

# **I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse Study Guide**

**I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse by Ellen Bass**

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# Contents

[I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents..... 2](#)

[Plot Summary..... 4](#)

[Part 1, 'I had thought it was over.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Fathers: Jude Brister, The Window's Netting; Maggie Hoyal, These Are the Things I Remember; and Yarrow Morgan, from Remember..... 6](#)

[Part 1, 'I had thought it was over.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Fathers: Jean Monroe, from California Daughter/1950; R.C., Remembering Dream; Jill Morgan, It Began for Me; and Marty O. Dyke, Yeah I'm Blaming You..... 8](#)

[Part 2, 'Yesterday I saw him watch my sister.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Relatives: Lynn Swenson, from My Half-Sleep; and Maya Angelou, from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.....10](#)

[Part 2, 'Yesterday I saw him watch my sister.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Relatives: Blanche Woodbury, My Brother; Desi, Story of a Granddaughter; Louise Thornton, Uncle Karl; Bella Moon, Silence; and Experience Gibbs, 1952, and Other Years..... 12](#)

[Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Lois Phillips Hudson, Why Aren't There More Creative Women?; Honor Moore, First Time: 1950; and Billie Holiday, from Lady Sings the Blues..... 14](#)

[Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Karen Asherah, Daddy Kanagy; Naomi Schwartz, The Peaches of My Childhood; and Miriam Monasch, The Fourth of July..... 16](#)

[Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Beverly Sky, A Priest's Kiss; Jana Vincenti, Daughter; and Lillian Kelly, Aftermath..... 18](#)

[Part 4, 'I never saw him before.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Strangers: Jade Gates, And Now; Pat Parker, Shoes; Martha Rogers, A Street Fair; Kate Millett, from Flying; and Ann Simonton, Trophy Girl..... 19](#)

[Part 4, 'I never saw him before.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Strangers: Maureen Brady, Chiggers; Mary Berger, Summer Vacation/Fifty Years Ago; Hummy, A Totally White World; Jean Alexander, Letter to a Soldier, and Jennifer Meyer, Crossing the Fence..... 21](#)

[Characters..... 23](#)

[Objects/Places..... 28](#)

[Themes..... 30](#)



Style..... 32

Quotes..... 34

Topics for Discussion..... 36



# Plot Summary

*I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* is an anthology of stories, essays and poems edited by Ellen Bass and Louise Thornton, among others. This book was inspired by a writing shop in which many of the students wrote about sexual abuse that took place in their past. The book is a moving collection that is designed to take away the secrets, to expose this terrible crime that takes place against children every day and to allow some of the victims to find a voice. *I Never Told Anyone* is a powerful book that throws the doors open on the secret of sexual abuse and finally allows light to shine on the smallest victims.

*I Never Told Anyone* begins in part one with stories written by women who were abused by their fathers. Jude Brister wrote about a trip into the country to help her father build a cabin for his new family that resulted in nightly sessions of unspeakable abuse. Maggie Hoyal wrote about years of abuse from her father who believed that Maggie actually liked his unnatural attention. Yarrow Morgan wrote a poem based on recollections of abuse that began when she was only an infant, while Jean Monroe recalled being used as a sexual outlet for her father while her mother was hospitalized for tuberculosis. R.C. related a dream she often had in which she attempted to save the child she once was and Jill Morgan recalls being brutally raped by her father while her mother did all she could to ignore the obvious signs. Finally, Marty O. Dyke wrote a poem that drips with anger toward her father for the pain of the abuse he put her and her family through.

In part two, abuse by relatives, many women relate stories of abuse by grandmothers, stepfathers, and even brothers. Lynn Swenson's poem discussed the abuse her grandfather committed against her, and possibly her sister, while her grandmother lay sleeping in the next room. An excerpt from Maya Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was included here. Maya was only eight when her mother's boyfriend began molesting her. Two encounters soon led to a rape that culminated in Maya testifying against her rapist in open court. Maya lied about the previous molestations because she did not want her brother to know she had kept a secret from him. However, this lie would sit heavy on her shoulders for many years, changing the carefree personality that once so delighted her brother.

