

**Testimonial
by**

Nobody

February 16, 2004

I have often pondered my earliest photographs for clues. But always a normal middle-class girl peers out at me, oblivious. Playing on the swings, pushing a cat in a baby buggy, crying on Santa's knee. By age six, this photographic stranger begins to look gaunt and awkward, her smile is strained, she is clearly trying hard to please, and by fifteen, in her eyes I can see a disquieting cynicism. But there are no bruises, no severed limbs, no visible scars to reveal the hell that was her childhood. My childhood. Here is my story....

I was born in a large city in Canada to a very young mother who married an unreliable man. I was my mother's first child. My father abandoned my mother when she was pregnant with her second child and her own family refused to help her. When my brother died of crib death shortly after his birth, my mother fell apart. She was divorced in the 1960s when it was still shameful to be divorced and had to lie about her status to get a job. Unfortunately, the job she found was as a traveling saleswoman and so she hunted around for someone to look after me. A friend of a friend told my mother she knew of two women who were taking in children from broken homes. They ran an unofficial day care from Sunday to Friday, where the little girls lived, dormitory-style, during the week, returning home on the weekends. I was sent away to live with these two women from the age of two until I was seven years old, with two short additional stays at ages eight and twelve.

On the surface, the women who looked after me were exemplary. Jane was a sensitive, chronically ill woman who was working on her degree in child psychology. She was petite, charming, had a way with children and a reputation for saving small animals. Her partner was a large disciplinarian named Bertha who held a prestigious job in a national organization dealing with children.

In this house of little girls, I was well-fed and well dressed. In spite of the so-called expert care I was receiving, I hated going. I woke up depressed every Sunday morning. I began to wet my bed. I had frequent nightmares and awakened screaming. I developed imaginary friends and outlandish escape fantasies. I had difficulty remembering things. I had tantrums whenever I was separated from my mother. I was branded a difficult, oversensitive child.

Fortunately, as soon as I became a teenager my mother married a stable man and I was allowed to leave the house of little girls for good and live in a relatively normal family. I rarely remembered or mentioned my early childhood from that day on.

As a teenager I began drinking and smoking heavily. I was terrified of sex and yet promiscuous. I ran away compulsively. I dropped out of school

repeatedly even though I was a good student and quite bright. I had talent in the creative arts but was easily discouraged. Again, these behaviours were treated as evidence of my bad character.

By my early twenties I had serious health concerns and so I embarked on a healing journey which started with doctors and psychiatrists and gradually progressed to more alternative modalities as I grew frustrated with traditional venues. I went into psychotherapy finally while living with a boyfriend who had a traveling job. Every night he was away from the house, I spent in the doorway clutching a knife, having “waking hallucinations” of being attacked, raped and tortured. My therapist didn’t know what to make of these “hallucinations” and treated them as Jungian symbols. I spent the first six years in therapy saying over and over, *I want to go home*, and, *there’s something I’m not remembering*. No one understood repressed memory in those days. I had no idea what I was saying. All I knew was that I felt perpetually haunted.

After years of therapy, I told my therapist I wanted to get to the root of these night terrors I was still having and booked some longer sessions. That summer I had my first ritual abuse torture memory. In the flashback, I was raped by two men in a barn. I would spend the next seven years remembering unspeakable things.

At three years old a knife was taken to my vagina and my hymen was severed. (This was confirmed by a doctor at age 13 although the doctor assumed I had ruptured it on a bicycle.) At six years old I was raped in an elaborate “pretend” marriage complete with wedding dress, and told I had been married to the Dark One. Every Sunday night we were driven to strange events. Often drugged, petrified and half-asleep, I huddled with the other little girls in the back seat. When we arrived we were forced to witness, perpetrate and endure bizarre acts. These were usually preceded by some form of abuse or torture; being tied up and left in a fruit cellar. Being locked in a butcher’s freezer. Having electric shock on a table in a farming shed. Locked inside an open grave and left for hours. At the end of such degradation, I was forced to harm animals or some of the other little girls in some way and if I didn’t comply I would be sent back to the fruit cellar, butcher’s freezer, cage, etc.

