

ACCEPTING shame

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THE AFTERNOONS WERE WARM BUT MY MEMORIES OF THEM AREN'T. HE WOULD WAIT FOR THE WOMEN TO LEAVE THE HOUSE. FIRST HE WOULD LIFT ME UP ONTO HIS LAP. TOGETHER WE WOULD SIT IN HIS ROCKING CHAIR, THE SUN SHINING IN THROUGH THE DOOR ON MY SOFT, YOUNG SKIN. HE WOULD WHISPER THINGS TO ME... "JY IS MOS MY MEIDJIE... EK IS SO LIEF VIR JOU".... AND THE TOUCHING WOULD START. HIS HANDS WERE COLD AND CLAMMY. HE WOULD TOUCH ME SOFTLY, FIRST OVER MY CLOTHES. THEN HIS HANDS WOULD MAKE THEIR WAY INTO MY PANTIES. HE WOULD CARRY ME TO THE ROOM I SHARED WITH MY MOTHER AND HE WOULD TELL ME TO LIE ON THE BED. HE WOULD TAKE OFF MY PANTIES. HE WOULD TOUCH ME. HE WOULD TELL ME TO LOOK AT HIS GENITALS. HE WOULD MAKE ME TOUCH THEM. HIS SHAKY HANDS WOULD PULL MY FINGERS UP TO HIS COCK. HE DID NOT "HURT ME". I FELT NO PAIN. I FELT QUEASY BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WHY.

Queasiness was love. I loved this man. He was a father to me when mine was not around. I loved him like all the women in my family loved him. So this was my first experience of "manly" love at the age of 4. He used his power to thwart my most basic understanding of self-respect. It took me years to realise that this time in my life, would irrevocably affect every romantic relationship I would ever have.

It took me weeks, perhaps months

to tell my mother what had happened. I couldn't tell her it happened more than once. I was too ashamed. But once, in her eyes was enough. I had such little comprehension of what was to follow. We were guests in his house at the time. I remember sitting on the lawn, listening to my mother defend me to our elder. The women were shouting and crying. I knew it was my fault. I shouldn't have spoken up. Naturally all but Ma, came to his defence. I came to his defence. Before I knew it, our bags were packed and we were off. No more family. Just me and Ma.

Praise her. She did her best. Being a teacher, she understood the psychological harm that would wrap its fingers around my emotional development. She took me to counselling. She prayed with me. She stayed with me. Perhaps because of this, throughout my childhood I felt I was nothing more than a burden to her. She worked so hard, all alone, to help me, to make me better. I still feel that way. I still feel that my experiences put her through immense and unnecessary difficulty. The "incident" broke our family apart. I had only her. We had only each other. She took



a job in a small mining town, Oranjemund. Our lives there were peaceful.

However, as with most single-parent households, poverty soon brought us to our knees. Before



ily's rejection. I learnt to accept things. I accepted the fact that he would try to sneak into the bathroom when I was showering. I learnt to lock the door. I was eleven years old. The first step to making something horrific seem okay is to brush it off. Accept it, girl. Accept it, and move on, but keep yourself safe.

They buried him when I was in high-school. "He has found God. He has been forgiven! Praise the Lord, Hallelujah!" they said. "Cheer up girl. This funeral is tough enough as it is!" they said. I was glad he found God. When I heard that he had been molested as a child, I was even more grateful that he could rest in peace. But I couldn't. I never got any apologies, any kind words, any closure. Accept it. Move on. Keep yourself safe.

There's an ugly infected pit in your heart when you have endured sexual abuse. The sticky, tar-like substances called shame lines the walls of your being, blocking out all the light. You are never aware of it because it is inside you and it doesn't show in anything other than your self-esteem. Your mind's only way of dealing with the intrusion of sexual abuse is by normalising it. This is normal, girl. This is how men love. It is shameful. You are shameful. Accept it. Move on.

Shame and love. Shame and love. So many men came into my life. I allowed them in so early. My shame attracted their shame. Some were good men but most were bad. Some were

meant that I would never love myself to truly love another person. There was a perpetual ambivalence of emotion toward all the other men I have been with. On and off. On and off.

It took me 20 years to realise that the "love" I deserve should be On, On, On! It took me 25 years to realise that I attract shame because it dwells in me. After 30 years of instability and self-loathing I decided to rip open the wounds that I have covered in shame.

Luckily for me, I have had ample support from my mother and other mothers and fathers who spread only love and understanding in my dark heart. Despite the pain and suffering, God has made his plan for me vividly clear. I am successful. I have a career. I have dogs and a family and friends. I have survived molestation. I have survived the date rape and physical abuse I endured through picking the "wrong" partners. I am a survivor.

There is however a universal truth that can never be denied. Sexual abuse is like drug addiction or alcoholism. It never let's you go. Every emotional interaction I have with anyone I am attracted to is prone to be affected by my shame. I will die with the shame even though I know it's NOT MY FAULT. Every day I wake up and I must forgive him, myself and all the other men who hurt.

As an adult I have done everything I can to support young women and children who are subject to or at risk of sexual abuse. How can I not? Nobody should just accept it. Nobody can truly

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I knew it, we were back at his house. This time for "holidays". He would be helping us "get back on our feet"... "He has changed, you'll see it", they would say. And that was that. I accepted it. Like I accepted my abuse and my fam-

violent. Others were jealous. In all of these relationships I felt that I needed to be an object of their desire, a sexual object, open to anything self-deprecating. If there was no shame between us, there was no love. My little shame monster

just "move on". No woman should feel the weight of self-loathing and depression that I felt throughout my life. As hard as this story is to tell, if it prevents one instance of sexual abuse, I know I will be a little closer to being less broken. ♀