Blanche Woodbury contributed a poem about her brother who molested her when they were children. Desi wrote a sad account of the baths her grandmother would give her as a child, the tone one of a woman attempting to figure out how another woman could hurt her in such a way. Louise Thornton, an editor of this book, contributed a story not about her own abuse, but about an uncle who abused her cousin and attempted to abuse her brother. Louise found herself in a position of protecting this member of the family while at the same time wishing he would pay for his crimes. Bella Moon wrote a stirring account of sexual abuse suffered at the hands of a foster parent while Experience Gibbs discusses abuse by an uncle when she was just a small child.

In part three, abuse by friends and acquaintances, Lois Philips Hudson began with a short essay discussing the impact of abuse on creative women. Honor Moore



contributed a poem about her abuse perpetrated by a respected member of her community when she was only five. An excerpt from *Lady Sings the Blue*, tells the story of how Billie Holiday, the blues singer, was nearly raped at the age of ten and jailed because of it. After going to the police for help, Billie was taken from her mother and sent to a Catholic institution as though the rape were her fault.

Karen Asherah continues this section of the book with the story of how a childcare worker her mother entrusted with her safety abused her and Naomi Schartz related in a poem how a trusted friend abused her after she turned to him for support after her father left the family. Miriam Monasch wrote of being molested by a teenage friend during a Fourth of July party while her parents were only a few feet away. The story of the Priest's Kiss not only addresses sexual abuse that Beverly Sky suffered, but a loss of faith that came about as a direct result of this priest's abuse. Finally, Jana Vincenti wrote a short story of how a boyfriend of her mother's attempted to rape her while her mother showered and Lillian Kelly contributed a poem of the lingering fear a sexual abuse victim carries around for the rest of her life, especially after the birth of a daughter.

In part four, sexual abuse by strangers, Jade Gates begins the section in a short essay that relates several incidences of sexual abuse perpetrated against her by strangers. In *Shoes*, Pat Parker relates how a love of shoes allowed a shoe store owner to lure her into his store and force her into oral contact with him. In a unique turn, Martha Rogers tells not her own story, but a story of a molestation that happened to her mother when she went to a fair with her brother and was touched by a stranger. From her book, *Flying*, Kate Millet relates a story of how a man offered her a ride home and then attempted to rape her on a deserted road. A successful model most of her teens and early twenties, Ann Simonton wrote *Trophy girl* to describe one of many abuses she suffered by men who equated model with sexual toy.

*Chiggers*, by Maureen Brady, begins as an innocent story of one child's summer, but becomes sinister when a stranger intrudes on what should have been a carefree school break. Mary Berger, too, had her summer ruined while staying at a tourist home one summer during the depression. A stranger molested her while she played on the swings. Hummy's story is one of the most heartbreaking of all in this collection. Hummy was raped repeatedly by a couple of handymen who thought they had every right to use her five year old body because she was an American Indian. Finally, in two stories of empowerment, Jean Alexander wrote to the soldier who molested her and expresses all her anger at his actions while Jennifer Meyer related how she was able to stand up to a possible attacker and defend her right to survive.



# **Part 1, 'I had thought it was over.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Fathers: Jude Brister, The Window's Netting; Maggie Hoyal, These Are the Things I Remember; and Yarrow Morgan, from Remember**

## **Part 1, 'I had thought it was over.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Fathers: Jude Brister, The Window's Netting; Maggie Hoyal, These Are the Things I Remember; and Yarrow Morgan, from Remember Summary and Analysis**

This book was inspired by a writer's workshop run by Ellen Bass. The project began as a way to give some of these women a voice and turned into a way of helping women survivors of sexual abuse to heal.

