



Secrets to Tame a Mystical Dragon

Cracking the PTSD Code...
Now You Have a Choice

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Names and places have been changed in this book. While the accuracy of the story and countries have remained true, it was necessary in some instances to alter city names and personal names to protect identities.

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ONE

My Life Zero to Eleven Years Old

My early years were a harsh reality. I wished for the warm cuddles of a mother, the smell of cookies baking in a pretty kitchen, a beautiful garden with a swing, fragrant flowers, green grass to lie in, and a strong father who could keep us all intact. These wants and needs appealed to my hypersensitive nature, and the security I craved would have calmed me. What I got instead was something quite different. What I got molded my entire life and wounded me so deeply that I have spent a lifetime trying to heal from its effects, endeavoring along the way to find adequate healers to help me do so. I will share the journey of my healing adventures—some good, some bad. I will also share how, in time, I was inspired to become a specialized healer of trauma. Here is the story of my traumatic and dysfunctional childhood and my attempts to reverse the fallout from years of emotional abuse and neglect.

It is my hope that this sharing will open the eyes of parents everywhere and inspire them to seriously watch how they treat their children and realize how their actions affect the open heart of a child. It is also my hope that those who have gone through any traumatic experience that is impacting their lives and relationships in a negative way will be able to take this formula for healing and improve their own lives immeasurably!

Ultimately, I believe it is all about thriving in your life. It is about living life to its fullest potential for power, joy, and vitality and not just remaining stuck in a struggling survival mode due to something you had no control over in the first place. I would like to suggest that it is possible to reverse the negative effects of trauma. It is not easy, however; it takes great determination, many years of various therapies, and a great desire to overcome the fear of making that choice. It's challenging, but it is possible.

Through my own experience, research, and treatment of traumatized clients, I have identified a sound formula, which I believe, if followed, will

shift your life positively beyond your belief! It must also be said that it is irrelevant what the particular trauma is that was experienced. For example, PTSD is common to any trauma survivor, regardless of whether one is a war veteran; rape survivor; accident survivor; witness of trauma; survivor of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; victim/witness of a violent crime, battering, or surgical traumas; and so on. The formula will work for anybody who has experienced trauma and who is presently suffering from its aftereffects.

I really cannot recall any happy moments living in the little one-bedroom flat with my parents. It was a depressing atmosphere—small and cramped. I slept in a bedroom that had been created for me in an enclosed patio. I became very aware that my mother was not affectionate or warm toward me, and she seemed to really resent the affection my father and I held for each other. My father loved me, but I quickly realized as I grew up that I had a mother who was very jealous of our relationship. If my father and I spent any kind of quality time together, she was sure to interrupt our interaction by creating an unpleasant argument with him or separating us by demanding he go complete some chore. This repetitive, associative unpleasantness occurred whenever we attempted to be together. Sadly, it began to limit our closeness.

Of course, this was very confusing for a young child. It did not make me feel very loved or wanted by my mother. What was even more confusing was that my father, instead of challenging her on this, always surrendered to her in an attempt to keep the peace. This lack of challenge from my father further encouraged my mother's poor behavior, and she really became an uncontested tyrant within our family. As a result, constant fighting, squabbling, nagging, and criticizing were a part of our daily fare. Adding to this situation was the fact that these two people loved their social lives above all else. Drinking and partying were their priority—not their child.

I had already developed emotional problems during these early years. My aunt once told me about a time she visited us when I was around six months old. I was a cranky baby due to a later-discovered milk allergy. I was not breastfed but given a diet of cow's milk, which did not agree with me and made me a sick, thin baby who suffered from chronic colic and crying. My visiting aunt told me that she was shocked to discover my mother hitting and smacking me hard whenever I cried. My aunt had

apparently asked my mother to stop doing this by pointing out that I was just a small baby. Clearly, my mother was clueless as to how to be a caring mother. But since my father did nothing to prevent this abusive behavior, he too was clueless as to how to be a father.

