” Lenny Hayes speaks of an unexpected experience with a white butterfly. What unexpected, powerful, and beautiful moment with the natural world has had a transformative effect on you?

44. In “If You Are Going to Be Silent…” Lenny Hayes speaks of a history of pain and trauma for Native American people. He says that he hopes that more Native people will tell their stories. Have you had the opportunity to share those stories; have you had the opportunity to hear those stories?

45. “An Engaged Conversation” by Nikkie Boe Johnson and Ronya Hoblit is a set of conversations between two people who participated in the “Authentic Voices” project through modern communications media. How can the new technologies help or hinder our surviving and thriving and sharing our lives? Does it make a difference that we are reading these poems, stories, and other pieces in a print format?

46. “The Quiet Place” by Ronya Hoblit closes these conversations and the book “Authentic Voices.” How do you feel about closing on this tone and note? What final words would you like to share at this point in your experience of this project?

47. How does reading and reflecting deeply on the pieces and illustrations in “Authentic Voices” contribute to how we empathize with others and to our resolve to survive, thrive, and be of assistance to others who face serious threats to their personal survival? How can we apply this to our lives as A) friends, B) family members, C) neighbors, D) citizens, and E) human beings who share planet earth with other beings?

48. Following is a list of words and phrases commonly used in our culture when reflecting on difficult or dangerous experiences. Reflect on what they currently mean to you and how their use changes: survival, survivor, success, victim, resilience, thriving, “thriver,” closure, letting go, moving on, endurance, strength, acceptance, and forgiveness.

49. Make a list of other poems, songs, books, movies, stories, etc., that address some of the same themes that appear in “Authentic Voices.” Compare them and contrast.

50. What is a benefit of prevention efforts that are survivor-led?

51. North Dakotans have sometimes said, “Child abuse doesn’t happen here.” We are sometimes reluctant to recognize abuse within our own families, social groups, faith communities, etc. How might this book help North Dakotans better understand the dynamics of childhood abuse in our state?

52. How does a book like this contribute to the prevention of childhood abuse?
**Anonymous**

We lived in ten different places before I was three, when we moved into my great-grandfather’s house after he moved to the lake. My mom still lives there. I got my love of poetry from my grandmother and my love of singing from my mother. Today, I try to help anyone I can, in any small way I can, even if it’s just singing a song or writing a poem.

**Bonnie K**

I was raised in a small neighborhood with lots of kids. I loved to swing and play tag, running through all the back yards with no fences! I still love wide open back yards and occasionally swinging real high. I love music and singing, when I know the right words. So many songs remind me of my life and the past. It’s not always good, but it is what it is.

**Karen Van Fossan**

I was raised someplace between cornfields and creeping urban sprawl. I wrote my first poem at age three, while singing and spinning around. Today, I work to prevent child abuse and still enjoy singing, making up poems, and occasionally spinning around.

**Lenny Hayes**

I am an enrolled member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate. My profession is a Mental/Chemical Health Therapist Consultant. I’ve offered training locally and nationally on the issues that impact the Two-Spirit/Native LGBTQ individuals and communities.

**Leslie Brunette**

My bio is a creation from my Z’s (kids). They are a huge reason why I survive and thrive, so I thought who better to write my bio? “My mom is nice, loving, unorganized, helpful, clean, amazing!” My oldest Z’s both said that one (amazing). It made me tear up to hear them say that; it’s exactly how I feel about each of them. I pictured holding a mirror that reflected that word, “amazing,” shining brilliantly back at them, filling their hearts and minds with that belief. They are amazing little people, and I draw strength and courage from all three of them every day! Miss Zaylea closed with this, “I picture you and God, two peas in a pod, and the one in the middle is me!” What an awesome visual. I loved the expression on her face and the tone in her voice. It was beautiful.

Leslie Brunette and Heather Pautz are sisters. Leslie says: My “little” big sister,
Heather, is a source of inspiration and strength for me. We grew up too fast and never had time to be the sisters we have become. The three of us, our lil’ sis included, are now women full of life and love, respecting each other for who we are and inspiring one another to become ALL that God has planned for us to be. Thank you, Heather and Greta, for who you are and for the sacred bond we share. Love you both so very, very much.