In Window's Netting, Jude Brister wrote a fictional account of a trip she took to help build a cabin with her father and her brother. However, when the young girl realized that she would be sleeping alone with her father in a tent, the fun began to leak out of the weekend. That night, while the young girl fixed the rubber bands on her braces, her father waited impatiently. When she was done, the young girl's father forced her into his sleeping bag and raped her both that night and again the following morning. This happened several days in a row until the young girl's brother gave her a single person tent with a ripped window netting. The young girl repaired the window netting and slept in quiet safety alone that night. Jude Brister wrote this story at the age of nineteen and published it in a brochure. The writing of this story allowed Jude the security she needed to help her talk to her mother and brothers about the molestation she suffered at the hands of her father. After writing this story, Jude also learned that her grandfather had also molested a young girl and that her paternal aunt had been molested by her mother's brother.

Maggie Hoyal had repressed the memories of her sexual abuse, refusing to deal with them until she joined a writer's workshop and found herself writing about her memories. The result of this experience was *These Are the Things I Remember*, a short story that gave her the strength she needed to begin to put her life back together. In *These Are the Things I Remember*, Maggie's father got a construction job working on a hotel in St. Lucia. Maggie recalled her father trapping her alone in the hotel room and touching her.



Maggie refused to speak that night leading her mother to believe she was ill. A few days later, Maggie told her mother about her father's touching and she promised it would never happen again as she rushed out of the door to return to her guests. At fourteen, her father told Maggie she would have to pay for the clothes he had bought her by allowing him to take her virginity. Maggie agreed only because she felt she had no other choice. Maggie managed to put her father off for a while, but eventually she could no longer delay the inevitable. Her father attempted to make Maggie feel as though he were doing her a favor, but all Maggie felt was disgust. The next contributor, Yarrow Morgan, was molested by her father and brother from an early age. Remember is a poem Yarrow wrote about her childhood, a poem describing memories of a sexual attack on a three year old child who refused to cry out and elicit a violent assault. The poem ends with the idea that these memories do not come easily, but the victim will no longer be silent.

These first stories of part one all have the same theme of sexual abuse. However, they are all told in vastly different tones. The first, Window's Netting, begins with an optimistic tone as a young girl faces a weekend adventure with her father with the excitement of any child who has been separated from her father through divorce. However, this optimistic tone quickly disappears as the young girl realizes her father intends to sexually abuse her as they sleep together in a small tent alone. The optimism returns at the end of the story, though, when the girl's brother gives her the means she needs to protect herself: a torn tent that is damaged like her, but, hopefully like her as well, repairable.

The second story, These Are the Things I Remember, is almost like a short memoir, written in flashes of memory almost like the writer is physically recalling these things as she writes. The tone begins with the typical nostalgic tone a memoir often has, but begins to turn a little sadder, a little more hesitant as memories of sexual abuse begin to creep into the story. In the middle, a tone of sadness and desperation begins to drip from the words, until desperation and perhaps a grudging acceptance dominates the tone at the end of the story. Finally, the tone of the poem Remember begins with sadness that turns to outrage that finally becomes determination. Remember is about using memory as power, using what happened to this small child as a way to fight back. Remember is optimistic as well, but a guarded optimism that is more about fighting than hope.



# **Part 1, 'I had thought it was over.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Fathers: Jean Monroe, from California Daughter/1950; R.C., Remembering Dream; Jill Morgan, It Began for Me; and Marty O. Dyke, Yeah I'm Blaming You**

## **Part 1, 'I had thought it was over.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Fathers: Jean Monroe, from California Daughter/1950; R.C., Remembering Dream; Jill Morgan, It Began for Me; and Marty O. Dyke, Yeah I'm Blaming You Summary and Analysis**