As an adult, I remember somebody asking me about my childhood. After hearing my response, the person replied, "Wow! Usually a child has one bad parent and the other good, who is capable of balancing the situation, but in your case, both were bad parents." I always felt that on an emotional level, I was in the hands of two very immature people. It felt dangerous and insecure. My welfare was not a priority.

As I got a little bigger, I remember always having a dripping nose, colds, acutely sore throats, and painful earaches. I also remember there simply was no relief from the constant fighting and discord in our family. My father, who should have been protective, often just looked the other way. On the rare occasions when he challenged my mother, our lives were made so miserable that it simply wasn't worth it.

I remember being force-fed at the little kitchen table. I hated the taste of green beans, and because of the way they were prepared, they scratched my throat as I ate them. Naturally, I always left them on my plate. My mother would then force-feed them to me and would not release me from the dining table until they were eaten. I remember throwing up the beans on more than one occasion, yet still she continued.

I remember asking my mother one time if she was my stepmother, because all the fairy tales told of horrible, unkind stepmothers who treated their children badly. I felt she surely could not be my real mother. A real mother would be kind and loving and warm, and that's definitely not what I was feeling from her. I remember being hit so hard in the head in response to that question that it knocked me sideways into the wall. All the while she yelled that she was, indeed, my mother.

My father was reckless. He was more like another child than a father. One time when I was three, he encouraged me to climb up the highest competition diving board at the local swimming pool and assured and convinced me that he would catch me in the water after I had jumped off. I nervously climbed up the long steps to the top and then looked down in fear at my father waiting to catch me. With his encouragement, I jumped. He missed me, and I dropped like a rock, plunging into the deep end of the pool. He had to dive under the water to bring me up from the bottom of the

pool, as I was choking, coughing, and spluttering. He thought it was hilarious and laughingly congratulated me on my bravery! Heaven knows where my mother was during these events, but I don't remember any intervention.

On another occasion, my father was shaving in the bathroom. I was walking around the flat in my mother's high-heeled shoes. While I was watching him shave, somehow my father dropped the razor, which landed inside the large shoe I was wearing. It lodged itself behind my little heel and cut it badly. As I jumped in pain from the initial cut, the razor continued to slice into my skin. I remember lots of pain and lots of blood. Another time, he had made a wooden rocking horse for me. It had a horsehair tail attached by a hook, which he had failed to close and make safe. When I was rocking one day, I fell off the back of the horse, and the hook dug into my inner thigh, tearing the skin open. Again, there was a lot of blood.

With all this neglectful, irresponsible behavior, it was really just a matter of time before it became life-threatening. The following event convinced me, even at five, that I was in a situation I needed to disassociate from. My nasal/throat/ear condition had deteriorated to such a degree that I was taken to a doctor who diagnosed me with acute tonsillitis and suggested, even though I was very young, that my tonsils and adenoids should be removed. After the surgery and a short hospital stay, I was released to my parents and taken home.

One night, shortly after being released, I awoke at home feeling very nauseated and began to throw up. Scared, I remember crying for my parents as I choked and vomited in the completely dark flat. I quickly began to panic when nobody answered my cries for help, and I observed large, dark, sticky-feeling lumps all over my bed. All my instincts told me that something was very wrong, and I remember feeling terrified. What I didn't know was that I was in a fight for my life. The stitches in my throat had come loose, and I was hemorrhaging!

Thankfully, at that point, our downstairs neighbor and family friend, who was a registered nurse, heard me crying. She was aware that I had been hospitalized for a tonsillectomy. She and her husband ran upstairs and broke the glass in the front door to gain entry. When they realized I was alone, they quickly got ice from the refrigerator, wrapped it in a towel, and placed it on my throat to stanch the bleeding. After wrapping me in a blanket, they rushed me by car to a hospital where I was again taken to surgery to repair

the damage. This husband and wife's quick thinking and actions had saved my life.

