

ONE



# One Person at a Time

The late afternoon sun cast long fir-tree shadows across the sidewalk on the south side of the street, making it darker than when my classmate Sandy and I had walked after school to her family's white colonial two-story to play with her dolls.

An autumn breeze blew rust-mottled maple leaves across a driveway, and my light-yellow sweater didn't seem heavy enough, nor did the robin's egg-blue elastic-waist pants I'd chosen before school. My dark sneakers and white anklet socks gathered dust from the trodden trail behind the school as I hurried around the corner out of Sandy's neighborhood and onto a narrow path next to a tall chain-link fence. Mom had said it was okay to take the short way home.

It would take me past a playground with a portable, past the multipurpose room and library, and past a cluster of classrooms. I would cut through the school grounds, cross the big playfield, pass through a narrow gate in the school's chain-link fence on the opposite corner of the school property, cross the street, and walk two more blocks to home.

Though I shivered with the autumn chill, I was excited to tell Mother about my first visit to Sandy's. No time to stop on the playground, as it was late and I had to get home before dinner.

From two classrooms away, I heard basketballs slapping the pavement in the breezeway. I turned the corner and noticed two tall boys who looked like giants compared to my brothers. I hurried toward the south wall when one of the boys let his ball bounce away.

He leered and shouted at me, "Hey, little *girl!*" Unzipping his blue jeans, he barked, "Stay where you are and pull down your pants!"

I froze.

The boy moved menacingly toward me. Confused, I stared as he pulled down his jeans with one hand and grabbed himself with the other. The other giant boy dropped his basketball, started unbuckling his belt, and edged my direction.

My heart pounded in my chest. I couldn't breathe. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up. I didn't understand what was happening and didn't know what to do.

The first boy was closer now, just a couple steps away. The second boy was still five steps away by the breezeway wall. If I tried to run back to Sandy's, the boys would for sure catch me. The other direction, behind more classrooms, was empty and hidden. The only way out was to run past them through the breezeway toward home. As I darted past the first boy, he reached toward me, brushing my sweater with the fingertips of his free hand.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw he had started chasing me, his jeans and underpants falling. My brain yelled, *Run!*

As I raced across the breezeway, the second boy began to chase me too, but I dodged him and ran as fast as I could on cement walkways until heavy footsteps and breathing echoed behind me. I ran downhill until the sounds were muffled by grass and faded completely.

Even though I felt the danger had ended, I continued running across the field and slipped through the gate at the far corner of the

schoolyard. For the first time ever, I forgot to look both ways before crossing the street. A car honked and swerved, and it wasn't until I was on the other side of the street that I dared to look back. The big boys, their pants on, laughed as they sauntered up the hill.

I ran the rest of the way home in tears. Wiping my tears with the back of my sleeve, I told my uncle what had happened.

He chuckled. "Boys will be boys." He poured a glass of milk and gave me a cookie, even though dinner was on the stove.

Mealtimes in my family home were big, noisy, and chaotic, but my uncle didn't mention my experience.

Neither did I, and it was the last time I asked for permission to visit anyone at that school. I was five years old.

#MeToo, Angel



That little girl was me. My mother's nickname for me was Angel.

Over half a century after this story took place, I write this book now as a human being with a spirit, soul, body, and voice that is ready to be heard. While the first #MeToo story I remember was at age five, I grew up in a home with three sexual abusers (now deceased). I've accomplished a great deal of counseling and healing and now spend little time thinking or talking about my experiences. Although they established a broken pattern that led to many problems in my life, I've been able to face and overcome these experiences and rebuild my past from its shaky foundation to a solid foundation for my present and future.

Later, I will open more windows on the effects of sexual violence, but I will do a bit of self-revealing here. My past has been quite a train wreck because I had a "broken-people picker." I'm not proud of the results—several promiscuous years before marrying the wrong person for the wrong reasons, a few affairs that bookended many faithful years

of marriage, and a return to promiscuity after divorce. I had offered my body to people who never once treasured my soul. If their intentions were to exploit me, I was an easy target. And if covert video surveillance had been installed, my behaviors could have turned me into someone's porn against my will.

I regret my past decisions but understand the brokenness that led me there. Yet if I could go back and relive the past knowing what I know now, I'd make different choices. Years of counseling and years of the awareness of God's faithful and compassionate love helped me get much-needed perspective, significant healing, and balance in my personal life.

Then as a coach, I spent years rebuilding my personal and professional foundation. This work set a new course for the positive life I'm living today and gives me great hope for others whose lives have been impacted by sexual discrimination, harassment, abuse, and assault. With this solid ground beneath my feet, I'm able to share my thoughts and a few of my own experiences from a place of strength.

I've been victimized by criminals in my own home growing up, and I've experienced ongoing harassment, stalking, criminal violations, and gaslighting as an adult. I'm a daughter, sister, mother of two adult daughters, aunt, and friend to girls and women in a world where stories are rarely shared and burrow deep into unhealthy cultural patterns that severely damage girls, boys, women, and men. I'm a community member spending resources to help people deal with the aftermath of their adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including sexual abuse. I'm a resident of a state that has a commission on women, which restarted after #MeToo to address needed changes. And I'm a citizen of a country whose policies impact not only how violence is dealt with but also funding for programs to help victims of sexual violence. As a member of the global human community, I'm aware of a worldwide scope of devastation from sexual violence that seems to exceed our capacity to measure, fathom, or understand, and that goes back through the ages.