California Daughter/1950 was written by Jean Monroe where she wrote of several instances in which her father fondled her breasts while her mother was away, recovering from tuberculosis. When her mother came home from the hospital, Jean's father began to treat her with anger, accusing her of things she did not understand. Once, Jean went into the bathroom while her father was bathing and he showed her his penis. At the same time, Jean's mother began lecturing her about sex and how to protect herself. One day Jean tells her mother what her father does to her. Jean's mother promises to make it stop. Another woman, R.C. was sexually abused from the time she was four until she was eleven. R.C. blocked out the memories of this abuse until she attended a growth group and heard a woman talking about her own sexual abuse. This experience caused the memories to resurface. In Remembering Dream, R.C. related a dream she had often in which she was being sexually abused by her father and then she was trying to save herself as a baby from the abuse.

Jill Morgan was brutally abused by her father and wrote It Began for Me about this abuse. Jill's father would be in charge of her care when she was young, often molesting her under the guise of giving her a bath. One afternoon, Jill's father brutally raped her, damaging her body so badly that she had to spend several weeks in the hospital. However, Jill refused to tell who had hurt her. At nine, Jill's father raped her. Jill's mother untied her when she returned home, but instead of calling the police or leaving the house, she drugged Jill to keep her calm. At thirteen Jill was raped again. At fifteen, Jill's mother left Jill home alone with her father for a week, during which he tied her to the bed and raped her repeatedly. At eighteen, Jill's father attacked her, but she managed to get away by stabbing him in the shoulder. The next writer, Marty O. Dyke, wrote the poem, Yeah I'm Blaming You, an attack on her father for the rapes he perpetrated on





both her and her sisters. The poem tells this father that Marty will no longer be quiet, that she blames him.

California Daughter/1950, is a sad story about a young woman who became a replacement for her mother at a very young age when her mother became ill. This story is filled with confusion as the girl struggles between wanting to make her father happy, of wanting him to love her, and feeling uncomfortable with his sexual touches. At the same time the girl is putting up with her father's strange behavior, her mother is lecturing her about allowing boys to touch her in a sexual way. The story ends on an up note, however, when the young girl tells her mother what her father has done and the mother promises to make it stop. The girl runs out of the house skipping, excited that for once someone has listened to her and she will no longer have to deal with this very adult situation on her own, giving the story an optimistic tone that leaves the reader with some hope.

Remembering Dream, like Yeah I'm Blaming You, the tone is less optimistic and more frightened and angry. Remembering Dream is a short essay about a young abuse victim attempting to rescue the child she was when the abuse was happening. Yeah I'm Blaming You is much angrier than Remembering Dream, but it follows the same idea as the young woman in the poem is attempting to rescue herself by standing up against her abuser and admitting to the world that what happened to her was no one's fault but her fathers. Both these titles are about surviving, about saving that damaged child, and about empowering one's self to move past the pain and have a normal life.

It Began for Me is a brutal, terrible story about a young girl who was repeatedly raped by her father with her mother's full knowledge. Jill Morgan suffered unspeakable horror at the hands of her father and writes about it here, sharing with the reader the darkness that filled her childhood and shaped the woman she would become. However, the story ends on the note that although the memories are painful, this young woman has her life back, she understands where her fears and her insecurities come from and she is willing to face the future knowing the worst is behind her. This story, as brutal and violent as it is, as outrageous as it is, ends in an optimistic tone as the young woman takes back her life and refuses to allow her parents to define her any longer.



## **Part 2, 'Yesterday I saw him watch my sister.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Relatives: Lynn Swenson, from My Half-Sleep; and Maya Angelou, from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings**

### **Part 2, 'Yesterday I saw him watch my sister.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Relatives: Lynn Swenson, from My Half-Sleep; and Maya Angelou, from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings Summary and Analysis**

Lynn Swenson grew up with her divorced mother who was often abusive toward Lynn and her sisters. As an adult, Lynn wrote a series of poems called *My Half-Sleep* that chronicled time spent on a farm with her grandparents as an eleven year old girl. In the excerpt provided in this book, Lynn wrote about her grandfather coming to her room at night and sexually assaulting her, then later watching her sister undress before a fan.

