

Chapter 6 - Step 3: Remember

....remember, no one wants you to remember.

Of all the steps in any step program, this is by far the hardest one to do because it is by remembering that you reaffirm you past. These are the events, often horrifying, which have permanently stained and erased much, if not most, of your childhood. These are the times when you were subjected to unspeakable acts by people stronger than you, but who were without the strength to consider the consequences. These were the moments that cost you years, if not decades, of happiness, fulfillment, and love. And these are the ghosts in the machine which continue to control and ruin your present and future, unless you can recall your past. Yet, as obvious and important it would seem to acknowledge all of this, you must always remember, no one wants you to remember.

As a child of pain, you have paid an inexplicable price for surviving something no one would choose. And you had no choice, as your predator, or predators, were the ones making all the decisions. It was their choice to abuse you, and it was their choice to be sure no one else knew about it. And they exercised their choice of denial as aggressively and, if need be, as violently as were their acts of abuse. For, if anyone else were to find out, then it would be they who would be subject to torture.

There are many ways in which predators can intimidate and control a victim, the most extreme method being murder. But, short of this final solution, a spectrum of tyrannical tools and techniques are at the abusers' disposal which allow them to hide past transgressions while perpetrating future ones. In many cases, they can even count on others closest to them to participate in this cover-up, a mutual-benefit conspiracy tactic still in use by the Catholic Church, today. Let us begin, however, with the manipulation of the immediate relationship between the predator and their prey.

Intimidation is a game of reward-and-punishment: do as I say or else. Once preyed upon, the victim - already in a state of weakness - can be easily influenced by statements such as "If you tell anyone, I'll kill you," or "If you tell anyone, I'll kill your parents." The former one is often highly effective with older children, while younger one's are more susceptible to the latter. Imagine the guilt a five-year-old must feel at the mere thought of them doing something which would take mommy and daddy away forever? Of course, this is even more devastating when threatened against only one parent, because the other parent is the predator.

Beyond direct verbal threats, there is still much an abuser can do to ensure secrecy. In addition to violating the direct relationship with their victim, predators can broaden their manipulation to affect others whom they and their victims both know. When a close friend or relative abuses a child, it is not uncommon for them to

over-ingratiate themselves to people who are closely associated with the abused person, so as to create a false atmosphere of being trustworthy and above reproach: “Uncle Tod, no way, he’d never do that. He’s such a nice person, and he’s so good with children.” So now, the child is not only under direct intimidation, they find themselves in a impossible, up-hill battle against a supposed superman who is actually the villain. But, there’s a third layer, yet to come.

Not only can the predator threaten their victim and adapt the hero role with everyone around them, they can also create false circumstances which undermine any credibility which the victim may have had. By spreading rumors, telling lies, and even creating situations where the victim is falsely blamed for actions they never did, the abuser can turn family, friends, and, in cases such as the Catholic Church, whole institutions against the already drowning child. Even parents have cast stones at their own children when they were under the shrewd and sophisticated influence of such demonic, predatory actors.

It is worth mentioning here two phrases often associated with cover-ups of child abuse: gaslight and Stockholm Syndrome. The terms gaslight, gaslighted and gaslighting come from the 1938 play *Gas Light* by British playwright Patrick Hamilton, and denotes psychological abuse of a victim in which they are given false or misleading information so as to make them question their own memories and judgment. It was made into two film adaptations by the same name (1940 and 1944), and,

under the title *Angel Street*, it became the longest running drama on the New York Stage, with 1,295 performances. It was also the first time Vincent Price appeared on Broadway in the role of a villain.

Gaslighting has devastating effects upon a victim's psyche, as it is usually deployed against them while in a state of weakness and distress. The ultimate effect is further, rapid deterioration of the abused person's state of mind, making them even less reliable as their own witness to the torture they survived. A simple "I don't recall that," or "Are you sure you're not making that up?" is all that is necessary to begin the self-perpetuating cycle of doubt and uncertainty which leads the victim to abuse themselves through self-recrimination of their own character ("How could *I* be such a bad person for thinking such things ever happened?") and repression of the truth.

Then there is the Stockholm Syndrome. It is named after the 1973 failed bank robbery in Sweden, by Jan-Erik Olsson and his accomplice Clark Olofsson, of one of Stockholm's largest banks - Kreditbanken - in which four hostages were held for six days. During the trial, instead of incriminating their captors, the hostages all defended the two men, even to the point of raising money for their legal defense. The reason for this seemingly inconceivable reversal of loyalties lies in the six days of captivity: the perpetrators and victims got to know each other and bonded. In the end, this bonding, cemented by the shared, traumatic environment, led the

hostages to see their abusers as the ones who were being abused. The same thing can happen with some children of pain.