I'm a person of faith who believes Jesus was the sinless Son of God who surrendered His life on a cross for the forgiveness of all humanity's sins, rose from the dead, and will return one day holding final authority over all. I trust God with my broken past as I focus on the present and future, seeking to walk humbly in the Divine Presence who sees all and offers compassion and forgiveness to those willing to accept these gifts. There is a great need for healing and change in the Christian church, and I often feel out of place among its 2.2 billion<sup>1</sup> members, as sexual abuse scandals and other offensive actions done by self-professing Christians are abhorrent to me. As a grateful, redeemed sinner who depends daily upon the cleansing and healing of the Holy Spirit and the mercy of God through the work of Jesus on my behalf, I equally respect the humanity, dignity, and perspectives of those who do and do not share my faith. Willingness to see things from others' perspectives is critical in a coaching conversation.

As a business coach, to the degree my clients need to work on deep healing, I refer them to counselors. When they need legal or financial advice, I refer clients to legal or financial professionals. Clients may work with me on reframing assumptions and creating strategies, goals, or action plans to help them move toward a better future. I have the privilege of seeing transformations, and the starting point is always in my clients. My mastery of coaching skills is always in development, and any other subject-matter expertise isn't as relevant, except to the degree that it helps cultivate curiosity and offer powerful questions that open new ways for my clients to think, be, and do.

While I support nonprofits helping victims of sexual violence, this strategy seems as futile as taking cuttings off a huge tree while ignoring the roots that continue to thrive. I hope this book adds to the existing body of work to create root-level change.

I have argued with porn users that the global porn industry objectifies people. Most of the individuals who show up in pornography on computer screens around the world aren't acting out or acting upon

their hearts' deepest desires, but rather, their involvement in that unfortunate industry minimizes their potential to offer their highest and best contributions to the world.

I have wept after reading celebrities' histories of sexual violence. News stories about human trafficking, of girls and women who are kidnapped and locked in cupboards or sheds or chopped up and buried on rural farms, tie my stomach in knots. Sexual discrimination, harassment, and abuse scandals within the church, business corporations, the arts and media, and politics are rampant. Avoiding these stories is impossible if you're plugged in to society, so numbness creeps in.

There's something deeply wrong and rotten about this world that allows such negative things to happen. The issue unveils a heavy weight of injustice. I believe my (and your) responsibility requires more than silence, which is complicit agreement with all that is wrong.

President John F. Kennedy quoted Edmund Burke as saying, "All that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."<sup>2</sup> We are to blame.

After the topic came up during a visit with a girlfriend the summer of 2018, I said, "I need to write a book." I believe our world is sitting on a pivot point, a windowsill of time to talk about and develop strategies to change what has been overlooked and accepted for far too long and to work together to create lasting change. I'm grateful this work is already happening on many levels. It must continue and increase until we reach a New Normal where all humans are treated with dignity and respect.

My passion is to empower girls, women, and all who support them to live their best futures. This requires identifying, examining, and discarding any parts of "default mode" that are not useful. Coaches don't come equipped with all the answers. In fact, quite the opposite. We see our clients as brilliant, creative, and able to generate solutions, growth, and the changes they're seeking through our engaging in questions that help them connect, gain self-awareness, create vision, design strategy, move into action, and accomplish change through accountability.

This book is one tool to help you coach yourself through your experiences to make sense of your own life beyond #MeToo. I use the pronouns “they” or “her” as I refer to victims because the vast majority are females. I recognize many males have been victims too, and encourage you, as you read the book, to replace pronouns in a way that serves you. In any case, I hope you’ll engage and gain awareness (and self-awareness) by considering each question, connecting in conversations with others about this topic, contributing to a shared vision, offering your thoughts and actions as strategies are developed, adopting new habits, and working with those in your community who are adding structure and accountability to create change. Your value is immeasurable. Your contribution is needed.

I believe the following:

- #MeToo begs for global (individual and corporate) self-awareness, calling for honesty, repentance when needed, forgiveness, and willingness to be vulnerable in ways that will rebuild trust.
- We as individuals and as a society need to rebuild trust, connect and align from a place of awareness, create a united vision, and develop and enact strategies with accountability to create transformation until the transformation becomes innate, unchanging, a New Normal.
- We need a new vision for how girls and women (and all humans) can be and are treated with dignity and respect. We need to examine old strategies and to create new strategies for defining and requiring new standards for human behavior. We need a worldwide call to action, demanding accountability that leads to a New Normal. Global transformation will have its starting place in one person at a time. I am that one person. So are you.

## **Questions to Thoughtfully Consider and Discuss**

1. Were the actions of the big boys in Angel's story sexual harassment, abuse, or assault?
2. What do you think about how Angel's report of her experience was handled?
3. What was your exposure to the onslaught of #MeToo stories in October 2017?
4. How have the stories impacted you or your community?
5. What might facilitate learning about this topic?
6. What are your thoughts about people who've made mistakes and their ability to learn from them and recover?
7. How open are you to looking at others' perspectives?
8. What are your best practices to develop and grow in your own knowledge and awareness?
9. Who is accountable for the wrong in our society?
10. What about silence might make it complicit agreement?
11. What are your beliefs about #MeToo?