Maya Angelou wrote four autobiographical books as well as many books of poetry. In this excerpt from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, her first autobiographical book, Maya relates several incidences of sexual abuse perpetrated on her by a boyfriend of her mother's when she was only eight. One morning Maya climbed into bed with her mother and her boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, after suffering a nightmare. Maya's mother got out of bed before either Maya or Mr. Freeman woke. When Maya woke, she found Mr. Freeman was touching her. When it was over, Mr. Freeman held Maya close to him, a feeling that she enjoyed. Later, Mr. Freeman told Maya she had peed the bed. Then he said if she ever told anyone what had happened he would kill Bailey. Over the next few weeks, Maya longed for Mr. Freeman to hold her close to him again. One night Mr. Freeman allowed Maya to sit on his lap for a time, then he rushed off to the bathroom. After that, Maya became more interested in her new library card than Mr. Freeman.

A few weeks later, Mr. Freeman sent Maya to buy some milk. When she returned, Maya found Mr. Freeman alone in the house. Mr. Freeman raped Maya and then again told her if she told he would kill Bailey. Maya went to the library, but the pain was so unbearable that she returned home. Maya's mother thought she was coming down with the measles and let her remain in bed. That night, Maya's mother and Mr. Freeman fought and Maya's mother sent him away. The following morning, while changing Maya's bed, Bailey found her bloodied underwear. Mr. Freeman was arrested and put on trial. During the trial, Maya was forced to testify against him in open court. When



asked if Mr. Freeman had ever touched Maya any other time, Maya lied for fear of hurting her brother when she revealed she had kept a secret from him. Mr. Freeman was found guilty and given a year and a day in jail. However, he was murdered on the streets shortly after his trial. Maya became silent after the trial, filled with fear that she had the power to kill people with her words.

In the poem, *My Half-Sleep*, the writer uses the desert sand as a metaphor for the wall of silence that surrounds a victim of abuse. In this poem, the writer describes a rape by her grandfather that the child is afraid to tell anyone about because she does not want to hurt the grandmother who loves her or the sister who looks up to her. At the same time, the young victim is torn because she wants to protect her sister, but she is afraid of the consequences of telling her secret. The poem captures the conflict all victims of abuse feel and expresses it with simple phrasing and appropriate metaphors.

*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is an autobiography by Maya Angelou that is the first of four such books. This book chronicles Maya's childhood. The excerpt featured in this book is about the rape Maya suffered at the hands of her mother's boyfriend when she was only eight years old. This rape was the third such attack on the young child, but the first with penetration, and it ended in a trial for the man accused. Maya healed well physically after this attack, but mentally no one helped her to understand the conflicting emotions she experienced. Maya cared about Mr. Freeman because he was one of a few men in her life who gave her the physical contact all children crave. Maya did not know that what Mr. Freeman was doing was bad, she only knew that he held her when it was over and she liked that. Later, Maya lied about Mr. Freeman in court. When Mr. Freeman ended up dead, Maya felt somehow responsible. Maya stopped talking, afraid that the things she said had the power to kill people. This is a clear example of the kind of guilt, a theme of the book, children of abuse suffer despite the fact that the fault does not lay with the child, but with the adult.



## **Part 2, 'Yesterday I saw him watch my sister.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Relatives: Blanche Woodbury, My Brother; Desi, Story of a Granddaughter; Louise Thornton, Uncle Karl; Bella Moon, Silence; and Experience Gibbs, 1952, and Other Years**

### **Part 2, 'Yesterday I saw him watch my sister.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Relatives: Blanche Woodbury, My Brother; Desi, Story of a Granddaughter; Louise Thornton, Uncle Karl; Bella Moon, Silence; and Experience Gibbs, 1952, and Other Years Summary and Analysis**

Blanche Woodbury's mother suffered a nervous breakdown soon after her birth and checked herself into a psychiatric hospital. Blanche and her brother were left to the care of their grandmother. Blanche's brother blamed Blanche for their mother's illness. Blanche was sexually molested by her brother. Once, when their grandmother walked in on them naked together, she blamed Blanche and beat her. In the poem, My Brother, Blanche writes about the abuse they never talk about and how the burden of the secret is slowly killing her brother.

