



BEYOND THE
MIRROR

Peaceful Homes: A Basic Human Right

POEMS BY MARLENE JEZIERSKI
a book to read and pass on

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BEYOND THE
MIRROR

Peaceful Homes: A Basic Human Right

Poems by

Marlene Jezierski

THIS BOOK IS A GIFT.
AFTER YOU READ IT
PLEASE GIVE IT TO ANOTHER.

*Not everything has a name.
Some things lead us
into a realm beyond words.
By means of art
we are sometimes sent—
dimly—briefly, revelations
unattainable by reason.*

— Aleksander Solzhenetsyn



DEDICATION

With deep respect and gratitude, this book is dedicated to the millions of victims/survivors who have suffered at the hands of controlling, abusive partners. It is also dedicated to victims' children and pets who have endured untold psychological pain and physical suffering.

The courage evidenced in the willingness of many who shared their stories so others might benefit is inspiring, humbling—and a gift of incomparable worth.

INTRODUCTION

Peace in the Home: A Basic Human Right

Having worked for decades as an emergency nurse and taught about family violence, I understand the vicious impact it has on the psyche and health of the entire family. Women are the primary victims. Department of Justice statistics report that 95% of physical and sexual violence is experienced by women. Men and children are victims as well. In 40% of homes where there is domestic violence, children are abused. In 88% of homes with physically abused children who have pets, the animals are also abused or neglected.

Over the past 25 years, I have given seminars on physical and emotional abuse and how to help victims to hundreds of health care professionals and others. I have worked with advocates, lectured in the U.S. and New Zealand, and testified to Congress in Washington D.C. I have published family violence articles, participated in research, and written curricula for health care professionals, faith communities and child care providers. I conduct healing services at a local women's shelter.

In spite of this and the work of many others, information gaps exist. This book is an attempt to breach those gaps through prose and poetry. Emotional abuse is not well understood. Its damage is not as obvious as injuries from physical abuse such as cigarette burns, broken limbs, or strangulation bruises. In the face of pain from physical injuries, survivors say that the pain of emotional abuse is worse. Some emotional abuse victims don't recognize it as such; some don't recognize the damage it can cause. Often the damage to children is unnoticed, unrecognized.

Emotional abuse is a silent spirit killer. Victims suffer from a variety of problems including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, chronic headaches, back pain, and a long list of other health problems.

The material in this book is created from stories I have heard from victims and advocates. I offer this book with reverence for the victims and joy for those who have found abuse-free lives. The stories tell of the pain of adult and child victims and their pets. They also contain hope. Some are difficult to read but must be told to illustrate the severity of the problem, to honor victims/survivors still being abused and those who have moved on to peaceful lives.

It is urgent that victims/survivors recognize abusive, controlling relationships early. It is also urgent that their loved ones understand the issues they face, what they can do to support them, and have information to help them make informed decisions. Earlier awareness can make the difference between good and poor physical and mental health, be the difference between life and death, and impact the lives of future generations. Everyone deserves a peaceful life, free of emotional pain and a damaged psyche.

The societal problem of violence in the home must be dealt with collaboratively by family, friends, health care professionals, the community, and advocates. After reading this book, you are challenged to be a part of the solution for this tangled societal ill. Change can happen with an aware, responsive community.

Marlene Jezierski



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With deep appreciation to many, without whom this book would not have come to fruition: the brilliance and creativity of poet Jude Nutter whose counsel and guidance is priceless; writing partners Pam McAlister and Jerry McAllister, who spoke truth and shared wise thought—additional thanks to Pam’s sharp editor’s eye; Linda Back McKay’s ideas and invaluable direction; Dawn Banghart’s and Therese Zink’s respectful, skilled feedback; Dawn Rutt’s generous sharing of her knowledge of teens and her wisdom; Marianne Nold’s writing and editing skills; numerous poets who lifted me up and provided encouragement and ideas; the time and support of Connie Moore, Anita Berg, Rev. Doctor Margie Guelker, Marina McManus and Judi Sateren; the love and urging of family and friends; and the amazing community of advocates and activists who work for the greater good and strive—undaunted—to bring peace into every home and every heart.

