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English 460

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Healing Poets: Survivors Transforming Trauma

Poetry can be a powerful tool in the healing process for survivors of trauma. Poetry explores the inner world of the unconscious, bringing emotions, thoughts, and memories to the surface using devices such as imagery, metaphor, and paradoxical language. Poetry excels at bringing disparate images and ideas together, creating a new whole. This is the challenge that a trauma survivor faces when she is trying to heal from trauma. Her memories, sense of self, and connections to others have been shattered by the traumatic experience. She is lost, trying to find her bearings, drifting in the chaos of her own mind. Poetry can help her to find her way by creating a transformative experience. It can help her to reconstruct her memory, her identity and sense of place in the world and reconnect her to a supportive community. Poetry can also give her a voice in the larger society and help her to shatter the silence of oppression.

Poems by survivors of child abuse, sexual assault, and domestic violence such as Patricia A. Martin-Rossi, Toni Rose, Jenn Krapf, and a poet we'll call Mary Stiles can help to illustrate how the creative process can help survivors to heal from trauma. Narrative poems such as "Little Girl Memories," "Once Upon a Crhyme," and "The Alpha and the Omega: Rape at a Frat Party" by Martin-Rossi, and "Senior Year" by Rose piece together memories of child molestation and rape. "Shattered Silence" by Martin-Rossi and "Hyper-Vigilance" and "Everyday People" by Rose discuss the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and use reframing to empower survivors. The poems "annihilation" and "journal April 2nd" by Stiles and "I am" by Rose are

good examples of how the creative process can help poets explore the inner self and rebuild their identity. “Believe in Me” by Rose describes the effort to rebuild the sense of trust that has been damaged by abuse. “Let Me Help You” and “Poetic” by Rose and “I Almost Let You Win” by Krapf are examples of how survivor poet communities such as The Blue Rose can support and strengthen survivors. The Blue Rose, founded by Toni Rose, is an organization that helps survivors to share their stories through poetry.

Writing and sharing poetry can help a survivor in her recovery process. Survivors of trauma often experience invasive symptoms that make day to day life difficult. In “Shattered Silence,” Martin-Rossi describes how the body feels during a flashback. She says, “Body parts feel phantom touches / Adrenaline rushes / Cheeks flush red.” The memory of being abused can stay with the survivor years after the trauma is past, replaying itself in her mind and forcing her to relive the experience. The body reacts physiologically as though it is still in the threatening situation. Adrenaline is released as part of the fight or flight response. According to Kali Tal, PTSD can cause “nightmares, flashbacks, or persistent thoughts... that intrude into everyday affairs” (135). Invasive thoughts, feelings, and memory can intrude invade daily living and otherwise pleasant experiences. “Feeling dead inside” is another symptom described by Martin-Rossi in “Shattered Silence.” Numbness can be the result of the attempt to protect oneself from overwhelming thoughts and feelings. Tal describes it as a “numbness that takes the meaning out of life.” (135). Symptoms of PTSD can make life a struggle. However, the survivor can hope to decrease and manage her symptoms through the process of recovery.

One very important part of the process of recovery is for the survivor to tell her story. In the telling, the survivor has a chance to create a cohesive narrative from the disordered shards of her memory. However, creating a narrative out of the trauma can be very difficult. According to Tal,

this process requires separating “sense from nonsense, narrative from chaos” (15). The survivor’s memories after a traumatic experience are often scattered and confusing. In “Shattered Silence,” Martin-Rossi says, “Memories splatter piercing hearts.” This eloquently describes the havoc that trauma wreaks in the mind. Memories are often scattered, out of order, vague or missing. In “Little Girl Memories,” Martin-Rossi says memories of trauma are like “those 8 MM movies / Some scenes are not clear.” The trauma can often cause disassociation which can make memories confusing and difficult to recover. Judith Herman describes “traumatic memory as a series of still snapshots or a silent movie; the role of therapy is to provide the music and words” (175). By helping the survivor to reconstruct her story, poetry can provide “music and the words,” creating a whole out of the broken pieces. Herman says that the “reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor’s life story” (175). Invasive memories decrease when they take their place within the larger puzzle. According to Herman, the challenge for the survivor is “to see more than a few fragments of the picture at one time... and to fit them together” (2). In “Hyper-Vigilance,” Rose describes this process. She says, “Puzzle pieces fit together / As you build on life without fear.” Reconstructing and integrating the traumatic memory can help the survivor to start to take control of her traumatic experience and her life.

It is not enough to reconstruct only the narrative of the trauma. The survivor needs to integrate the memories and emotions into the larger whole. According to Herman, she must “simultaneously reexperience the feelings in all their intensity while holding on to the sense of safe connection that was destroyed in the traumatic moment” (178). She needs to hold two contradicting experiences in her mind at the same time, the unsafe past and the safe present. To the survivor, holding the two sets of experiences in the mind at the same time can seem like a

paradox. Susan Brison writes about the “paradoxes of traumatic memory” (xi). The survivor tries to reconcile an experience so traumatic it seems irreconcilable. However, poetry can help with this process. According to Cleanth Brooks, “paradox is the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry” (3). Poetic language can be a tool for creating a cohesive whole out of broken pieces.