In Story of a Granddaughter, Desi writes about the abuse her grandmother perpetrated on her. Desi's grandmother was convinced that a woman's vagina was smelly and that it must constantly be cleaned. Whenever her grandmother would babysit, Desi could recall her scrubbing her vagina until it was raw, often using her fingernails and once even using a Q-Tip. Desi would grow up distrusting women until she met a woman who helped her to learn to trust women again.

Louise Thornton is an editor of this book. While never abused herself, Louise Thornton had an uncle who molested a cousin and attempted to molest her brother. In Uncle Karl, Louise writes about this uncle, describing how he would often take the boys of the family out to car races, but would always leave Louise at home. Louise came home during college and learned from her mother that a cousin had accused Uncle Karl of molesting him. While the family believed this young man's claims, no one wanted to



confront Uncle Karl. Louise kept her mouth shut as well. However, when she learned that Uncle Karl had begun spending time with the family of another cousin who had a son of her own, Louise called that cousin and warned her of Uncle Karl's past behavior. Another featured writer, Bella Moon, grew up in and out of foster homes. Bella was abused in these homes, but she was never able to discuss them with her therapist until she wrote *Silence*. In *Silence*, Bella writes as though she, as an old woman, is standing over the child she once was and is helping the child to cope with the horror she suffered from sexual and physical abuse.

Experience Gibbs was raped by an uncle when she was just a child. Experience hesitated to contribute to this book, but decided to go ahead with it when she began to recognize the power rape had over her life. In *1952, and Other Years*, Experience writes about an afternoon when her uncle raped her during a party in her grandparents' house. Experience struggled with sexual feelings awoken too soon, unable to talk to anyone about it. When her uncle died, Experience cried.

Blanche Woodbury's *My Brother* is a short poem that is almost amusing in its flippant handling of her brother's unhealthy lifestyle. However, the darkness lurks in every phrase, revealing to the reader the anger and hurt that Blanche felt when she wrote the poem. The tone, while it appears to be light, becomes darker on the second reading, more sinister, as brief descriptions of violence and cruelty leap off the page. In opposition to *My Brother*, *Desi's Story of a Granddaughter* has in it more of a tone of confusion, of a need to understand. Desi does not know why her grandmother did what she did, but illustrating the theme of misplaced guilt or blame, she openly blamed herself at several points during the abuse, trying to behave better so that her grandmother would stop hurting her.

In *Uncle Karl*, Louise Thornton writes about the abuse her uncle perpetrated on a cousin. Louise idolized Uncle Karl and learning about his darker side made her almost afraid of him, afraid of what he might do to the innocent little boys in the world. However, this fear did not force Louise to call the police or to do anything else to help her uncle. Instead, Louise quietly lived with this information, warning only a cousin who had a small child her uncle was interested in. Louise went to see Uncle Karl at the time of his death and recognized his need for forgiveness, but never addressed the forgiveness she needed for not acting or the help her cousin needed for what her uncle did to him. Louise was protecting a perpetrator, making her story stand out among these stories of victims and giving it themes all its own.

In *Silence*, Bella Moon wrote down her fantasies of going back and protecting the child she once was, a story that empowered her in such a way that she was finally able to talk to a therapist about the abuse years after beginning her therapy. *Silence* gave Bella a voice. The same could be true about *1952, and Other Years* by Experience Gibbs. Experience did not want to write a story for this book, but she did because she realized the power rape had over her life. Experience found her voice, just like Bella, and learned to speak out about what happened to her instead of continuing to protect her perpetrator with silence. These stories empowered their authors, giving them the strength they needed to heal.



