

## TRANSFORMING VICTIMIZATION: TRUE STORIES

“When the bottom falls out of your reality, you then pay attention to yourself, your fears, dreams and needs in a very different manner. You have nothing to lose in letting the smoke screens in your life fall away. As you can learn to look at your life honestly, without excuses and self-imposed, preconceived conditions, you will find the levels of fear and anxiousness diminish. The willingness to re-evaluate the current ‘you’ and the possibilities for a new ‘you’ is what turns limitation into opportunity and destructive, old patterning into viable, healthy new paths of growth.”

Meredith Lady Young

*Language of the Soul: Applying Universal Principles for Self-Empowerment*

How does one heal and grow from an unthinkable traumatic experience? It helps each of us when others open their hearts and tell their stories. In this issue and several following, personal stories illustrate how we can move beyond staying a victim and how to use painful events to grow spiritually. Know that the events that wounded us, whether or not they are as severe as those in these stories, can deepen our relationship with our Self and be used for the upliftment of our consciousness. To raise our consciousness out of the consensus reality of victim/victimizer consciousness, takes tremendous courage and vigilance.

Allow these courageous people to impact you and show you the way out of trauma. Their sharing is very personal and each of them hopes to show you that no matter how challenging a life situation, there are ways to grow and heal from the experience.

Some of the best teachers and healers are the wounded healers who have healed themselves. Here is story number one. In the following months you will read others. If you are drawn to write your story, send it to me.

### **Story Number 1 Nancy Moonstarr**

I was a psychologist in the prison system in the state of Maryland when two very traumatic events coincided many years ago. About two weeks after the death of my father, I experienced a sexual assault at work. This was more than a very difficult time for me. The assault took place by an inmate, one who earlier had been one of my patients.

How could this even happen, you might ask? To answer simply there were many things out-of-order that day. Each inmate must, for example, be accounted for at all times. Routines were not up to standard during the change of shifts that late afternoon, in

December. He was cleaning the area around my office and no one else was on that floor at that moment. This is some of the data to explain how this assault could happen.

Why would such an abhorrent experience happen to me, a good person, with good intentions, and spiritually based? I asked myself this many times. There were other questions and thoughts haunting my mind too: “Why was I singled out? What did I misread? Where was my intuitive guidance? How did I miss this one? There must be something wrong with me, with my ability to prevent this. What did I do to bring this on? How could rape be for anyone’s highest good? I thought rape happened to those who placed themselves at risk and/or didn’t follow the ‘high road.’ How do I continue my life when I feel so desecrated, dirty, and violated? How can I ever return to my work? Where do I begin? What is the value of anything? I wish the rapist had just killed me so I wouldn’t have to feel all this pain. I don’t want to be alive. Why did this bring on the breakup of my marriage? How will I handle my overwhelming feelings that consume me one minute, then seem so not a part of me the next? Do I have the courage to make sense out of this?” My mind wouldn’t stop at times.

Slowly I did heal enough emotionally to be able to ask, “What is the purpose of this experience? What is it telling me? What does it mean for me in terms of growing positively from this?” I entered counseling and was able to return to work and resume my graduate studies as a doctoral student. It was not easy and I did stumble around in my pain, anger, fears, doubt, and depression many times.

My healing continues today, many years later. After a long process, I did recover and I have created a new life that I love. I will never forget this experience, however, I can put it behind me and enjoy my life.

What was my inner healing process like and how have I moved out of the victim/victimizer pattern and belief system? Sound possible? Earlier in my life I would have thought no. One important thing I have learned through this experience is that there is a deep, spiritual strength within to draw from that I did not know existed. I had to mobilize tremendous courage to face my fears and shadow, or unconscious side, to review my life, my beliefs, and to learn the many lessons from this experience. I am continuing to learn about myself and heal even as you are reading this passage. Let me

explain, in a minute, how I am taking responsibility for this negative feeling experience and healing myself.

First, I must preface this discussion of moving out of duality thinking of the victim/victimizer pattern by looking at the bigger picture, with compassion for all that the human part of me, or anyone else, goes through in such a trauma. Getting to the bigger picture must never deny the pain and suffering on a physical-emotional-mental level that I have gone through. Nor does it deny either that the human, physical world personality of Nancy took a long period of time to process this event in order to heal and grow from it.

Another point needs some explanation here too. Taking responsibility for my own life does not imply that I am to blame for being raped, or that I consciously caused this event. Our culture encourages the belief that women are responsible for the crime of sexual assault by provoking the victimizer or by failing to protect herself. This thinking protects the male from being responsible and conveys that this act would not have been committed if the female had not invited the attack, by dressing certain ways, drinking, drugging, or being a promiscuous person. Unfortunately, I have found these stereotypical attitudes to be prevalent. This type of thinking places blame on the one whom is assaulted and interferes with the perpetrator taking responsibility for past actions, which includes correcting behavior and paying the consequences.