Survivors use poetry to help weave together the disconnected memories of trauma, memories surrounding the trauma, and the safe present. In “journal April 2nd” by Stiles, the poem meanders through memories of the past. It touches on the traumatic memory itself, “being raped at 3,” circumstances slightly after, “I couldn’t sleep for the pain,” and a memory of trying to write a letter to a safe adult “on the... stationary she sent.” She also anchors herself in the safe present by reminding herself that the abuser is no longer a threat. She says, “He is gone, long gone.” The poem navigates the paradox created by the traumatic memories and the safe present, integrating the two through the language of the poem. “Little Girl Memories” weaves memories of the traumatic past through the present using the vehicle of a flashback. Martin-Rossi describes the flashback as “memories” that “rip through her mind.” “Little girl memories... of not so innocent touches” become “big girl memories.” “Big girl nightmares” haunt her present. However, she also says, “He’s been dead for years / He can’t hurt her anymore,” reconnecting herself with the safe present. By writing about childhood memories of being molested and the present when the child molester is dead, the poet can effectively reintegrate memories that have been disconnected by the trauma.

Transformation of the traumatic memory requires not only constructing a narrative, but existing in the memory with all of its sensations and feelings. Herman says, “The recitation of facts without the accompanying emotions is a sterile exercise, without therapeutic effect” (177). Poetry is an excellent medium for describing emotions and sensations. In “Poetic,” Rose

describes how poetry can express emotions. She says, in poetry, “emotions explode / pure and raw.” In their poetry, the survivors not only describe their traumas, but also the emotions and sensations that went with the experience. In “The Alpha and the Omega,” Martin-Rossi describes feelings after waking up and realizing she has been drugged and gang raped at a frat party. She says, “Tears welled / Pain surged / Confused! Afraid!” Through the medium of the poem, the poet is able to express the pain and fear associated with the traumatic memory. The poetic device of describing sensory experiences to put the reader in the present moment of the poem also functions as an effective tool for putting the poet into the moment of the trauma. In “Little Girl Memories,” Martin-Rossi describes physical sensations at the time of the molestation. She says, “Hot summer sweat ran / Down the nape of her neck / Baby doll pajamas clung to skin.” She remembers not only the events, but how it felt to be there. In “Once Upon a Crhyme,” Martin-Rossi transports us into a child’s mind, reliving a memory of sexual abuse. She describes in painful detail the feelings and sensations. She says, “Warm breath on back of neck / Hairs like soldiers stand straight / Eyes close....tears trickle....toes tremor.” We get a vivid image of the child’s fear, defensive hairs standing straight on the back of her neck, tears, and tremors. The imagery puts the survivor as well as the reader into the physical sensations of the event.

Poetry can help survivors communicate experiences that may seem incommunicable. Telling the story of a trauma might require a new way of looking at words. Tal says, “Words such as *blood*, *terror*, *agony*, and *madness* gain new meaning, within the context of the trauma” (16). Words may seem to have lost their meaning after the trauma. The survivor may need to create new language or new definitions for old words. Poetry can make old words new, redefining and giving them new meaning. This can make feelings and experiences that seem indescribable more accessible. Imagery and metaphor are useful poetic tools for this process. Tal says, “The writing

and rewriting process allows women to manipulate imagery and generate metaphors for their suffering” (172). Poetry gives the poet access to a whole world of imagery and metaphor to describe her experience.

Survivors use imagery, metaphor, and other poetic devices to redefine their words and their experiences. In “Hyper-Vigilance,” Rose asks, “Do you know how it feels to be in terror?” The word itself is not adequate to describe the experience. She uses imagery to define terror in the poem. In her words, we hear the agony of invasive thoughts vividly described. “The gentlest touch” becomes “one of a thousand hands / pounding against your flesh.” “The smells of home cooked meals” become “a stench of vomit and urine fills / your nasal passage.” The sensory images give new meaning to the word. In “annihilation,” Stiles asks the question, “how to convey the terror?” She tries to redefine words as they take on new meaning in her mind. She says terror is “beyond pain, although pain is present, beyond fear.” She peers below the surface of the word, grappling for its elusive meaning. In “journal April 2nd,” Stiles uses the destructive and overwhelming force of a “hurricane” as a metaphor for being “orally raped” as a toddler. In “annihilation,” Stiles describes being sexually abused as a small child as being pushed into a “tiny very deep and dark secret bleeding place within yourself.” Imagery provides a deeper exploration of the trauma than would a simple narrative. Another way to give words new meaning is through grammatical choices. In “Senior Year,” Rose capitalizes the words she uses to describe feelings and sensations at the moment of realization that a passenger in her car who “requested sex... then demanded” intended to rape her. She says, “The Darkness... The impending Fear.” Using capitalizations as though the words are proper names suggests they are beyond visceral or emotional experiences, but more like places hidden in the mind known to survivors of trauma.