## **Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Lois Phillips Hudson, Why Aren't There More Creative Women?; Honor Moore, First Time: 1950; and Billie Holiday, from Lady Sings the Blues**

### **Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Lois Phillips Hudson, Why Aren't There More Creative Women?; Honor Moore, First Time: 1950; and Billie Holiday, from Lady Sings the Blues Summary and Analysis**

Lois Phillips Hudson was molested several times as a child. In her essay, *Why Aren't There More Creative Women?* Lois discusses her attack by a neighbor while also lamenting the necessity of women to beg not to be hurt. Mr. Ahmann was supposed to drive Lois to the dentist, but instead he pulled the car over and attempted to force Lois to have sexual relations with him. Lois begged and begged for him to stop and eventually he did. However, Lois was left with the memory of her helplessness and a concern for Mr. Ahmann's young daughters. Lois ends the essay by raging about the need for women to have to beg not to be hurt and asks women to assert their rights to safe.

Honor Moore was the daughter of a minister who belonged to an experimental ministry at an inner city church. Honor was molested by a young man in the church who was babysitting her. Honor's poem, *First Time: 1950*, describes an incident in which this young man distracted Honor's baby brother with his keys and then forced her to perform oral sex. The next contributor, Billie Holiday was a famous blues singer. In an excerpt from her autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*, Billie relates an incidence in which she was nearly raped by a neighbor. Billie came home to find the neighbor waiting for her. The neighbor said that Billie's mother had sent him to get her. At the man's house, Billie laid down for a nap. The man came into the bedroom and attempted to rape her. When Billie resisted, the man's wife came into the room and held her down. Alerted by another neighbor, Billie's mother came rushing into the house with a police officer. Both Billie and the rapist were taken to the police station. Billie was placed in a jail cell and held for



several days before she was sent to a Catholic institution. These events would color Billie's outlook on life for the rest of her days.

These stories seem to pull together a collection of the injustices of sexual abuse. Lois Phillips Hudson not only tells how a neighbor with daughters of his own attempted to rape her, but rails against men and wonders why women have to beg to feel safe, to be allowed to live without the threat of rape hanging over their heads constantly. Honor Moore, while not outwardly angry about what happened to her, has placed the safety of her molester before her own safety, illustrating almost exactly the things Lois Phillips Hudson laments in her essay. Also in Honor's poem there seems to be more of the theme of misplaced guilt or blame as Honor finds herself unable to call out to the woman next door even though she knows that she could see what was happening. As an adult, the woman should have done something and she did not, leaving Honor to live with a shame and a guilt a child should never know. At the same time, Billie Holiday was put in jail for her rape, even though she was the victim. The reader wonders if this was based solely on a misunderstanding of sexual assault at the time, or if this was based more in racial inequality. Either way, Billie Holiday should not have been punished for what her attacker did to her.



## **Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Karen Asherah, Daddy Kanagy; Naomi Schwartz, The Peaches of My Childhood; and Miriam Monasch, The Fourth of July**

### **Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Karen Asherah, Daddy Kanagy; Naomi Schwartz, The Peaches of My Childhood; and Miriam Monasch, The Fourth of July Summary and Analysis**

In Daddy Kanagy, Karen Asherah tells the reader how her mother got a job and enrolled her and her brother in the day care the Kanagys, a retired couple, ran. Karen's mother greatly admired Daddy Kanagy and often held him up as an example of a respectable male adult. This confused Karen when Daddy Kanagy would touch her but the touches made her feel uncomfortable. Karen did not tell her mother about these incidences until she was older because she did not want to tarnish the image of her perfect father figure. The next contributor, Naomi Schwartz wrote the poem The Peaches of My Childhood about a molestation that took place shortly after her father left the family. The poem describes the child's admiration of a house painter who reminded her of her lost father.