To fully understand this, one has to understand that while both violence and intimidation are commonplace in abuse scenarios, they are not always present. In fact, there is a wide spectrum of relationships which can exist between the abused and abusers, with violence on one end, and, unbelievable as it may sound, what seems like compassion on the other. That is because not all abusers use negative influence (violence, intimidation, etc.) to control their hapless prey. Some, instead, use positive reinforcements (rewards and praise) to groom and entice their victims's complicity and continued participation.

While this approach may not be effective in verbal, emotional or physical abuse which are dependent upon violent touch or words, it is sometimes seen in both cases of neglect ("Oh, I didn't feed you last night? Well, let's go to McDonald's and get a Happy Meal!") and sexual abuse ("If I give you this candy, can I touch you?"). Under these circumstances, it becomes clearer how an abused child, especially a very, very young abused child, might be drawn toward and bond with their predator, rather than be repulsed and fearful of them. Nowhere is this more devastating than in a subset of this pernicious paradox called Familial Stockholm Syndrome (FSS).

When a parent, grandparent, sibling, or other close relative abuses a child, they can choose reward over punishment to tie their victim's hands. As there is

already a natural, one-sided dependancy underlying their relationship, pairing intense pleasures (rewards) with the abusive acts (neglect, sex) can lead to an intense perversion of the normal familial bond: it becomes stronger, but darker. In the case of sexual abuse, the reward and punishment can even become the same, as a pre- or post-pubescent pre-teen or teenager might derive some physical enjoyment during the hidden behavior. It is under such circumstances that Familial Stockholm Syndrome can arise, with the victim having intensely strong emotional ties with, and loyalty toward, their predator.

As if all of this wasn't enough, with the many, even contradictory, ways in which the abuser maintains power over the abused, things get exponentially worse when other people become supporting actors in these transgressions. For example, if the primary bread-winner in a family is also a predator, then others in that family might actively defend them against accusations of abuse, out of fear of losing their sole source of financial income and support. The devastation for the victim is now total and complete, as it pits the non-abusing parent against their own victimized child, leaving the survivor damaged by both mother and father, regardless of which one is the abuser. In the most extreme of these cases, the originally non-abusive parent may become so resentful and angry over their compromised position that they also become abusive, taking out their misdirected frustrations upon the already brutalized child. This was what I endured when

my mother began mercilessly beating me in response to my father repeatedly raping me.

Beyond the home, this secondary level of betrayal can happen on a much larger scale. In addition to family members and close friends, whole institutions can be swept up in the predation. Doctors and teachers will look the other way when confronted by a small child's bruises, or even broken bones, when a well-paying adult client is involved. Police will turn a deaf ear toward a minor who attempts to file abuse charges, especially when the adult involved is well known within the department or the community at large. And priests, rabbis and imams will use the entire power and influence of their orthodoxies in order to deflect any suspicion of wrongdoing.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the 2018 grand jury report which uncovered the Gold Cross Boys of Pennsylvania. This two-year investigation accused over 300 priests of abusing over 1,000 boys and girls under the shroud of a decades-long cover-up by the Roman Catholic Church. One particularly heinous crime involved giving "favored" alter boys special gold crosses so as other priest-predators would know they were ripe to be raped. The complicity of the church was so effective in hiding and empowering abusive priests that these crimes continued unabated from the mid-1900's to well into this century.

So, in reflection, is it any wonder that children of pain have difficulty in remembering? Could anyone blame them if their memories were incomplete? Should

these victims, now survivors, be harshly judged if they lack sufficient proof to back up their claims? No, because it is nothing short of inevitable that one should happen to forget, even want to forget, or actively resort to repressing all sights and sounds of the horrors they endured. What else can a child do when confronted with such overwhelming odds?

That is what makes recovery a life-long proposition. Like peeling an infinitely large onion, our memories of hurt are trapped in layers where, once the outermost is removed, a deeper and even darker past is then revealed: one beneath another, and another, and another. And each of these layered recollections requires time to clarify its detail, console its hidden pain, and connect itself to other memories. Over time, what began as an accumulation of hazy apparitions and uncertainties will coalesce into an intricate pattern of well defined betrayals and brutalizations. But this cannot happen without a cost, for every door that is opened will lead to more doors of pain as the child once abandoned is finally allowed to speak its truth. That is why you must allow it to take time - a life time - for there must also be time to heal, each and every day.