For the trauma survivor, reconstructing a meaningful narrative can also help to rebuild her shattered sense of self. This requires reconstructing her sense of the world, her place in it, and the meaning of her trauma. “Reconstructing the trauma story also includes a systematic review of the meaning of the event” (Herman 178). Exploring its meaning can allow the survivor to reflect on the traumatic event, gaining more insight into what really happened. Herman says that the story is “not only the event itself but also the survivor’s response to it” (177). It’s important that the survivor’s story include not just feelings, but also thoughts about the event so that she can affirm her own experience and her sense of right and wrong in the world. In *Senior Year*, Rose says, “A favor / A ride / That’s all I offered.” She affirms that offering a ride does not mean accepting responsibility for actions of the passenger. In “*Little Girl Memories*,” Martin-Rossi reflects on the trauma in a child’s voice. She says, “She didn’t understand / She should fear that look.” The little girl had no reason to anticipate what was going to happen. In “*The Alpha and the Omega*,” the survivor realizes she was drugged when she says, “She awoke shivering... Not knowing how she got there.” She says, “She never stopped to think / Something sinister would happen that night / After all...she was only drinking soda.” She realizes that what happened was not her fault and the blame lies with the perpetrators.

Telling the story in her own words allows the survivor to look at the event in a new way. Reframing the experience can give her a new perspective on what happened. Tal says, in retelling her story, “There is a transformation, a change in the terms of representation - even a revision” (134). In some ways, by telling her story, the survivor can change it. In the poem, “annihilation,” the imagery of “the tiny dark secret place,” repeats, but changes. It “holds a seed” and “the seed begins to unfold itself slowly.” The poem becomes a story of transformation, rebirth and renewal. The metaphor asserts the process of recovery. In “*Shattered Silence*,”

Martin-Rossi uses a metaphor of windows to reframe the traumatic experience. In the poem, “windows muffle screams,” but she says, “We must break them.” The poem is wielded to free the survivor from the oppression of silence. She says, “Some broken glass windows are beautiful... Fragmented light shines where darkness once held stares.” Through the poem, light is brought to the darkness and secrecy of abuse. In “Little Girl Memories,” Martin-Rossi reframes the experience of being molested as a little girl in the last few lines. She says, “Big girls create dreams... To help them cope and survive.” She speaks of the act of creation and of dreams as opposed to the nightmares mentioned earlier in the poem.

In “Hyper-Vigilance,” Rose uses the structure of the poem to reframe the experience of invasive symptoms caused by the trauma. This allows her to take control of them through the vehicle of the poem. The first few stanzas describe imagery of intrusive thoughts and feelings, “A loud scream / A thousand hands.” In the middle section of the poem, pleasant feelings trigger the unpleasant ones. “The quietest sound” becomes “a loud scream / only you can hear.” “The gentlest touch” becomes “one of a thousand hands / pounding against your flesh.” However, towards the end of the poem, the pleasant sensations are freed from their traumatic associations. “The quietest sound / The gentlest touch / The smells of home” appear in their own stanza without the accompanying invasive thoughts. In this way, the survivor reframes her own experience and reclaims the joys in her life.

Reframing the story can also give a survivor a sense of control. This is important as the sense of control may have been taken from her during the abusive experience. Herman says, “The first principle of recovery is the empowerment of the survivor. She must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery” (133). The survivor needs to be the author of her own story and to take control of her own experience. In “annihilation,” the poem begins to change with the words “that

moment when you decide... no more.” She decides what will happen next, taking back the control. In “Senior Year,” Rose chooses to emphasize through repetition, the best sense of control she probably had which was her words, “PLEASE... use a condom if you’re going to rape me!” Survivors have more control over how they tell the story than they may have had in the actual situation. By putting the experience into her own words, the survivor can gain some control over her own memory. In “The Alpha and the Omega,” Martin-Rossi says, “*It’s time for you to heal.*” She takes control of her own recovery. She calls the rapists, “Thieves,” suggesting they stole the “body / That had once been hers to give / Taken without / permission.” However, in the end of the poem, she says, “Thieves will never steal... your words.” The poem itself is a response to what was stolen from her. No one can take her own story, her own words. With her words she is able to take back control over her own experience and reaffirms her sense of self.