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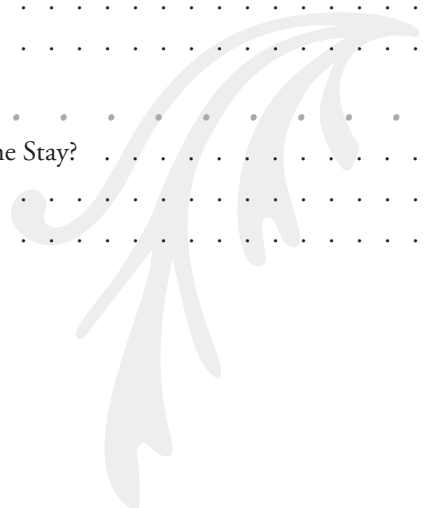
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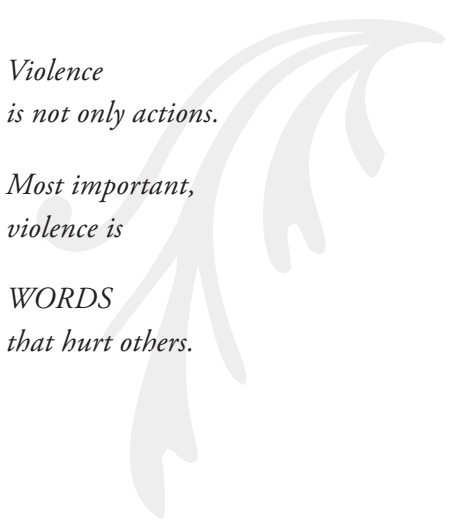
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*Violence
is not only actions.*

*Most important,
violence is*

*WORDS
that hurt others.*

DOMESTIC ABUSE HOT-LINES

National: 1-800-799-SAFE

Minnesota: 1-866-223-1111

part one

*The physical wounds have healed,
but the pain of the words
is still there.
I don't know if it will
ever fully disappear.*

*I was never hit,
but my spirit was shattered,
my self-esteem was gone.
I believed I was a bad person
and at fault for the problems
in our relationship.*

*It was years before I realized
I was abused.*

*I used to want to yell out loud—
hit me. Please! Hit me.
I can't stand it any longer.*

*— A composite of statements made
by victims of emotional abuse.*



MORNING PHANTOM

One morning while brushing her teeth,
she's startled to see, behind water specks
dotting the mirror, a girl she once knew—

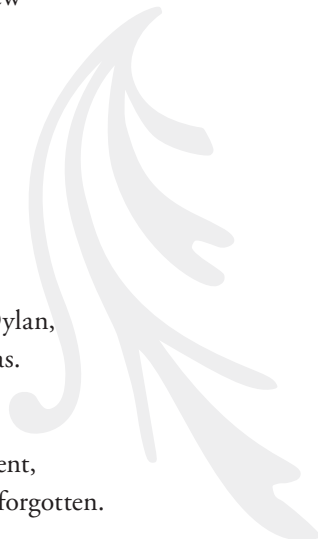
who strode like Susan B. Anthony
marching against Vietnam,
led sit-ins at the U of M,
and sipped wine through the night
with grieving friends,
cursing capricious romances;

who, in times of take-out pizza and Dylan,
loved, and dreamed of poetry and arias.

That girl in the mirror
and her aspirations—company president,
an office with windows, a secretary—forgotten.

A mist of desires remains, suspended
over a meadow of flowers,
violets and magentas
shriveled to dull browns.

The woman peering at the mirror
is jumpy, like an oriole.



She's been taught she lacks
grace, is full of herself, is loud
and proud; she's been schooled
to mix meat loaf without over-salting
or under-seasoning,

told to stop flicking her hair
from her face and interrupting
her lover, and to stifle
her bar-room laughter.

She cut her hair short and keeps quiet,
but there's always something else:
slacks the wrong color,
shelf paper placed incorrectly,
a picture hung too high,
worn brakes because of her driving.

She lingers, wishing that girl
would reappear, but the girl is lost
in a foreign landscape,
a shadow.



HE NEVER HITS HER

She watches, like a puppy
waiting for affection or a treat.

She watches—yet rarely
is there a gentle touch,
or loving eyes.

Instead, his eyes
are gunmetal.
His words are razors.

*You're getting fat.
What do you do all day?
You parent like your mother.
Where did you get that outfit?
You forgot to get my cleaning again.
It's beyond me how you got a degree.
Your friends say they don't like you.
You missed a spot when you vacuumed.
You forgot to use heavy starch on my shirts. Again.
You get an allowance because you can't handle money.
All I ask is that you do what I ask.
You can't do anything right.*

She watches. And he turns, as though
she is a curl
of dog shit that one
would dispatch into sand
with a quick kick of his Nike.

He never touches her. With his fists.



THREATS FROM THE WEST

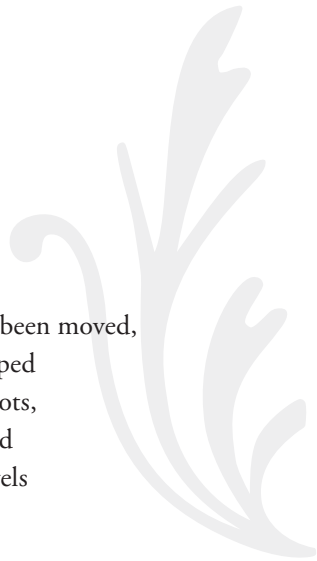
There are four: a plump toddler
with golden curls; a freckle-faced boy
gripping an autographed ball;
a red-haired mother with a pony tail;
and a broad-shouldered father,
his black hair slicked back,
his chin tilted upward.