This is a very common line of thinking of people that investigate such crimes, as well as, family and peers who react to the rape. Even treatment personnel may fall prey to these attitudes. To make matters worse many women have ignored their pain and suffering when they have bought into this interpretation with these kinds of accusations, believing they did deserve the attack and did cause it, and therefore, stay trapped in a victim position. Some have ignored their pain because of the disruption it causes to accuse and bring charges of rape against someone else.

This is not the type of responsibility I will be talking about in this passage. Going to the soul level of understanding to see the big picture, is not talking about this limited or distorted type of belief of causation. I believe the intention of seeing the bigger picture from my spiritual self helped move me out of this duality thinking to transform my earlier interpretation of the victim/victimizer pattern.

I have learned that there is a match on an energy level any time two people interact positively or negatively and I have spent much time trying to understand the match between myself and the rapist. Rape is a crime of power, not sex, so the energy pattern I had to figure out was about my power or lack of it; and I had to look at how I was used by another in my disempowered moment.

If I look back at my life at the time of the assault, outside of the physical reality that allowed this crime to take place, I see that I was a grieving, vulnerable person. The death of a parent is a vulnerable time emotionally for most people, as it was for me. In this state of mind, I was not operating with full power; I was no match for someone wanting to misuse his power. Add to this my gentle, benevolent nature that is loving and accepting of all types of people, along with the fact I was at the place of burn-out in my job. I was drained by the demands of my situation and personality. This left me giving too much of myself and being empty emotionally, as well as, spiritually.

Now to delve deeper. What are some of the awarenesses that I have discovered that were triggered by this physical-emotional shock? There are many. For one, I was tested on my belief and value system by calling into practice unconditional forgiveness. As the officers were taking the man who assaulted me away to a super-maximum security facility, I motioned to them not to hurt him. I did not want revenge and knew it could have been very easy for this man to have “accidentally” lost his life that day. My immediate reaction was to have compassion for this man, being able to live my truth that separates ones actions from ones inner worth. In other words I accept the individual not his actions. Two, I grew to trust the spiritual aspects of life more. By surrendering to death, during this ordeal, I found that there is spiritual comfort and strength given from loved ones that have died. I also now know that life continues after death. I met my recently deceased father during the experience, which brought much needed comfort and direction. It got through to me that someone could destroy my physical body, but never be able to destroy my soul or spiritual essence.

Then the third thing that began the next day was realizing how loved and appreciated I was by others as a person and in my job. As word got out to the whole prison system, thousands of men implicitly participated in a day of silence as a show of

grief over one of their peer's act of betrayal and violence towards me. Scores of prison personnel, both treatment and non-treatment staff, called to console me.

There are many more things that were brought to my awareness. One that I now know is a major lesson for me is to learn what emotional support is and how to receive that support from others. I was forced into a role reversal of having to ask for help in my deepest hours of need. It is still very difficult for me to ask for help, but I know I could not have survived this experience without it. I have also learned a lot about discrimination and recognizing which people are wise to trust, who adds value to my life and who does not. Some people that had been very close to me, I have painfully learned, were unwise for me to be with in a close relationship.

Miraculously, one of the most powerful things that occurred took place immediately after the assault. I experienced an incredible source of support. When I called for help and put out the message that I had been raped, about ten employees ran to my office tightly surrounding me with gentleness, compassionate words, and embraces, providing exactly what I needed. Some stayed with me to help and just be present with me, as I was in shock, and had to go through the long, drawn out, exhausting ordeal of reporting the incident and being interrogated by the police and medical aftermath. Again, lessons in emotional support and letting help in were presented to me.

Another issue that was not new but had to be confronted and healed was a self-loathing at a deep level. This is not an easy thing to face, but since this experience, I face it when it surfaces. I continue today to make progress in appreciating my unique self and set of traits, to never settle for less than what I deserve in a relationship, and to recognize and appreciate my personal power.

I can see I played a part in preventing another injustice to society by removing a predator from assaulting someone else. (The rapist was prosecuted and given a longer sentence in addition to his current one being served for rape). It was challenging to stay with the legal process and I acknowledge myself that I did.