Poetry can give survivors tools not only for reconstructing their experience and expressing it to others, but also for reconstructing their sense of self. Brison says that “effects of trauma epitomized the loss of control and the disintegration of the (formerly coherent) self” (103). The shattering of memory can also create a shattering of a survivor’s sense of self. Without a sense of self, the author exists in a cocoon of darkness, confusion, and chaos, isolated from the world. In “annihilation,” Stiles says, “one’s own identity has been is being annihilated and you are now nothing, nothing, have ceased to exist.” Without coherent memories, the survivor can experience a loss of self. Through her poetry, she must recreate herself, build her own wings of escape, and find a way to connect with the outer world. Reconstructing the memories of the event can help the survivor to reconstruct her sense of self and her place in the world. According to Brison, “piecing together a shattered self requires a process of remembering” (x). The self is made up of the thoughts, feelings, and memories of the past and present. Reconstructing the shattered

memories can help to reconstruct the shattered self. In “annihilation,” Stiles continues with “there has been no annihilation, not really... I am.” She reasserts her existence, reclaiming her lost self. In “journal April 2nd,” Stiles says, “Well here I am / Good Morning morning, I announce, still here... / still alive” She still is and by being defies the deconstructing of self through the traumatic experience. In “Senior Year,” although she says she is “emotionally dead inside,” she also says, “Alive.” In “I am,” Rose says, “I am one person one heart one soul. / I am.” She says, “... I am you today tomorrow yesterday.” The deconstructed self has been reconstructed as well as with the deconstructed memories. In “Believe in Me,” Rose says, “My poetry / Has been a transcending / Part of who I am.” Poetry can help survivors to rebuild the self.

The medium of poetry can also give survivors the chance to share their stories with others. Herman says, “Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation” (133). The survivor story needs to be told, but it also needs to be heard. Herman says, “To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance” (9). The listener needs to be compassionate and without judgment. This can happen in groups or at places such as poetry readings. In “Poetic,” Rose speaks of the exchange between poet and listener in a poetry community, “receiving a message / not to be judged / embraced and understood.” A poetry reading can be an environment full of receptive, open-minded listeners. In “Poetic,” Rose describes the “healing and community” that can be part of the poetry experience. When community relationships have the chance to evolve, close and loyal friendships can form. In “Let Me Help You,” Rose says, “**I will be** your safety net.” A community can create a protected space for the survivor to heal. A community of poets or a community of survivors, of, even better, a

community of survivor poets like the Blue Rose can give the survivors a chance to hear their poems read in an empathetic environment and help the survivors to reconnect with others. In “Let Me Help You,” Rose says, “I will learn to listen / Hear you.” Survivors, in particular, are often very sensitive to each other and their stories. They can reaffirm and support each other in a way that helps the survivor fully integrate her story. In “Let Me Help You,” Rose reassures other survivors, saying, “You are not **ALONE**.” Reconnecting to supportive others is a very important part of the recovery process.

Herman says that a survivor’s “sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others” (214). Survivors can help to boost each other’s self-esteem, encourage each other, and validate each other and their stories. In a group of survivors, “a complex mirroring process comes into play. As each participant extends herself to others, she becomes more capable of receiving the gifts that others have to offer” (Herman 215). Rose exemplifies this in “Let Me Help You.” She says, “**I will be** the keeper of your confidence --- remind you / You are **BEAUTIFUL** / You are **STRONG** / You are **COURAGEOUS**.” Survivors’ support of each other can be incredibly helpful in the healing process. In “I Almost Let You Win,” Krapf speaks of feeling supported by another poet survivor. She says that the poet’s words “guided” her and “**EMPOWERED**” her. She felt strengthened by another survivor and by being a part of the survivor poet community. Being a part of a community can give survivor’s the strength and courage they need to share their stories and to stand up for themselves.

For a survivor, sharing her story can be an act of resistance to abuse. Abuse most often happens in secret. Herman says, “Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator’s first line of defense” (8). The abuser knows the best way to get away with what he is doing is for no one to know about it. Herman says that “truth is what the perpetrator most fears” (210). His abuse often

includes techniques to keep his victim quiet. In “Once Upon a Crhyme,” we hear the abuser whispering to the child, “Shhhhhh.....don’t tell / This is our secret.” Survivors often have learned from their abusers to suppress their stories. Sharing stories can be a way of breaking abusive cycles. In “I Almost Let You Win,” Krapf says, “Night after night I stood on the stage reading my poem.” Then, she realizes that she must resist words of her abuser that have become a part of her own thought pattern. Even though she has been free of her abuser for years, she says, when she reads her poems, “Each time I would start ripping myself apart inside.” She says of the abusive words, “But this time... they were coming from me... You trained me well.” Years later, the echo of the abuser’s voice in her head still threatens silence.

Unfortunately, sometimes the larger society also tries to quiet survivor voices. If a survivor’s sharing of her story “threatens the status quo, powerful political, economic, and social forces will pressure survivors either to keep their silence or to revise their stories” (Tal 7). The tendency of society to silence, blame, and isolate survivors of trauma can mirror the behavior of the abuser. Resisting the culture of silence can be an act of revolution against the greater society as well as individual abusers. Tal says, “Bearing witness... is born out of a refusal to bow to outside pressure to revise or to repress experience” (7). Publicly sharing their stories can help survivors to advocate for themselves and resist the silencing oppression of society which mirrors standing up to the silencing behavior of abusers. In “I Almost Let You Win,” Krapf says to her abuser, “STOP... I almost let you win but... an amazing poet’s words lifted me up.” The connection to another survivor poet helps her to change the words in her head. She says, “I’m still shining and you will never dim my inner light again.” Her poetry becomes an act of resistance to her abuser and to the silencing elements in society.