The portrait hangs
over a fieldstone fireplace
on the south wall—
the family appears relaxed
in that frozen moment.

On the west wall,
balanced on dowels,
its barrel cold as the father's heart,
hangs a Remington rifle
pointing south.

One day, once the father was gone,
the mother took the weapon from
the wall and turned it
so the muzzle
pointed north.

Later, the father, seeing the rifle had been moved,
eyes narrowed, fists clenched—clomped
wordlessly to the wall in his work boots,
grasped his gun with both hands, and
flipped it, placing it back on the dowels
so, once more his weapon
pointed
south.



AN INCOMPLETE LIST OF RULES TO LIVE OR DIE BY

The rules are laid out as with a plumb bob,
setting a straight foundation.

There is no question as to adherence,
expectations are as firm as hardened
cement, as confining as walls.

You are allowed to use the phone, once
your housework has been judged adequate.
Canned goods must be sorted by category, labels facing out.
CDs are to be arranged by type, then alpha-ordered by artist.
Vacuum marks must all go in one direction.

Once the children leave for school
and the kitchen is spotless,
you are to exercise at least 30 minutes
and record it on the flow sheet.

You may purchase only those groceries listed.
Purchasing something not on the list
is—unthinkable—like you running for senate.

He will provide menus and recipes
and advise you each morning
the hour dinner is to be served.

He will eat in the library.

You and the children will eat in the kitchen.

You will learn to cook rice
like his mother.

Fluffy. Not sticky.

On Fridays you will gather the remains
of your allowance and receipts,
and meet with your 13-year old son
who will compile figures and report to his father.
When the two of you dance,
you will gaze at him
with soft eyes and loving glances.
You are expected to respond with smiles
and loving touches
when he desires intimacy.
You will pray daily for self improvement.
You will not discuss petty worries with others,
people don't want to be bothered.
Weeping is unacceptable—
you look awful
with blotchy skin and puffy eyes—
your time is best spent giving thanks.

You wait
in the kitchen,
receipts in a neat pile,
holding a few crumpled bills,
two quarters and a penny,
in your moist hand.



*Informed by lists survivors have been given by their abusers; in one of these,
the abuser required a signature and date.*



THE LOOK

—a private language
between some couples,
unique, unquestionable—
conveyed by a Sergeant
to a recruit.

Learning comes while walking
blindfolded. As you feel
your way, you are engulfed
by sounds: fists breaking
walls, doors slamming,
dishes being smashed,
dogs yelping,
children crying.

One learns, while wandering
alone, sightless—groping
for safety, ramming
into granite cliffs and falling
over precipices.

Insight is a requirement—
the recruit must understand
thought without speech.

Recruits get hurt during training.
Lifelong injuries persist like shrapnel
pushing its way out
years after the war is over.



The Look might mean
stop doing what you are doing or
come here right now or
I don't approve or

don't talk to that gossip
don't eat one more cracker
don't drink any more wine
don't laugh like that
don't walk that way

stop talking to that man
stop flirting with that man
stop going near men
stop being you

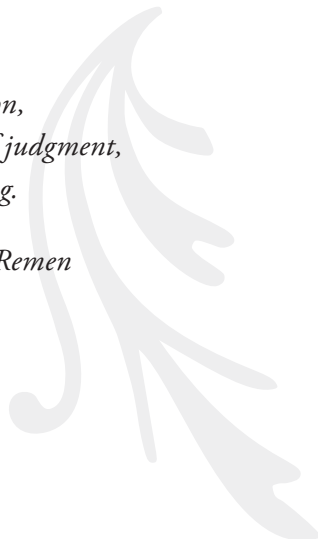
we're going home
now

you've done it
you're going to get it.



*For those who have compassion,
woundedness is not a place of judgment,
but a place of genuine meeting.*

— *Rachel Naomi Remen*



HOW IS THE WIDOW DOING?

How does a woman married for 60 years
move on when her life partner passes?
Is there grief? Guilt? Emptiness?

Was she allowed to lunch with her sister,
drive on impulse to the Mall of America,
spend a long weekend with friends in Door County?

Did she grocery shop unsupervised?
Prepare meals untutored?
Was she complimented on her French cooking?