Where were my parents? At a party. Apparently, it wasn't important enough to ensure that I, at least, had a babysitter. I had been left alone to fend for myself, despite being recently discharged from the hospital for a surgery with a known history of stitches coming loose. My parents had to have been made aware of this by hospital staff. I was very lucky. Most children simply keep swallowing the blood as they sleep until they die. In my case, my sensitive stomach had thrown the blood up, signaling the potentially fatal situation. As an adult, I have often wondered how many times I had been left alone at home. Just by natural, protective instincts, it would have been inconceivable for me to leave my own children alone in a similar situation—or any situation, for that matter.

When I was almost six years old, we had already moved into a house nearby, and my baby brother, Matthew, was born. Till that point, I had lived the often lonely life of an only child, so I remember being very excited about his impending birth. When I first saw him after my mother returned from the hospital, I felt all the protective instincts of an older sister. I also remember feeling a great love for him. He was so incredibly cute with his chubby little legs and arms wiggling around.

But true to, and due to, our unhealthy family dynamics, as he started to grow up, he always seemed to experience some accident or other, especially as a toddler. I was attending school at this point, and he was left alone at home with my mother. I remember him being burned at some point and covered in bandages. Another time, he fell and cut his chin, which required an emergency room visit and stitches. I did witness one accident when an iron was left sitting on an ironing board with the plug hanging down onto the floor. He had crawled over to the cord and pulled on it. The iron came hurtling down with the sharp point first and hit him just below the eye. Again, there was lots of blood and stitches. Here was the pattern once again. One would think that at some point my parents would have “gotten it,” but the dysfunctional behaviors continued—the friends, the parties, the drinking, and the neglect of their children. They were both just simply not in possession of any normal, mature, natural instinct to protect their young.

I am afraid that by that time, I too had picked up the bad habits of being oblivious of safety. I remember one occasion when my mother asked me to take care of my infant brother while he was in his pram. It was one of those

large, old-fashioned prams with a carriage, large wheels, and one large handle. My mother wanted to spend time talking with a friend on the phone, so I had been instructed to watch my brother.

I sat on the wooden rail of our wrap-around verandah with my feet on the handle of the pram. He was fussy, so while I sat on the rail, I pushed the pram back and forth with my feet. Then I slipped, and as I did, my feet pushed down on the handle, and my poor brother was catapulted out of the pram. He landed on his head onto the hard tile verandah floor. It is no surprise then that my brother grew up in great fear.

When I was not around, he would not let my mother or father out of his sight. He simply could not be left alone. Even when my mother played tennis, she had to take him onto the tennis court with her, or he would become hysterical. He clung to my father whenever he was around, especially when in the company of other people. When I was home, I assumed the mother role, and more and more, my brother and I began to adopt an attitude of us against our parents and the world. We naturally began to form a very close bond, I believe, in an attempt to form some kind of security net around us for survival.

It must be said here that outwardly we looked well cared for. We were well dressed and well fed, and I am sure we looked like a normal family. My parents were very clever and talented in that way. For all public appearances, great attempts were made to make our family look as normal as possible. It was a huge charade that continued their entire lives. Inside it was sick, unhappy, dangerous, and highly dysfunctional—a disaster waiting to happen. It seemed to me that on a daily basis we experienced split and contrasting realities. Outside the home, all was happy and smiling and loving, but the moment we arrived home, the misery, fighting, and tearing apart began once again. For me, this was a very confusing phenomenon—a sort of “show time” mentality. It was as if our parents realized how bad it was, but they didn’t know how or care enough to find the strength and courage to correct the situation. They found the perfect easy solution to their guilt by simply hiding it from friends, family, and the public at large. We were kind of play acting the perfect family. It was highly deceptive and dishonest, and being an intelligent child, I didn’t trust it. From experience, my instincts clearly told me that in order to survive my life, self-sufficiency was the key.

When I was eight and my brother was two, my parents bought our first home. It was a small, three-bedroom, one-and-a-half bathroom house in a beautiful country neighborhood. Finally, I got what I always wanted—green grass, a huge rose garden, and lots of flowers and trees to play in. They even bought us a swing! I was well into the play acting by then, and this outward appearance of prettiness was therapeutic and definitely took the edge off. It enabled me to escape all the truth and ugliness of our family dynamics.