Breaking silence is a theme throughout survivor poetry. In “Shattered Silence,” the metaphor of glass represents not just an individual abuser trying to silence a victim, but the larger society silencing the victim as well. Martin-Rossi says, “Some windows muffle screams / We must break them.” This is a metaphor for breaking that silence. In “Everyday People,” Rose says, “We break the silence.” In “I Almost Let You Win,” Krapf says, “The Time had come to break the silence / Speak out to the masses.” In “The Alpha and the Omega,” Martin-Rossi says, “*This* story breaks the silence / Gives survivors courage to be heard.” Breaking the taboo of speaking about these issues can be empowering for survivors.

Breaking silence can give the survivor story meaning beyond the individual survivor. It can make her an advocate for survivor’s everywhere giving her a mission beyond herself. The survivor’s hope is that her individual narrative will resonate through the larger narrative of society, deconstructing and reconstructing that narrative with new beliefs and values. Tal says, “If survivors retain control over the interpretation of their trauma, they can sometimes force a shift in the social and political structure” (7). In “Everyday People,” Rose says, “we do not want these cycles of abuse to continue.” Survivors “hope that the community of women will be strong enough to prevent the commission of atrocities in the future” (Tal 127). While survivors still have the courage to share their stories, they hope that there is still hope to change the future. Herman says, “While there is no way to compensate for an atrocity, there is a way to transcend it, by making it a gift to others” (207).

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Shattered Silence

Patricia A. Martin-Rossi © 2012

Memories splatter piercing hearts

Body parts feel phantom touches

Adrenaline rushes

Cheeks flush red

Feeling dead inside

Pride washed away

Waves of pain drift slowly

Tear filled eyes drain

Stained sheets hold secrets

Pillows whisper nightmares

Ears block dead voices

Whose senseless choices destroyed innocence

Monsters still breathing cause wreathing of intestines

Victim's souls sentenced eternal damnation

Demons create fears seeking cremation

Stained glass windows conceal truths

Revealed behind confessional doors

Kin share fluids blood ties should sever

Incestuous viscous liquid should never enter bodies

Of cousins nieces nephews sisters brothers sons or daughters

No translucent water scalding or holy will purify these sins

Some windows muffle screams

We must break them

Shattered silence of hand covered mouths

Amplify cries

Some broken glass windows are beautiful

Allow voices to sing poetic justice

No boards cover them

Fragmented light shines where darkness once held stares

Words fell on deaf ears

Now able to hear spoken words

No longer weak

Survivors stand strong

Reveal wrongs of the past

No longer prisoners

Souls free at last

Once Upon a Crhyme

By Patricia Martin-Rossi ©2013

Shhhhhh.....don't tell

This is our secret

Warm breath on back of neck

Hairs like soldiers stand straight

Eyes close....tears trickle....toes tremor

Remember silk sweat soaked baby dolls

The same....but different

Innocence stolen again

Silent voice cries....please don't

This won't hurt

Hand reaches....fingers seek shelter

Legs squeeze tight

Now I lay me down to sleep

I pray the Lord my soul to keep

If I should die before I wake

I pray.....I pray.....I pray.....

Dear God make him go away

No one's supposed to touch me like this

Cousins should not touch me like this

Cousins play tic tac toe....double dutch

Cousins say....Miss Mary Mack...Mack...Mack

All dressed in black...black...black

Cousins teach songs.....

Down...down baby down by the roller coaster

Sweet...sweet baby I don't want to let you go

Please let me go....whispers unheard

Shimmy...shimmy coco pop...shimmy....shimmy rock

Cousins don't do this

Cousins don't touch that private place

Mary had a little lamb....little lamb....little lamb

The private place where pee comes out....and sometimes blood

Mary had a little lamb whose fleece was.....fuzzy

Fuzzy wuzzy was a bear

Fuzzy wuzzy has hair around that thing

He makes me squeeze that thing

It spits...it's not nice...it spits milk all over my hand

I think he's sleeping....he's breathing funny

Don't move....stay still.....like you're dead

Maybe he'll go away

No....run upstairs....lock door...hide under the bed

Monsters are nice under there

Cousins are not supposed to be monsters

Like Lizzie Borden's father

Lizzie Borden took an axe....gave her cousin 40 whacks

No.....no....that's not how it goes

This is not how this goes

Nobody knows

Little Jack Horner sat in a corner

Eating his Christmas pie

He stuck in his thumb.....

Stuck in his thumb.....

Stuck in his thumb.....