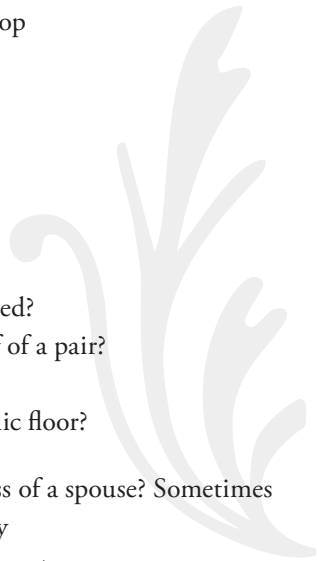
Could she choose to buy the Jones of New York suit,
wear her royal blue velvet dress to a friend's wedding,
openly watch *Desperate Housewives*, or choose
to hang the Sivertson painting in the dining room?

Was her odometer checked
before leaving home to Christmas shop
or see her gynecologist?

Was her faith ridiculed?
Was she told her prayers
were not heard because
she was not worthy of God's love?

Was her pain known and love returned?
Was she a whole woman—a full half of a pair?
Or was her spirit shattered,
a crystal figurine crashing to a ceramic floor?

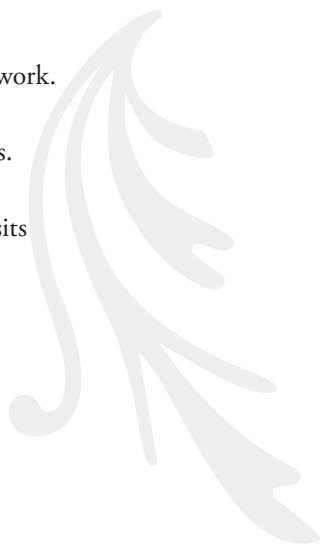
How does a woman deal with the loss of a spouse? Sometimes
the answer is locked away for eternity
in a sarcophagus, or sprinkled on the waters.



DADDY IN THE BASEMENT

Daddy lives in the basement now,
because he is a failure
as a father and husband. Mother
plans outings, bakes birthday cakes,
cleans, irons, and helps us with homework.
Daddy is almost never home
because he is at work at one of his jobs.
When he is home, he never fixes
broken toys or leaking sinks. He just sits
and watches TV.
He doesn't pick up
his clothes and tools,
forgets Mother's birthday
and concerts at school.
He doesn't rinse his milk glass
or wipe the counter.
He is a slob. Mother made him
move into the basement
so we don't have to look at his mess
or see his stupid face.
He never says or does anything right.
He bugs us about our grades
and gives us books he thinks
we would want to read,
but we don't like any of them.

It's hard to make ends meet.
Daddy's jobs are piddly.
A good father and husband would find work
that brings home enough money,
but he isn't smart enough to do that.
He works his stupid day job, then
goes off at night to referee hockey games.
His salaries don't pay the bills.



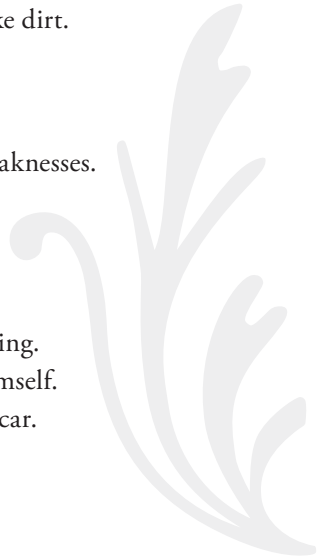
Mother works hard to keep the house up
and buys clothes, food and school supplies.
She keeps the family going.
She has to be both parents
because Daddy has no clue.

Daddy's family is messed up.
They exclude Mother and us four.
They make trouble. Daddy's mom
leaves birthday presents on the front step,
but Mother sends them back.
We don't want her charity or her useless gifts.
Mother returns Christmas cash from her, too.
We don't want her dirty money.

Once, Mother went to a wedding
for a relative of Daddy's.
She sat in the back of the church, waiting
for someone to invite her to join the family,
but they ignored her—treated her like dirt.

In spite of it all, our family manages.
My mother, sisters, brother and I
have learned to live with Daddy's weaknesses.
Our love keeps us together.
Mother taught us well.

We know Daddy doesn't love us.
He says he does, but we know he's lying.
He doesn't care about anyone but himself.
When I got my license he gave me a car.
It's a piece of junk.



ANNA JANE'S SURVIVOR STORY

Oh the comfort, the indescribable comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts, nor consider words, but pouring them all right out—just as they are—chaff and grain together—certain that an understanding hand will take and sift them—keep what is worth keeping—and blow the rest away.

— Author unknown

She nestled in a cradle of joy, nourished by parental love. The family moved west, picked peaches, sold bread, and paid rent with quarters. Then her father drank boric acid

and died. Anna was seven. Mother and child moved on with iron spirits and fervent prayers. Anna was twelve when cancer stole her mom. So—she cleaned houses, saw movies with friends—

and healed. In a whirlwind of schottisches and long talks, the orphaned teen fell in love. He was twenty, strong—her mentor. She was sixteen, trusting, and took comfort knowing

he was always right. They married in North Dakota. Her Irish eyes flashed as they danced under a twirling crystal globe, sealed their promise with love-making, and made a family. She baked and mended. He taught

her proper behavior when drinking in mixed company. She welcomed his counsel. He moved from one job to another, left each angry or disgusted. She knew he was right—but feared they'd lose their home.

