

Relationship Rehab Show

FREE DOWNLOAD #1 The Beginning

Getting Acquainted with Nancy

The following article was written for a writing contest for a writer's conference. I was told by one of the judges that this article was their second choice for winning! Not bad out of 400 entries! It describes my emotional state for most of my childhood. Not all of my childhood was this bleak. We enjoyed picnics with other families, occasional outdoor barbeques and guests for dinner, occasions when my mother's gift as a great cook and hostess shined and she always seemed the happiest. I won't speak for my sisters, but this was my experience...

My Place

By Nancy Landrum

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The house was Mama's place. In the house, all choices were hers. The meals she prepared were eaten quickly and completely. She never asked what we liked, or wanted, or felt, so there was little reason to linger around the table. The dishes were always washed immediately. The beds were made. The laundry was done on Monday and the house cleaned on Friday. In this place, anger was not allowed, or frustration, or any unpleasant emotion. So, happiness was rarely felt, either. Here, Mama knew best. We were not pretty or sad or sick or good until Mama said so. She said I should not be shy or bite my nails or be afraid on my first day at school. She said I must be happy when company came, and be glad to sing in front of the church, and love my new dress.

The hair of four little girls was washed on Saturday and bobby pinned into curls. Sunday mornings, the curls brushed out, clad in dresses she chose, we went to church. The God we met there was distant and disapproving. Righteousness was demanded but impossible to achieve. Love was proclaimed, but withdrawn with the least childish sin, so the promise of life eternal seemed very tenuous.

In Mama's house, sisters were not friends, or loyal allies. Though we shared bureaus and closets and beds, we were separate, each silently bearing a burden without form or name.

In this place, skin was not caressed, or heartaches comforted. The words, "I love you" were rarely heard. The verbal darts hurled between Mama and Daddy spilled over to our ears and stung our hearts. Sometimes in the night, we heard muffled fighting, and a slap.

The yard immediately surrounding the house was Mama's as well. She tamed it into lawn which was faithfully watered and mowed. A bed for her favorite rose bushes was lovingly nurtured. One year, a lavish row of Shasta Daisies marched alongside the driveway.

When I was very little, I thought Daddy's place was the shed and the carport with the dirt floor that smelled of old grease. I thought the pump on the gas tank in the yard was his; the easy chair with an ottoman;

a floor lamp for reading his paper. But when I was five, or six, or seven, old enough to go to work with Daddy, I realized these places were only lent to him by Mama.

His true domain encompassed acres and acres of vegetable fields. Here, he was treated with respect. The foreman followed his orders. The vaqueros quickened their pace of hoeing, or harvesting. Here, Daddy seemed taller. Here, he was smart. Here, if he said I could ride on the tractor, then I could. Here, I was trusted to creep in the car around the dirt track to the other side of the field where I met Daddy, who had walked across the field checking the progress of carrots, or parsley, or corn. In the fields if I made a mistake, like driving the car into the irrigation ditch, no one yelled. The foreman just got the tractor and pulled it out. And Daddy didn't tell Mama when we got home

I loved the fields. I loved the tangy smells of things growing, and of fertilizer. I loved the space for my eyes to reach out to the sky, and the dependability of long orderly rows, and neat rectangles of green, and ribbons of brown muddy water. The sounds were of field birds like meadowlarks hopping up and down their musical scale; or crows raucously bullying each other; the tractor putt-putting in the next field; the ebb and flow of round, rolling Spanish words being spoken in the distance. And the tastes! Nothing tastes sweeter than a freshly pulled baby carrot with the dirt only brushed off, not washed. But all that was Daddy's place. I only visited there.

Sometimes on the way home, Daddy would say, "I don't know what to do about Mama. What do you think I should do about Mama?" And the little six or seven or eight year old me would valiantly try to think of something that would cure the illness in our home, and make Daddy happy.

My place was harder to define. When I was very little, I claimed the field behind Mama's place. There, in the spring when the weeds called sheep's ear grew tall, I would mash them down in patterns of my own choosing, making a house, or fort, or cave. The weeds left standing made walls that, if I lay down or crawled, would hide me from the windows of her place. The sheep's ear seeds were soft. I ate them, and imagined that I could live forever without her. When the weeds died with the heat of summer, and Daddy destroyed that place with his tractor, I moved my place further away, beyond our boundary, into the lemon trees. When I reached the gully where a trap door spider lived, I pretended to be on the other side of the world. The sun mixed the fragrances of dirt, and lemons, and wild berry vines, and eucalyptus trees, into the finest potpourri. The fabric of my seersucker blouse was hot and felt good on my back. I was sure if she called, I couldn't hear, so wouldn't have to go home.

Learning to read gave me a place that was more convenient. I could sit in, or under, or behind a tree and be lost in another country, another life. Books became the real world, so real my body could be curled up in the midst of her domain but all consciousness would be far away. I dreamed of a quiet, grown-up place where I would sit surrounded by windows open to fresh air, and space, and fragrance, and sounds, while I wrote books that would be a haven for others.

I eventually sought out books that promised solutions to the pain that wouldn't go away. I faithfully followed the directions in one book, and then another. The pain didn't leave, but questions, doubts, and conflicts were added, not about the solutions proposed, but about me. I became sure I wasn't good enough to stop hurting, or disciplined enough, or spiritual enough. One by one the solutions, along with the hopes they sparked, were discarded like wilted petals falling from a dying rose.

Much, much later I began to explore a place where love is given and received just because I am. This place has rooms for all feelings, not just the nice, quiet ones allowed in that other place. In this place I am permitted to throw tantrums, grieve losses, be ill, cry until I am through crying - for sorrow or for joy. Here, at last, I have been freed to laugh, be silly, tease, play pranks, experience childhood.

God dwells here. Not a rigid tyrant or a manipulating ogre, but a Guiding Presence who celebrates me. Here, there is space to try, and fail, and move on without the heavy burden of disapproval. In this place I have choices. Here, every effort is acknowledged and praised. Here, I am learning something that is very hard...how to live without shame.

In this place I no longer need to look up to Mama and Daddy as giants, or down at them as ants in the dust. Here, I stand equal to them, seeing their humanness, their fears, their wounds. From this place, their power is not so awesome or their sins so great. Here, in the safety that is offered me, and that I am claiming for myself, I understand, and forgive.

Here, at last, I am finding My Place.

Added Notes, 2022:

It is in this environment where my dream to have a happy, loving marriage was born. When I learned to read, I somehow knew that I would one day write books to help others have a happier, more loving marriage.

I wonder if you have a dream...a vision...that is being born from whatever painful experience you may have had or are having now. If so, would you like to write about it? What experience is giving birth to your dream? Ideally, what would the fulfillment of your dream look like? Be as detailed as you can!

You have my best wishes and support!