Shhhhhhh.....don't tell.....this is our secret

And said what a good boy am I

Little Girl Memories

Patricia A. Martin-Rossi 2011

Little girl memories

Of his smile

Tattooed in her brain

Because smiles don't

Cause pain

Do they

Little girls memories

Of weekends on the Cape

Became big girl memories

Equivalent to little girl rape
Memories of not so innocent touches
She clutches her fists
So hard her palms bleed
Blood rushes then slowly drips
As memories rip through her mind
Thoughts flash and flicker
Like an 8MM movie on a sheet
Hanging from the living room wall
She hopes memories move quicker
So she doesn't have to hear him call her name
Patricia
You're so pretty
He used to say
She was only seven
Thought all nice neighbor men
Talked this way to little girls
Like those 8 MM movies
Some scenes are not clear
Maybe it's better that way
Because on days
These memories creep in
She cries

Wonders why he picked her

She was only five

When the touching began

Hot summer sweat ran

Down the nape of her neck

Baby doll pajamas clung to skin

He grinned from ear to ear

She didn't understand

She should fear that look

When he took her hand

Sat her on his lap

She didn't know that wasn't his knee

Pressing against her bottom

Or that the tapping of his leg

As if he had to pee

Meant she was exciting him

Looking back she wonders if

His granddaughters knew

The feeling of his knee

Or the touch of his hands

The way she did

Did they trust his smile

As he defiled little girl memories

Did he ever touch his daughter

While running water for her bath

Did his wife know

He liked to show little girls

How the cows behind the fence

Were milked

Did she know he liked to feel

Silk baby dolls on his lap

During summer naps

On the cottage porch in Sandwich

Did she hear the pitch of his voice change

When little neighbor girls

Came to visit

Did it register in ANYONE'S mind

The kind man with the smile

All the while was creating

Little girl memories

That would become

Big girl nightmares

He's been dead for years

He can't hurt her anymore

But memories stored in dark places

Keep faces of dead men alive

Big girls create dreams
Despite little girl screams
To help them cope and survive
The touches of a smiling dead man

The Alpha & the Omega: Rape at a Frat Party

By Patricia A. Martin-Rossi

Laughter lifted above
Sounds of music
Silk screened Alphas and Omegas
Across chests
Down sides of legs
Secret handshakes
Initiations

Constellation of smiles filled dimly lit room
Conversation wiled her away
From concentration on her drink
She never stopped to think
Something sinister would happen that night
After all...she was only drinking soda
Liquor free fun!

Designated driver

No odor or trace of alcohol

She awoke shivering... Cold

Sat naked

Knees to chest

Through cracks of shaded windows

Street lights peeked bold

Not knowing how she got there

Clothes...strewn across wooden floor

Wetness trickled down her thighs

Fingertips, red with blood

Body bruised

Tears welled

Pain surged

Confused! Afraid!

Dressed her shaking body

Found her way to the door

Locked from the other side

Window raised

She gazed onto empty street

No sign of life

No sound...Eerily quiet

Painful...body hoisted over sill

Guided by will and determination

Fear whispered in her ear

“Find the nearest phone”

Campus security

Drove nameless girl to the infirmary

She felt ashamed

Like a leper plagued with scurvy

Afraid of the truth

Refused to listen to their words

“She was RAPED!”

Kit placed on tray

Legs in stirrups

Speculum inserted

Soul void

Emotion deserted

Specimens resembling viscous lotion

Placed in cups

Covered...Tagged...Bagged

Sent to be tested

She left with insecurity

Rode home

Head rested in hands

Stomach acids churned

Burned their way to throat

Spewed on officer's neatly folded coat

The walk to her front door....An eternity

She felt dirty from head to foot

Stepped fully dressed

Under streaming shower for an hour

Shivering in corner of tub

Scalding hot water sanitizing a body

That had once been hers to give

Taken without permission

Left...like meat after slaughter

Preyed upon by faceless fraternal monsters

Their mission...Sick and twisted

Body drugged and listless

Trespassers

Violators

Rapists

Thieves robbed her of the faith she had in men

Each

Like a sieve

Straining her body from her soul

29 years

Memories buried

Never revealed

Until the day fear whispered in her ear

“It’s time for you to heal”

No more shame

No more worry

Nothing to hide

This story breaks the silence

Gives survivors courage to be heard

A voice

That says *“It’s time for you to heal”*

Thieves will never steal...your words

Hyper-Vigilance

Toni Rose

Hyper-Vigilance;

One of the hyper arousal symptoms of PTSD

Do you know what it is to be afraid...

Your senses become hyper vigilante

A loud scream

A thousand hands

A stench of vomit and urine

Cascaded with shadows

Vile acid burning

Scorching any possible release

Your life drains from your body

Do you know what it feels to be in terror...

Your senses become hyper vigilante

The quietest sound

a loud scream

only you can hear.

The gentlest touch

one of a thousand hands

pounding against your flesh

The smells of home cooked meals

a stench of vomit and urine fills

your nasal passage

The sight of beauty

cascaded with shadows

reaching out to get you.

The sweet taste of candy

turns to vile acid

burning your throat

Scorching any possible

release of sound.