She took in roomers, made curtains from old sheets, and earned a few dollars typing thousands of envelopes. He never apologized when money was scarce. He tutored her to believe what he believed, to hate those

he hated. His argument with her best friend's husband—
whether idling cars was good or bad—ended when he said
You can't see her, we will have nothing more to do with them.
She demurred and grieved—privately.

Their lives became cloistered, whiskey was his partner.
Mornings began with a shot in his coffee. He fell.
I have an inner ear problem, he said. Decades passed.
He raged incessantly at *money mongering Kikes, predatory queers,*

commie pinkos and mackerel snappers. His words and drinking
pushed his children away. Her quiet deepened. Closeted
in their lake home, she mailed dozens of birthday cards
to loved ones. When people called or sent her gifts,

she was ecstatic. One day she fell, and went to her daughter's
to heal her broken body. One night on the phone, he lashed
at her, lacerating her spirit hollering
you're so stubborn and stupid, you can't do anything right.

She sought peace in the garden—and wept.
He's never going to change.

Drunk again, he fell. At age 90, he was placed
in a Home. He never got out.

Anna danced in the sunlight of her living room.
You cannot believe how beautiful it is here, how wonderful.
The tatters of her family mended—the warmth
of Anna's freedom was balm to their wounds.

Seventy years of weight dissolved. She saw that
she wasn't stupid, that she was good. Despite years
of ravings and put-downs, Anna Jane could never
hate. Her scars faded and she healed—for good.

*The greatest things done
are by the help of small ones.
The greatest oaks
have been little acorns.*

— Author unknown



Thoughts of a Sixth Grade Boy

*My dad is a very interesting man.
He has two totally different moods.
One mood is very nice, the other is very cruel.
The nice dad can joke about things,
especially TV shows.
The bad mood is something you don't want to see!*

*He is very critical, unjust, selfish and violent.
In a lot of ways it reminds me of myself.
When I babysit for my little brothers, I get mad.
I do some of the exact same things he does.
So when he gets mad at me or my little brothers,
I know what's going on in his head, and it scares me.*

*I pray to God that when I grow up I will have
enough self-control.*

But it's not like he's like that all the time.

He can be fun.

*But I've had too many bad experiences
that deep down there is always a disgust,
almost a hate.*

At the moment, he is being great.

But I know how he can be.

— *Anonymous*



METAMORPHOSIS—TO SAM

Like a honey bee, he hummed
as he circled dining room and porch,
racing in his super-speed tennies,
his flyaway hair poking at every angle.

Sticky hands gripping a bat,
he whacked at balls and hopped
with joy as they skittered several feet.

He loved skimming Hot Wheels
across the kitchen floor.

His mother took him to the zoo
and bought food for the seals.
Animals and humans alike
squealed over the chunks of chum.

Sweaty and breathless
bunched on a bench
they shared popcorn.
Pigeons hopped nervously
as he and his mom
hooted with laughter,
but returned as he
tempted the birds,
sowing snowy pods in a semicircle.

One day the mother
met a man with a booming voice
who bought him ice cream
and hugged and kissed his mother.

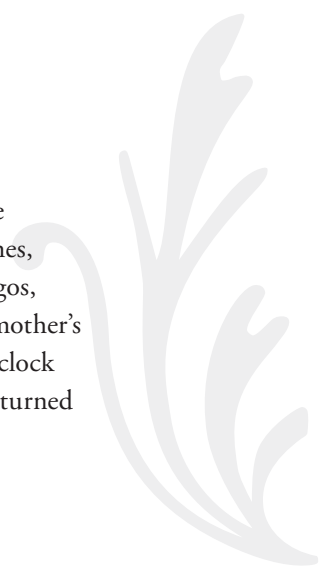


His mother and the man got married.
After a while, their home got noisy,
the man yelled and threw dishes
at the wall. The mother cried
and held her son, her tears
wet his unruly hair.

Months passed.
The man punched holes in walls
and tore up the son's drawings.
The man's yells grew louder.
His mother cried almost every day.
The son turned three,
but there was no cake
and no party.

Many nights, the son awakened screaming.
When visitors came he hid in a closet.
He started to stutter. He stopped
playing with his hot wheels.
The day care lady told his mother,
your son is hitting other children.

One day, when the man was away,
the Mother called a friend who came
with a red pickup. They packed clothes,
her Confirmation bible, her son's Legos,
her spoon collection, and her grandmother's
dishes. They loaded her grandfather clock
and the boxes into the truck, then returned
to the house for Sam, where he was
skimming Hot Wheels
across the kitchen floor.