Inside, things were spinning out of control. I do remember at this time that the drinking and the partying were escalating and taking a toll on our family. There were attempts at some normalcy, but they were very erratic. I remember my drunk mother often stumbling around the kitchen trying to get dinner ready before my father returned from work. We didn't dare talk to her, or the screaming would start. We stayed out of the way. When she was like this, my father would get angry when he returned from work. Inevitably, an argument would erupt, and the screaming would start again. I felt we children were constantly walking on eggshells, never knowing what would erupt at any given moment. This constant tension was very stressful and kept us on high alert. Then something awful happened.

One day my mother just didn't return home. It turns out she had run off with the husband of one of the women from the tennis club. My father was left devastated with two small children. My grandmother came to help him with us when he was at work and moved into our house from her home very far away. I used to listen to my father crying at night, and I really hated my mother for that! It was so disrupting for all of us. And then, just when we were returning to some kind of routine, she showed up on our doorstep again. Apparently, the romance hadn't worked out, and she wanted my father to take her back. And he did. I cannot swear that she repeated this, but I seem to distantly remember that she did this a second time. Again, he took her back. By this time, I had lost all respect for him—and her. I do remember asking her one day why she had returned to us. She told me that she was not going to lose out on my father's pension money and benefits and that if they divorced she would lose access to this future security. There was no mention of having missed me, my brother, or my father.

I was slowly divorcing myself emotionally from my parents, because it just didn't seem safe to rely on either one of them any more than was necessary. I loved to play tennis and spent all my spare time playing. It was

therapeutic. When I was playing tennis, I could focus on the game and escape the miserable realities of my home life. I delved into it competitively and excelled at it. Winning matches made me feel strong, happy, and in control of my life. So I won a lot!

As a family, we were spinning out of control and always seemed to be hanging on to the threads of a deteriorating fabric. It was a fabric that was so weak, threadbare, and fragile that it felt like any small pull in any direction would surely tear it asunder. The inevitable finally happened one awful night. It was huge and descended upon us when we least expected it, blowing us and everything around us completely apart! As a family, we imploded and never recovered. The story of this particular night is a sad one and made sadder by the fact that it was my brother, the youngest and most defenseless member of the family, who ultimately paid the price. I never really forgave my parents for that.

When the following December event happened, I was eleven, and my brother was five. My brother was very excited, because he was finally going to start school the upcoming January. My mother had just purchased him new clothes for school, and we were all looking forward to Christmas.

On the weekends, my brother and I were subjected to my parents' friends, who were all heavy drinkers and party people. This particular Sunday we were to visit a couple whom we regularly visited. The man was the manager of a large, international wool auction factory in an industrial area. He lived in an apartment on-site with his wife. Both were alcoholics, especially the wife who, I remember, was often drunk in bed and unable to even participate in the visit. I liked to visit them at the factory, because it had wooden floors and lots of big walls. I could take my tennis racket and tennis balls with me and spend the time hitting the balls against the walls. It saved both me and my brother from being forced to watch four people getting drunker and drunker.

We were let into the factory by both the manager and my father. We would switch the lights on, and they would leave us alone there until my parents were ready to leave, which was usually late at night. By the time my brother was five, he was also starting to play tennis. This particular night we hit the ball back and forth together for quite some time before adventuring in the factory as we always did after playing tennis.

The factory was very large and very long. Raw wool of different grades lay in piles on the wooden factory floors where buyers from all over the

world would view the wool and buy it during auction. During the weekends, there was no activity, and everything was closed down. Once the wool was purchased, it was bundled into one hundred-pound bales and placed on a slow-moving conveyor belt, which took it to different areas of the factory to be deposited onto transport trains underneath the factory floor. The bales were deposited onto the transport trains through one of the many large square cutouts in the factory floor. This was our playground.