To close your eyes

Flashes of images

A puzzle of past trauma

Abuse...

The sounds bore through your

Head like a jack hammer on over load

Sweet gestures go unheard

The touch of your skin cold, wet, clammy

As the sweat consumes your heat

Loving touches go unfelt

The smells of his must cramp you stomach with

Memories of deep penetration

The smell of summer violates your senses

The sight of darkness allows you to

Escape the visions of his vile face

As puzzle pieces merge together

The taste of him blood oozes from your lips

as you bite Down

drowning out the cries of joyous music

Bitter taste

Your senses hyper vigilante

The quietest sound

The gentlest touch

The smells of home cooked meals

The sight of beauty

The sweet taste of candy

To close your eyes
As you gasp for breathe
Puzzle pieces fit together
As you build on life without fear

Senior Year

Toni Rose

Senior Year
Dark skinned West Indian boy
Short curly hair, intense sexy eyes
Muscles firm, lips soft and sweet
Kissing him made me want more
In the car, his house, even at his cousins house

Mentally in a dark place
A victim of sexual abuse
We had sex in a dark room,
His cousin's room
My only salvation ...Sex!
With that West Indian boy
He was my drug
A substitute for love and affection

Pepsi and Vodka chaser

Always by my side

Alcohol induced promiscuity,

his cousin ...

my best friend

in the same dark room

Putting myself in a risky position

I did not care... I needed this chocolate West Indian love

To feed my needs

Plotting behind my back

Conspiracy

Led to this dreadful-typical-vulnerable-physical-uninvited-personal attack

The ride home a favor for my boyfriend

I knew I shouldn't go alone

Something telling me **NO!**

A favor

A ride

That's all I offered

A simple conversation

A secret shared

A conspiracy unfolded

He requested sex

Suggested, then demanded

He wanted me

NO! was my response

He removes my keys ... gets out

Walks into his house

- Ignoring my pleas I screamed

Adrenaline rush

Something telling me **NO!**

A familiar place

I'd been there before

Dark back yard

Up the winding wooden stair case

Heart... beating fast

The Darkness

The impending Fear

Entering his room

Caught from behind

Heart pounding

His voice echoing as he tells me to strip down

My voice **strong firm ...NO!**

Pushed onto his bed

Tears streaking down my face

Don't do this! Fighting

Struggling to be free

Wrists aching

Held tight

Tugging at my skirt... panties torn away

Free long enough to escape

Top of the bed

Fetal position

Legs grabbed pulled toward him

His body weight heavy

Fixed on his eyes

Begging him to use a condom

Since he was going to rape me

Struggling, angry, I piss him off

Knife at the base of my neck

Raw and exposed

My life is in his hands

Tears streaking

Brain thinking

Voice speaking

If you're going to rape me

PLEASE ...use a condom!

On top of me

He's laughing ... trying to enter me

“Don't worry... I Had a VASECTOMY”

Physical fight paralyzed Browbeaten

Use a condom if you're going to rape me

PLEASE ...use a condom if you're going to rape me!

PLEASE ...use a condom if you're going to rape me!

- Words repeated again and again...and again

Erection impossible,

Sexually, unable to perform

Body weight lifted... knife dropped

Keys tossed to the foot of the bed

Disappeared into the darkness...

My exit translucent

My memory vague

In motionless flight

Fresh air...heart breathing

Alive but emotionally dead inside

Every Day People

Toni Rose

Victims

Jenn, Toni, Pat, Satta, Amy Patrick, Madeline, Christopher, Daria, Colleen

are every day people,

you cannot look at them

see the hurt

the pain or

the bruises.

they are very good at cover ups,

making excuses

living ordinary lives

trying not to fall apart.

they are unique individuals

who focus on other peoples troubles

avoiding their own

It's easier to chug, inhale, inject

Or take control promiscuously

Because it easier to lead than to be led

they are everyday people

sons of fathers

daughters of mothers

they are victims of abuse

not always at the hands of strangers...

the perpetrators

Jonathan Dwyer, Ray Rice, Wally Williams, O.J. Simpson, John Brolin, Sean Penn, chris Brown

Bobby Brown, Nicholas Cage are

Family, friends and close neighbor.

someone powerful older in control

able to put fear in our hearts

Often not afraid of what could or will happen to us

But often what will happen to the ones we love

the everyday people

are not recognized

in these crimes

its when the rich and famous

are hurt

there is an uproar

a movement...

We are victims trying to stay alive

while protecting those around us

We are innocent

of the crimes against us

We were scared to yell

“stop,”

We are scared to tell

“cause no one will believe us”

Husbands, neighbors, friends

Cousins, boyfriends, fathers

Mothers, brothers, and sisters

We were scared then

Today we find our voice

We find the lies

The not telling

only protected the person hurting us.