One of the hidden gifts of this negative feeling experience was that I received counseling for several years after the incident. I, like many in the helping professions, gave to others but could not seek help for myself. The counseling helped me face the many things that were out of order in my life. The sexual assault jolted me into the

awareness that my husband and I separated and divorced. I realized there was no support or understanding for the person I was becoming. With the support of counseling I was able to look at my entire history of being victimized and not even recognizing it, always taking more and more pain into my life. I was willing to face my shadow or unconscious side, by opening up to my fears. I got in touch with my worst, negating thoughts about myself, as well as the terror I felt within at a deep level. It was very difficult to face previous episodes of assault that I had been unable to completely accept or heal. I am figuring out how to love and support the wonderful person that I know I am. Lots of new and old people are in my life now. My life is enriched with lots of loving friends and I can now recognize and accept emotional support, as well as be more open and less fearful of expressing my true feelings.

It has been several years now since the sexual assault. I have grown tremendously since this experience and continue to learn and grow. I am learning to trust my intuition, to face any person, feeling, or situation that needs confronting, to ask for what I want, and not be afraid of my power or to show others who I am.

*Through this dark experience Nancy has made the best of this situation. She has delved deep within and made many changes that have put her life more on track with her life's intentions. Nancy did finish her Ph.D. and changed the initial dissertation to that of Understanding How Others Perceive and Assign Blame to Rape Victims. She continues to help many others; she has been a beacon of light to numerous other assault victims. Currently, Nancy is enjoying helping others with a private practice. One of the most joyful notes is that, ten years after the assault, Nancy adopted an eight year old girl of a different race. Mother and daughter feel they are meant for each other.*

### Betrayal – What is it?

Someone recently asked me this question. I have personally been victim of this numerous times in my life in many different ways. We often associate it with a sexual assault. My first experience with that type of betrayal took place when I was four or five years of age. There were other sexual assaults throughout my life, with the last one, a violent one, taking place when I was 44 years old (I am 55 as I write this).

There were similar themes in each one. For example, not paying attention to, nor being fully conscious of dangerous people or being under the watch of a parent who might not be conscious of such. The conditions surrounding the event I went through when I was 44 included me not responding to my gut or intuitive feelings of how much I was not up to going into work that day. I remember being very depressed, stomach turning over when thoughts of my supervisor came to mind (which were constant). My father had died two weeks earlier, so I was just getting back from family leave and the aftermath of this transition. Yet, I dutifully disregarded these clues about myself, work, and authority. Machine like, I forced myself to go into work.

This assault connected to a major betrayal episode, blasted me into a new reality. My husband behaved underhandedly, which left me unaided at a time I believed I needed his help the most. It was predictable, our marriage ended with me beginning a new trek of finding peace, joy and neutrality in being single. I then became engrossed with creating a new job, but none appeared and so I had another betrayal. Yet, in review of my last 10+ years I can see remarkable events that showed me purpose for living. This part of my life involved me returning to my old job for several years in order that others could experience healing with me. At times we appeared to heal vicariously and find relief in seeing me function again. At other times we felt healing more directly as co-workers shared their own experience with assault and betrayal. At a certain point, as I began my private practice as a licensed psychotherapist, I realized every client I had was one who had survived rape. My understanding and continued healing of these phenomena was just what I and those I served needed.

I wish I could say the transition was a continual upward one, but it was marked by such things as my having a five year affair with a married man as well as a struggle with depression and not wanting to be alive. Again, I learned so much from this unpleasant incident that allows me to help me and my clients in ways that books or formal education cannot.

Some of my recent occurrences of betrayal reflect learning from all of my former experiences with it. For example, this past summer I began working on creating new office space for myself. As I checked into possibilities for this new space, a colleague of mine approached and invited me to join her in her own search for office space. She had made inquiries and found several possibilities at even better rates than I had found for the same space! Wow, this sounded good. She was fun and open-minded. I found it somewhat effortless, yet exciting. We had talked about our wants and what we saw happening together. As the weeks narrowed to the time we would need to make a decision she stopped returning my calls. Finally, she called and informed me she had decided to change her plans and share office space with another therapist. I was not invited. Instantly, I felt the sting of betrayal – ugggh, I had been replaced! They were happily going into one of the spaces we had talked of going into together. I had lots of feelings come up, even shame around saying, sharing so much of who I am. Next, I began recognizing my “little ego self” was speaking and maybe there was another way to look at this. Over the next couple of days, my mind started to look deeper. My colleague was different than I in the area of running a business. I like to receive payment as well as

pay my bills in a timely manner. 'Coincidentally', I found out there was a wide difference in our standards of practice. Another 'co inky dinky' occurred. Through the grape vine I learned that her new choice of landlords had authoritarian values that were quite dissimilar to mine. These are just a few of the clues I 'oops' missed at first, but turned up for me to see. Now I know the universe worked its magic and turned things as would serve me best. Just at my earlier marriage to my husband was not a good fit and had blown apart for the better, this partnering with my colleague would not have suited me either. In the meantime, I remain in my same office space until just the right timing and elements materialize for me.

Nancy Moonstarr, PhD, and sister to Suzanne