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## A letter to my abusers

Candace Adams

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## **A Letter to My Abusers**

Candace Adams

***Content Advisory: The following piece contains references to childhood and adult trauma including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Please be advised that those who may be deeply affected by reading such material may find the following content emotionally and/or psychologically triggering.***

*A letter to my abusers conveys feelings about secondary abuse and psychological and emotional trauma in addition to incest, rape, and sexual abuse during my childhood. The content in the letters refers to how my mother and sister inflicted secondary trauma by refusing to listen to my narrative on my abusive father. Using excerpts and examples from my twenty-year-old dissertation, I lovingly and sorrowfully say goodbye to my family as I make my way to the next chapter in my life.*

### **Dissertation Introduction: June 2001**

#### ***Memory***

When does a memory begin? The moment after the event occurs and the message is stored in the brain, or does it need to lie waiting and have other events transform it? My own memories of my childhood are both random and time specific. Vivid yet vague. Always unpredictable. There are times when some small event will trigger a memory from the past. A smell, colors, an old song. Sometimes it is just the way the light hits an object in a certain way. Sometimes I run from the memories. I am too busy and too tired, and I want to shut them out. More recently, I have allowed the memories and the feelings to come, washing over me in a cruel mix of hot and cold. Eyes closed, fists clenched, the pain comes first, and I am transported to the home of my childhood. It starts in my chest, a pulsing, throbbing feeling. At other times it feels like a dull ache.

Nevertheless, this lost memory that feels like pain is always at the center of my chest. Where does a memory live? How long does it last? I believe that my memories will last until I take my final breath, until I no longer have any life in my body. I want to embrace them instead of running from them. I want to hold my memories like a child in my arms and give comfort, to say, "I understand now. You do not have to be afraid. Do not worry, your life turns out all right. Trust me, things are going to get better, they are going to be okay. Have no fear. You do not need to be afraid."

#### **A letter to my abusers**

July 9, 2021

Dear Mom and Frances,

I would like to take this opportunity to send you a letter of forgiveness and sorrow. Two years ago, the next chapter of our lives together unfolded. It is a period that I did not envision, however

it comes as no surprise. For my entire life, I have felt like an *other*, a person removed from everyone else, who struggles with feelings of worth and the desire to be loved and respected. I have gone to school my entire life to be an academic expert and more importantly to teach, learn, and to give back to others.

Almost twenty years ago, I wrote a dissertation that focused on autobiography and how the telling of one's story can heal trauma. Ironically, I was able to recall only the parts of my childhood that I could cope with. In my qualitative dissertation I focused on heuristics. Heuristics is concerned with, "meaning not measurements; with essence not appearance; with quality and not quantity, with experience not behavior" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42). I had to use my instinct to walk through the fire that was my childhood. This fire included emotional abuse, verbal abuse, neglect, and psychological torment. However, it was not until precisely 20 years later that I remembered the sexual abuse that started at age two. These repressed memories were buried so deep and were so raw that it took almost my entire life to recollect the horror inflicted by my own biological father. Together we remember some of the same abuse but each one of us perceives the trauma in different ways. This perception is revealed in our collective and singular recollection of terrible events.

What we can all agree upon is that your husband, our father, is a monster. What I am unable to understand is how you can believe his intentions yet deny me any sense of solace or kindness or support. In fact, to align yourself with a man you do not respect or like, and to turn your back on me. I want you to know that any person would not make up incest, continual and brutal rape starting at age 8, and my pregnancy at age 16. How could I make up a story about his stalking and spying after we moved to the Southwest, and he parked his van in the library parking lot across the street from our rental home? Why would I make up a story about his final, terrifying, and vicious rape? Or that I was so scared that I felt that it must be God's child because I had not been with a boy, in fact barely kissed a boy just days before the final attack?