BEFORE EMILY KNEW

Before Emily learned how love
overtakes a girl's body and mind,
Chad was next to her in biology class
with a voice that purred like a cat
and eyes the color of chocolate.

He made Emily feel she wasn't the impulsive
mouthy girl of her mother's description.
His eyes told her she was special.
His voice said she was the center of his life.
His mouth transformed her.

Before Emily knew how her body
would respond to a kiss from someone she loved,
he kissed her one night in his car.

Before Emily had a clue about balance
in relationships, he gave her a phone.
He said he loved and needed her so much,
that he wanted to hear her voice
when they weren't together. He called

when she was in the shower,
in class, at the library, eating dinner,
studying with her best friend,
at movies with her little brother,
at church with her family.

Before Emily understood healthy love,
she was patient with his interruptions.
As often as clocks chime he sang of his love for her.

Before Emily understood boundaries,
he asked what she was doing,
listened to her phone calls, asked
who she called and who called her.

When Emily told him she wanted
to keep her friends but loved him the best,
he went crazy and drove the car into a ditch
with her in it.

He yelled *I can't live without you.*
He screamed *why are you doing this to me?*

Before she understood control, Emily
told him she was applying for a job.
He asked *why do you want a job?*
Aren't I enough for you?
She decided not to work.

Before Emily was enlightened,
she gave in to his requests:
she returned his calls within minutes,
and reported her activities to him.
They did everything together—alone.

Before Emily knew there was a person
to speak to about her fears and confusion,
an advocate at school spoke with her.
Emily said,
I love being with him but I miss my friends.
It makes me feel special when he acts so jealous.
He says he'll kill himself if we break up.
My friends say he is too controlling.
Do you think he is?



SILENT WITNESSES

The woman endured his shouts in her face,
slimy hands and alcohol breath. She was afraid.
How can I buy food and clothes without him?

So she stayed and baked
chocolate chip cookies, prayed,
and slipped quarters to her children.

How are they, the social worker asked—
really—how are the children doing?
Are you sure they're all right?

Oh my yes, the mother's words
flowed in a rush—she had no doubt—
the children knew nothing
of the beatings or her tears.

The social worker persisted,
ever so gently, until the mother
allowed the children to be tested—
just to be sure.

Later, the social worker
showed the mother a truth:

in a daughter's drawing,
the father and the boys
had thick black hair. They had eyes,
noses and mouths.
The heads of the mother and the girls
were bald. They had no noses,
no eyes, no mouths.



HE WAS JUST A STRAY

He called.

Get home and take care of this dog.

She replied.

The doctor says I need another day to get my strength back.

I'm not taking care of your damned dog.

I'm sorry. I'm too weak. I don't have a choice.

The woman in the hospital
was severely dehydrated—
she needed intravenous fluids,
vitamins and antibiotics.

The man never visited her,
but she felt his presence.

One morning as she was drowsing,
the phone rang.

You don't have to worry about the dog.
I shot it.

She knew she must get well,
go home and get back to the work
of pleasing and perfecting.

Face his words.
Hear his disgust over her appearance.
Endure the aching band of loneliness.



OF DEATH AND FREEDOM

There was an eleven-year-old girl who had a pony.
Molly adored her pet. She had half-sisters
and half-brothers, but Molly was isolated
by a conspiracy of judgment and maliciousness.

Many times she saw her stepfather hit her mother
with his fists. He abused Molly, too.
Often, he banished her to the stable,
made her stand in one spot, unable
to move, even to go to the toilet. Sometimes
he would hide and watch Molly,
to see if she weakened.
She would soil herself to avoid a beating.

Molly found comfort in her pony's brown beauty,
in his velvety muzzle nuzzling her neck.
She gained strength from his soft breathing
and swishing tail—a lullaby within her prison.

A day came when her stepfather
would allow no one
to feed the pony. A second day
passed without a feeding. This
continued until, slowly, flesh dissolved
from his brown body, as when leaves
drop, baring trees in autumn, leaving
brown skeletons. In the strange peace
of the stall, Molly saw his dark eyes
grow dull, his legs become unsteady.

The stepfather removed the horse's water,
and Molly was banished to the stable
without supper. The girl and her pony endured.

As Molly lay next to him, her hand
caressing his quivering neck, his spirit
slipped away. Dully, she watched
her pony die.

She rose from her bed of straw—
not yet understanding that a part of her
had died as well. She would always feel
the love of her pony's kisses
and gain strength from the memory
of his swishing tail and gentle nose. Buried

in her spirit
a grain of courage
stirred—a fledgling
about to take its first flight.