The things I remembered tested my sense of reality, severely damaged my faith in humanity. At first, I thought I was going mad, but I did not crack up. I thought I would die but I did not. I thought my life would never be the same and this was true. I didn’t want to have the flashbacks, I struggled and resisted every one, but they came and came. At the end of it, I counted eleven murders, although I believe now that some of them were faked. In at least three cases the murdered people were stolen off the streets: hoboes and drug addicts whom no one would come after. In two cases they were young runaways.

The worst involved a girl named Shelly who resembled me and I was told to look after. She was gang raped in a group ritual, then stabbed and dismembered. Afterwards, I was thrown into the dark pit of the fruit cellar naked and told her murder was my fault. I lay in the dark, listening to the crawling insects and they threw her blood drenched head in after me. It fell with a thud onto my naked belly and in that moment, I can’t tell you what happened to my

mind—a blind terror swallowed me and I simply ceased to exist. I lay there for hours slipping in and out of consciousness, afraid to breathe or move, feeling her soft hair on my skin, her blood pooling around me. Whether it really was Shelly's head or not I will never know, but the fact remains I experienced a terror and grief then that completely shattered me. From then on I was often called Shelly and told that her angry spirit now lived inside me.

When I rebelled and refused to do what they wanted or threatened to tell, I was told they would come in the night and murder my mother the way they had murdered Shelly. For years I dreamt of waking up to find my mother dead beside me and so said nothing. To break my spirit and destroy my memory, I was frequently taken to a shed where I was restrained and tortured with electric shock and cattle prods. At this time, the two men who were the leaders of this intergenerational cult would sit at both sides of my head and whisper hypnotically in my ears, that I was white trash, I had no father, my mother didn't want me, I belonged to them to do as they wished. Over and over they repeated, you are nothing, you are nobody.

For years, I had struggled with the blackest suicidal depressions, and complained to my therapist that I felt worthless, unloved, dispensable. *I am nobody*, I had told her.

During the flashback years I slept with the lights on. I entered my apartment with my keys out like a knife and searched it before closing the door. I was agoraphobic, afraid of people, unable to tolerate crowds or have close relationships. While my friends were moving ahead in their careers, getting married, having children and buying houses, I was lying on a futon writhing and sobbing, re-experiencing unimaginable pain and degradation. My mother told me I had always been difficult when I disclosed what had happened to me. I separated from my family. I lost my job, my friends, and lived in poverty. None of this is obvious in my photographs, although my suffering did manifest.

Over time, the fragmented flashbacks began to form a coherent narrative. I figured out that Jane, one of my guardians, had been born into an intergenerational cult with its basis in southern Ontario. Her brother was one of my frequent abusers. The brother's friend was the high priest, although he was never called that. Both Jane and Bertha were pedophiles and had ample access to children, (all the cult members were bisexual.) Jane and Bertha rented out both myself and the other little girls to pornographers, for photographs and pedophilic sex, we were passed around from person to person. During that time, only one mother grew concerned and took her daughter out of boarding.

No one ever said, you are being inculcated into a cult. No one ever used the word cult. I was told I was lucky and chosen, or nobody and damned. Whatever hurt me I was told was good for me. There were no words to describe any of this in my young mind. How to remember things everyone pretended to forget? How to describe events so bizarre I had no words to explain them? So shameful I was afraid to say them out loud? My tormentors were organized, they committed their actions with purpose and drama and rational, they may have been pedophiles and petty criminals, yet they had inherited rituals, symbols and

a bizarre religious ethos to justify their actions and felt themselves spiritually ordained to use us as they saw fit. And they got away with it.

All in all, I spent fifteen years in therapy. In spite of chronic health problems, I did survive and manage to build a life. I have no children, but I have a husband, and a career that I love. I have achieved some peace and wholeness. But I live a dual life. Most acquaintances don't know of my "dark years," I am careful telling new friends after so many bad experiences. On the surface I seem like a normal middle-aged woman, a bit reclusive perhaps. Inside I still carry around Nobody. Nobody does not exist in the eyes of the world. Nobody receives no compassion, no compensation, no validation for her pain. On some level, no matter how much therapy I do, Nobody remains locked in a shed, isolated, treated with scorn by the societal denial around ritual abuse torture that prevails. Nobody has been silenced. I have spent most of my life on inner work, trying to change myself in order to become a better, healthier person. But the truth is, now it is the world that needs to change, to make it safe for all the other children out there who have been abused in such a real and horrific manner.

... A Canadian survivor of ritual abuse-torture

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