We all agree that my father's behavior during our childhood was erratic, alcohol and perhaps drug induced, violent, and criminal. He was a professional speech therapist who lashed out at any person that thought to criticize him. He regularly defaced property, vandalized his colleague's homes, threatened, and harassed dentists and orthodontists that disagreed with him. He was jailed more than once for his criminal activity. He broke into his own office and spray-painted vile words on the outside of the building. He broke into his colleagues' offices and destroyed papers and confidential medical files, all the while ruining their workplaces. These are people who did nothing to him. They just had the misfortune of sharing an office building with him. In addition, he vandalized his own office and damaged his own files. He drove home, drunk, hit a car, and then was arrested. I cannot recall if this was the time when he threatened the police officers who came to our home and was beaten up in the small entranceway in front of a five-year-old, a ten-year-old, and his wife. Was it the time that he traveled to Oakland and engaged with people who were stronger and tougher than he was? When he mouthed off to them, they flung him out of the car. He ended up handcuffed to a wheelchair in a psych ward in a surrounding city. Mom, you lied for him when you told the psychologist that he had never behaved in a criminal and raging manner. He rewarded you by stopping at the liquor store and buying a six pack of beer on the

way home. For me, these memories are both singular and collective. They each have their own nuances; yet together, it was all a nightmare. I remember only a few times in my entire childhood that seemed happy. The rest were like tangled necklaces, so twisted that it would take a generation with a tiny pin and a brilliant light to begin to unravel the knots.

Mom, I was blindsided when you called my father and spoke to him before speaking to me about the abuse. Frances, I was devastated when you refused to talk with me even when I would call you sobbing after many glasses of wine, begging you to come over and hold my hand. I was told that I was crazy, and someone who needed to be in a mental home, and a liar, and someone looking for attention. I did not realize that this type of talk is called gaslighting and that it is a way of manipulating a person to question their memories, perceptions, and their sanity. I did just that for almost two years. These are the years where both of you did not call me, contact me, or come by to see me. I live five miles away from you. Last year, on my birthday, not one family member called me. I sat in my power and while it hurt, I was okay.

I wanted to share these thoughts because I forgive you for all that has happened. Mom, I know that you were aware of the sexual abuse, almost from the inception. Frances, I know that you are worried that our father molested you as well. I forgive you for shutting me out, for talking about me with family members, for continued conversations with my father. Mom, I forgive you for telling me about another young lady that he raped in our home. Later, you said that you told me a story to “make me feel better.” I forgive you for your neglect and your own psychological and emotional abuse. I forgive you both for not contacting my daughter and not coming to see or visit her. We live five miles away.

I would like you to know that my sorrow has no limits and that it was only with the help of my husband, our daughter, our dog, and my therapist that I lived through the last years. I would also like you to know that I will not be taking a lie detector test. I filed a police report that detailed my rape by my father. I also want to let you know that I quit calling you about a year ago because after intense therapy, I no longer miss you. I also would like you to know that the insecure, needy, and people pleasing woman has been replaced with the woman who is writing this letter. If I had to stand alone in this world and have every single person tell me I was a liar, I could. I have the truth and God and a band of angels to support me. I am so very grateful.

Finally, I would like to share that while I love you, I do not miss the way you treated me. I allowed your disdain because I learned from two years old not to expect anything good from anyone. People only bring pain and heartache. So, I lived with a fortress around my heart and my soul. Today, I choose to live with the memories, but not the pain. If the sharing of my experiences can help others to heal then I will recount what happened to me, without guilt or shame because I was a child, and no child deserves to be molested and raped and sodomized on a weekly basis. I choose to use my shaky, wobbly, but determined voice to ensure that in my lifetime those that hurt children will be prosecuted to the fullest extent and that new laws will replace the old ones that protect abusers.

Mom and Frances, I would like to say goodbye and I am sorrowful to let you go. I will remember the good times that we had, because the three of us were everything to one another, until we were not.

I want you to know that I am and will continue to be all right. You do not need to be an expert at anything to be respected and believed and supported.

Finally, I wish you peace and love and happiness and all of the greatest things in life.

Please know that you gave away one of the best things ever; me.

Love,

XXXXXX

### **Author Note**

Dr. Candace Brown Adams is an Educational Consultant, Curriculum and Instruction Expert, and Trauma-Informed Researcher. Her research agenda includes helping people to heal.

### **References**

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