In order to live fully, we may need to look deeply and respectfully at our own suffering and at the suffering of others. In the depth of every wound we have survived is the strength we need to live. The wisdom our wounds can offer us is a place of refuge. Finding this is not for the faint of heart. But then, neither is life.

— Rachel Naomi Remen

BLUEBEARD IN WISCONSIN

Once upon a time, a young woman
seeing evil in her husband,
hid dimes and quarters
for a future escape.

On a day like any other,
he returned home after work
to find dinner ready, the table set.
Rather than sitting down to eat,
he sent her to the storage shed
ordering her to *clean up that mess*.
Confused, she obeyed,
walked outside to the shed,

pulled the door open
and fell back, horrified, seeing
the remains of her little dog.

It was as if a wild animal
had torn him apart.
Blood was all over the walls and floor.

Shaking, tears streaming, speechless,
she returned to the house.

Growling in her ear he said,
*If you ever leave
that is what will happen to you,
and they will never find the pieces.*

Many years passed. Then one day,
she climbed into the attic, lugged
a crock full of coins down the ladder.
Hugging them to her chest, she left
and lived happily ever after.



*Treat people as if they were
what they ought to be,
and you help them to become
what they are capable of being.*

— *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*



part three

*If there is to be peace in the world
there must be peace in the nations.*

*If there is to be peace in the nations
there must be peace in the cities.*

*If there is to be peace in the cities
there must be peace
between neighbors.*

*If there is to be peace between neighbors
there must be peace in the home.*

*If there is to be peace in the home
there must be peace in the heart.*

Let us be bearers of peace. Amen

— Sixth Century Prayer for Peace



WHY ON EARTH DOES SHE STAY?

I

The question hangs like
a weeping willow in shadows.
The answer is in the roots of an oak,
under ground, convoluted, complex.

Hearts ache. People wonder.
They speak in whispers.
Why does she strut up with it?
I'd be out of there in a New York minute.

II

She stays because her life is a prison,
a web growing stronger
as she works to free herself
from flimsy strands as impassable
as metal bars.

She tries to change her life, but the web
holds fast. Like a moth, her wings stick,
then her feet,
and she struggles, becoming more entangled.
She can't laugh, cry, or hug her children.

The web binds her thoughts,
tangles her mind. Faith, self-esteem,
judgment and justice
are cocooned.



III

Overwhelmed with depression, she shares
with a trusted co-worker.

I feel so down.

He doesn't let me have my own money.

Her co-worker responds.

Have you thought about getting some anti-depressants?

She begs her pastor.

*Help me, my husband is cruel. He says God
doesn't love me.*

Her pastor answers.

*What are you doing to upset him? Try counseling.
Breaking the sacred bond is against God's will.*

She tells her parents.

*He controls everything. He tells the kids I'm stupid
and won't let me work.*

Her father, voice

like a baggage inspector, speaks.

Someone has to be in charge. Pull yourself together.

He wants his family.

Her mother, lips thin as a pencil, answers.

We love you,

but we have never had a divorce in this family.

Fearful and confused, she tells her friend.

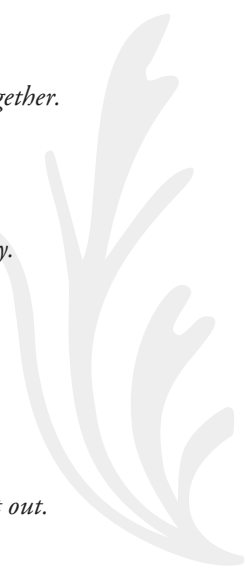
I am so mixed up. I can't do anything right.

I'm so afraid of him.

Her friend,

seeing her slow dissolution, speaks to her.

I don't know why you stay with the creep. Get out.



IV

The strands multiply like vines
that cover trees and block life-giving sun.

And there are voices,
so many voices.

*Don't take this abuse.
Run away—leave!*

*You will starve to death.
You'll not get a penny from me.
If you leave, you will never see your children.
You can't make it on your own.
You are too stupid.
No one will believe you.
If you leave I will commit suicide.
Your friends will abandon you.
If I can't have you, no one else will.*

*Momma, where's daddy?
Mom, why do you always make dad mad?*

Lawyer fees will run several thousands of dollars.

*I'm used to it.
I still love him.
I just want his behavior to change.
I'm scared.*



V

Each morning, she awakens,
trapped. Pulling against the strands,
she rises, lifting one leg,
then the other, from bed to floor—
like dragging logs.

Avoiding mirrors, she
propels herself to the kitchen,
toasts waffles, pours Aunt Jemima syrup
and juice, and makes peanut butter sandwiches.

Her children leave.
She is alone with her ineptitudes and her failures.
She hauls sheets to the laundry room,
then ponders nothingness as the suds swirl.

She thinks about trying tomorrow.
She is still searching.
Always searching.
The day is long. Dusk comes.
And she is weary.