We find

we do not want these cycles of abuse to continue

we don't want these monsters reeking

more havoc on our lives

or the lives of our children

We Break the silence

We Stop these men and women

From further hurting our kin

I Am (read forward, then backwards)

Toni Rose

I am the voice... behind the voice... behind the voice

I am the conscience... behind the un conscience
The rambling thoughts... the un heard emotions
I am pain guilt worry... denied by reality
Blocked by life's tragedy
I am fatigue sadness empty vessel of greatness.
I am the bad dreams wicked ways of communicating
Fist of steal I am you today tomorrow yesterday.
I am one person one heart one soul.

I am.

Poetic

Toni Rose

Poetry mimics all genres of art

A tone of lyrical notes

Flows through the ear

Captured attention

Sweet melody

A dance so intense

drawn in

partnership using

one to lead and
the other

Pulse beats like
drums echoing
the dance hall
mind encompassed
rhythm and beats
art knows no limits

Free style in the streets
mind, heart and soul
emotions explode
pure and raw

Poetry mimics
all genres of art
spoken, instrumental,
physical movements
interpretations
of feelings
receiving a message
not to be judged

embraced and understood

the story is truth

life's experience

Your opinion does

not change

reality but it

just may change

your bias

Dancers moving to

The beat... to

The notes of

someone else's

song

capturing the essence of

the message

adding a personal spin

poetry in motion

healing and community

sharing

Partners mover forcefully

across the stage

in sync moves

connect

music, master lyricist

mimics all forms of

art

Listen to the tone

in the notes

see the moves

along the dance floor

the strokes of a painting

the shadows behind the drawings

Poetry invites you

to get to know

A poet

Believe in Me

Toni Rose

I cry every night

Before I go to bed

And every morning

As I drive to work

It is a part of

My healing process

It is giving myself

Permission to feel

The pain... Deep and

Imbedded with in me.

My writing

My speaking

My poetry

Has been a transcending

Part of who I am

But I am a woman

So full of fear and

Mistrust

Not just for the world

Around me but

A lack of trust in

Who I am and with

What decisions

I make.

I say my failures in

Life, love and relationships

Stem from a cycle

Of abuse and post

Traumatic stress.

When I think of

My relationships

I feel like I often

Have one foot

Out the door...

It lasts for as long

As I let it... to

Eventually be let

Down and disappointed

Don't get me wrong

I did have an invested

Interest but a future it

Could never be

The safety of my child

Is what is always real

For me...

To never let what

Happened to me

Happen to her...

But it did

Even just one time

Hurts me more and

More each day... as

I continue to heal

And look for real

Love

You see there is no man

Out there that can

Truly love me

For me...

Because I only show them

Apart of me...

The empty part...

The bruised and

Abused part.

To get close to me

Is to get close to my

Family.

I am learning to trust in

Myself more... but hyper

Vigilance sometimes

Controls me...

Tough love is easy

Its for your best interest

Yet it is emotion-less.

I am a sensitive soul

When it comes to the well

Being of others... but to

Love myself is entirely

A different kind of love...

One that has included

Sex... weed... and alcohol
To fulfill my emptiness...
With what was taken away
From me.

What makes it even sadder
Was my perpetrators were
Never strangers... that is
Why I can't love him
Unconditionally...
Eventually he would want
To make us a family.

I don't know if I can
Trust myself to trust
Him as a secondary parent
To my daughter... when she
Already has an absent father.

I cry every night
Before I go to bed
And every morning
As I drive to work

Struggling to trust to
Believe the world is
Not as scary as it really
Seems... that love is not
Inevitable... I just have to
Open up and believe...
Believe and trust in
Me.

I almost Let You Win

Jenn Krapf

I almost let you fucking win
10 years after I got away
7 years after your last brutal rape
I ALMOST LET YOU FUCKING WIN
You see
I thought I had it all together
Years of therapy
Hospital stays
Even 2 weeks of outpatient classes learning how to empower myself

Speaking out

Helping others

Bettering MYSELF

I was on top of the world

I joined an amazing group of poets speaking out about the horrors of abuse

Even wrote my first poem

The Time had come to break the silence

Speak out to the masses

Night after night I stood on the stage reading my poem

Each time I would start ripping myself apart inside

"What a dumb bitch I am"

"These people must be thinking how fucking stupid I am for putting up with this shit for so long"

Words eating away at me breaking me down

But this time ... this time they were coming from me

I had become my own abuser

I took over where you left off

You trained me well

Walking off stage each night a battle raged inside my head

My own personal civil war

The words in my head manifesting from knocking myself down for being so dumb to telling myself I wasn't good enough to share the stage with these amazing women whose words touched my soul

Then one night as I sat Listening to one of the poets read, her words got through to me

Gave me strength

And that voice in my head

You know the one you trained so well screamed at me STOP

See, I said I almost let you win but in my darkest hour an amazing poets words lifted me up

Gave me strength

Held my hand and guided me when I Started to fall

EMPOWERED ME

I almost let you fucking win

But I didn't

I'm still shining and you will never dim my inner light again