As time went on, we got more and more adventurous and began to play on the conveyor belts. It was close to the floor and was made up of slats of wood about one foot apart. In its entirety, it was a series of conveyor belts joined together by steel rollers where one belt ended and another joined. The conveyor belts ran the entire length of the factory. Every individual conveyor belt was independently controlled by a little electrical box, which allowed it to be switched on or off. This was perfect for us. I would put my brother on the belt and start it up at the first switch box. As he moved slowly forward, I would run to the belt several slats behind him and jump on while it was moving. Then it was my brother's job to press the stop button at the second switch box before the conveyor belt reached the steel rollers and looped underneath. When it was stopped, I would then jump off, help my brother off, and then we would run to the beginning of the belt again and repeat this over and over until we tired of the game.

On this particular evening, we had first played tennis together, and then my brother had asked me to put him on a trolley and wheel him around the factory. It was a strange, eerie evening and very windy. The big trees outside of the factory scratched against the large glass windows. As I pushed and wheeled my brother around the edge of the factory, we chatted. I don't remember what we talked about, and I was completely unaware at that time, of course, that these were the last words we would ever say to each other. I did reflect back on it later, though, and it seemed that my brother had wanted to spend these last moments of his life together with me, enjoying quality time. I will always have these precious moments and was so grateful for them later. It was our last good-bye without us knowing. We were together and bonded as younger brother and older sister—us against the world in our own little created space of love and play.

And then we were ready for our conveyor belt ride. This time, however, I decided to push our adventuring a little further. When I placed my brother on the wooden slat of the belt, I gave him instructions to not stop the belt at

the end as usual but to go onto the steel rollers and wait for me there. He was already moving forward on the belt when I jumped on at the beginning. As he reached the end, he turned around toward me and with the index finger of his left hand hovering right above the button, he asked, “Should I stop it?”

It seemed very important at the time not to stop the belt. I will never know why. But I replied with a strong, “No! Put your legs up, go onto the rollers, and wait for me.” As he attempted to raise his legs to scoot onto the rollers, which was impossible in retrospect, he slipped backward. His little bottom fell between the front and back slats, and as the front slat slipped under the steel rollers, he was caught in between the wooden slat at his back and the steel rollers. While his legs were pushed tightly against his chest, he was slowly crushed to death by the power of the running machinery.

By the time I realized what was happening and jumped off to help him, he was wedged in too tightly. I could not pull him out despite my best frantic efforts. The electrical box had a reverse button, but it did not work. When I pressed reverse, the belt moved forward instead, wedging him in even tighter. At this point, I was screaming with frustration and hysteria and ran for my father to help me release my brother. As I burst into the apartment, the four adults were so drunk that all I got were dull looks as I screamed hysterically for somebody to help me. In desperation, because they seemed to be reacting so slowly, I pulled my father’s hand and told him to follow me instead of trying to explain the terrible situation.

Everything is a blur after that. I do know my father managed to break the wooden slat at my brother’s back to release him. In their panic, my mother and father rushed my brother to the nearest hospital and left me behind with the two drunks. I was extremely distraught and traumatized and needed somebody to comfort me so badly. These two drunks were in no position to do so. I did the only thing I knew to escape the horrible reality. Lying in the fetal position on the couch, I sunk into a deep, dark, depressive hole and fell mercifully asleep. And in my grief, I have never felt so alone.

It was very late when my parents finally arrived back to fetch me. My brother was no longer with them. He was gone. We rode home in silence—a demolished family. As we walked down the long, steep pathway toward our house, now just three of us, I remember my mother saying, “Let’s hope this is just a nightmare, and when we wake up tomorrow, everything will be the

same as it was before.” Of course, it wasn’t. The fragile fabric of our family was torn to shreds, impossible to repair.

*Security is mostly superstition. It does not exist in nature,
nor do the children of men as a whole experience it.
Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright
exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.
To keep our faces toward change and behave like free
spirits in the presence of fate is strength undefeatable!*

—Helen Keller, 1957

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