A MONTAGE OF MIRACLES

A survivor told her story of domestic abuse at a conference. When asked what helped her to gain safety, she explained, *The biggest thing was my best friend who told me, over and over, 'I believe in you. You are a good person.'* She never gave up on me.

A woman sought help from her pastor about her partner's abuse. The pastor said, *Your husband broke the marriage covenant the first time he abused you. God doesn't want anyone to be abused.* The pastor's words gave her the strength to leave, in spite of family and religion.

A woman went to a large medical center for surgery. She said she was afraid her husband would kill her. They changed her name in the records so he couldn't find her in the hospital. They contacted an agency that provided assistance. Once she recovered, she was flown out of the state.

A woman shared her story of violence with a doctor. He told her, *You deserve to be treated with respect and tenderness. It's never OK for one person to hit or hurt another. There is help for you.* He gave her phone numbers to call for help. Ten years later she saw the doctor at a shopping mall and said, *Thank you so much. Your help changed my life.*

A nurse caring for a male patient learned the man was abusive. The nurse told the man's wife that her husband's abuse was not her fault and she did not deserve that kind of treatment. Later, the wife called saying, *Thank you for talking to me. You were so helpful. No one has ever taken the time to speak to me with such insight and support. I am so grateful, it was so helpful.*

After taking classes on domestic violence at a hospital, a nurse came to the instructor and said *I recognized my marriage. My husband has emotionally abused me for 25 years. Now, my husband and I are both getting help. I wanted you to know how much the class helped.*



A young woman, weary and sad, saw her doctor for her annual physical. She told him her partner was abusive and the doctor said *I'm so sorry. You don't deserve that. It's not OK. It's not your fault.* He gave her a brochure about domestic abuse. The next year she thanked him, saying his words helped her to leave.

An abused woman was in the Emergency Department. She said nothing of her abuse but her nurse was concerned. When the woman was being discharged, the nurse said, *I'm worried about you. You have been here before with serious injuries. I'm afraid you may not live to raise your daughter. Take this card. It has a phone number you can call if you ever want to get help.*

The woman took the card home and taped it to the back of her refrigerator. Seven months later she called the number, a domestic abuse agency, and got the help she needed. She is safe, and so is her daughter.

A random encounter with a stranger freed a woman from years of a violent relationship—physical and psychological abuse by a man who others saw to be intelligent and charming, yet in the privacy of their home was cruel and abusive. The couple took a trip through the Rocky Mountains. The woman gazed with awe at a scenic view and spoke with reverence of the beauty. Her husband, with a decades-long pattern of put-downs, sneered, saying, *Are you talking about this valley that is like every other view we've seen?* Another tourist glared at him and said, *She is absolutely right. This scene is spectacular, and you, sir, are a horse's ass.* The woman's eyes were opened and she ended the marriage.



YOU ARE WORTHY OF

a peaceful life
the biggest piece
a free trip to France
truffles on your pillow
warm clothes
a new coat
good wine

a deep bow and outstretched arm
a soft touch on your cheek
a worthy companion
a shared smile

days of laughter and indulgence
restful nights
a quiet heart
a fear-free life

the fierce love of family and friends
the loyalty of a golden retriever
admiration
a standing ovation
a peaceful life.





BEYOND THE MIRROR

Marlene Jezierski

This collection paints a vivid picture of the anguish and destruction suffered by victims of abuse. If you didn't know the answer to the question "Why doesn't she just leave?" you will after you read this book.

Connie Moore, Executive Director, Alexandra House, Inc., Blaine, MN

What seems invisible is revealed. Readers experiencing emotional abuse can take courage from the stories and find strength and support to leave the damaging relationship.

Marina McManus, Director, Community Health and Environmental Services, Anoka County, MN

These poems powerfully depict the suffering of victim/survivors of intimate partner violence and gives voice to those whose voices have been stifled by violence.

Judi Sateren, MS, RN, Associate Professor of Nursing, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.

Marlene's poetry delves deeply into the insidious and pervasive nature of emotional abuse, helps those who are emotionally abused to understand that they are not alone and gives hope to those who have lost hope. .

The Reverend Doctor Margaret I. Guelker, Executive Pastor, Christ Lutheran Church, Blaine, MN

This book is a moving compilation of stories. It is both intervention and prevention. Read it, absorb it, take from it what you can, and pass it on.

Anita Berg, Executive Director, Partners for Violence Prevention, St. Paul, MN



Marlene Jezierski, a retired emergency nurse and passionate advocate for victims, has written numerous articles and curriculum about domestic violence, conducted seminars throughout and beyond Minnesota, and received awards and community recognition for her work. Sen. Paul Wellstone invited her to Washington to testify on the impact of violence on women's health. She lives in Blaine, MN with her husband of 48 years.