**Linda Salverson**
Growing up on a woodland farm in north lakes country, I connected with earth’s bounty for its healing and renewing nature and trees for strength and refuge. In that magical safe place in the reeds near the lake, I found peace and healing of my spirit. This is still true today.

About “Authentic Voices:” It’s like saving our lives from inside. It’s everything that we never got and everything we really need.

**Lovely Poison**
At 21, I am a performer, CNA, and animal lover. I’m married with a few “fur children.” I have a good relationship with my mom, dad, and foster mom. In the future, I hope to change the world so no one has to go through what I went through.

**Lynn M**
I grew up in many places and moved to North Dakota when I got married. We have three sons, and my ma lives with me - a big, happy family! I also run my own page, “Heart of Deaf Women Live/Laugh/Love,” which touches over a thousand women and their children.

**Nikkie Boe Johnson**
I started nowhere and have found myself moving towards a destination I never thought I’d see. I thank God every day for blessing me with the tenacity to continue forward, pray for the strength it takes never to go back, and ask for the courage I need to lead others. I am a survivor on the road to healing, and I know I’m not alone.

**Ronya Joy Hoblit**
I am a phantasmagorical kind of girl who can do anything if given a moment to visualize an outcome that may or may not be the actual outcome. But chances are the result may be even a greater than anticipated. My life is the best example of this.

**Rhonda Lura**
I am a survivor, and one who has been given the strength to share my voice and my story about overcoming child abuse and building resilience. I am a farmer’s wife, mother of four beautiful children, and the proud owner of my own clothing boutique. I hope my story helps you find your voice, feel like there is hope, and find strength to share your story.

**Scarred but Alive**
A Note from the Editor: In the interest of privacy and safety, Scarred but Alive chose not to include a biography at this time.
**Sunwoman**

I grew up on a North Dakota farm, isolated from the world, feeling unloved and unwanted, looking through a glass window, with writing as my only escape to a safer place. Today, I love to travel, write, bake, garden, have family time, and work as a nurse at the local Good Samaritan Nursing Home, living in the real world trying to help others get on the healing road. Thank you for letting me be a part of this book. It has been fulfilling and has brought comfort and peace to me. The demons no longer hold me back from being happy and living.

**Troy White**

I am a father and a son, a brother and a friend. I was born a survivor. No longer satisfied with surviving, I wanted to thrive and live. Through my journey I have learned that being silent was depriving me and those around me of who I am. Through my voice, I am free to be me. My vulnerability has been the vehicle in which to reach my destination and allowed me the pleasure of impacting those around me. I was born and raised in North Dakota, and I am honored to be able to share my story with those around me. Thank you for this opportunity to let me share experiences and hopefully inspire others to find their voice and set them free.

**Watching the Balloons Float Away**

I am a healing mother of two happy and healthy sons.

**Brian Palecek**

**Discussion Guide**

I am a teacher, humanities scholar, and social activist. I work as a writing, literature, and humanities instructor at United Tribes Technical College and am particularly interested in the art of conversation and group discussion. The recent film, “Conversations on the Bench,” produced with filmmaker Bruce Wendt, features one-on-one conversations between myself and conversation partners on an isolated bench in Bismarck.
This book belongs to:
Resource Guide

About Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota and Authentic Voices:
Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota (PCAND) is committed to a safe and nurturing environment, free from abuse and neglect, for all children. Authentic Voices is a project of PCAND and the North Dakota Department of Human Services that works to amplify the hope-filled voices of survivors of childhood abuse. We can be reached at info@pcand.org or 701.223.9051. Visit pcand.org to learn about our statewide initiatives to support children and strengthen families.

If You Suspect Child Abuse or Neglect:
Contact your local county social services office, where people are trained to address suspected child abuse and neglect. You can find a list of social service agencies at pcand.org.

If a child seems to be in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 or local law enforcement.

Resources:
If you need someone confidential to talk to, would like parenting tips, or seek information about local programs, the best number to call is 2-1-1, North Dakota’s FirstLink Helpline (TTY).
Help, support, and information are available 24/7.