In The Fourth of July, Miriam Monasch relates the story of how she was molested by a teenage acquaintance just feet from where her parents were enjoying a Fourth of July party. Miriam and her family went to the home of a family friend to celebrate the holiday around the backyard pool. After swimming most of the afternoon, Miriam's mother sent her inside to change out of her wet clothes before dinner. Miriam was afraid to go inside alone, but could not convince her mother to go with her. Safely in the bathroom, Miriam took off her wet bathing suit, but then discovered her clothes were gone. By the time Miriam had found and retrieved her clothes, the teenage son of her parents' friends had gone into the bathroom. The boy took Miriam into the bathroom and then forced her to perform oral sex on him with her parents just a few feet away. Afterward, Miriam went back out to the pool as though nothing had happened.

The theme of misplaced guilt or blame once again is illustrated in the short story, Daddy Kanagy. Karen trusted the man who was supposed to be caring for her because her mother thought he was such a respectable man. Karen would be molested at daycare





only to come home and hear her mother talk about what a great person her molester was. Karen thought that maybe molestation was a normal part of life. It was not until she was older that Karen was able to tell her mother the truth and to be reassured that molestation was not normal and it was not her fault. The same theme appears in the poem *The Peaches of My Childhood*. The girl in the poem just lost her father and has turned all her little girl affection on the housepainter as a replacement for her father. However, the house painter is a child molester who takes advantage of the little girl, leaving her wondering if she should make him stop or if asking him to stop would make him stop caring about her.

Miriam's story in *The Fourth of July* is an unusual one in that the perpetrator is a teenage boy. Miriam should not have to fear anyone, let alone a boy her brother's age, but it turns out that it is exactly this person she does and should fear. Miriam is attacked just feet from where her parents are and is forced to join a Fourth of July party as though nothing has happened. To Miriam, these facts are just as hurtful as the actual abuse. The secret, a theme of this story, lies heavy on this small child's shoulders, leaving her emotionally crushed in such a way that the adult Miriam can still express her pain in the tone of her story.



## **Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Beverly Sky, A Priest's Kiss; Jana Vincenti, Daughter; and Lillian Kelly, Aftermath**

### **Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Beverly Sky, A Priest's Kiss; Jana Vincenti, Daughter; and Lillian Kelly, Aftermath Summary and Analysis**

In *A Priest's Kiss*, Beverly Sky was forcibly kissed by a parish priest when she went to the church early to receive the Ash Wednesday blessing. Beverly's father was a devoted Catholic even though he rarely went to church himself and refused to speak to Beverly when, instead of telling the truth, simply refused to go to church again. Beverly not only lost her belief in the church, but she lost her relationship with her father. In *Daughter*, Jana Vincenti relates to the reader how one of her mother's boyfriends raped her while her mother was taking a shower in the next room. Jana suffered terrible pain from the rape, as well as confusion as to exactly what had happened, but she did not tell her mother until almost four years later. Jana was only seven at the time of her rape and she would continue to wonder why this man chose to hurt her. Another woman, Lillian Kelly was molested by the father of a friend when she was a teen. Lillian would drown her feelings in food and was obese throughout high school and college. Lillian believed she learned a valuable lesson from this experience and it was a part of what made her who she is today. In the poem, *Aftermath*, Lillian speaks of the fear she feels for her daughter in light of her own attack.

These stories speak of a loss. The first story describes a simple kiss, but this simple kiss caused Beverly Sky to lose her belief in the church and to lose the relationship she had with her father. Beverly has never been able to enter another church for any reason other than to admire its architecture, a loss that she has felt profoundly all her life. In *Daughter*, Jana lost her innocence the day her mother's boyfriend raped her. In the story, Jana's anger at this loss is still clear, jumping off the pages as she asks the reader why her rapist was able to use his body to hurt a little girl. In *Aftermath*, Lillian Kelly writes a simple poem about the memories of her rape and the way it colors her fear for her daughter. Lillian has lost the ability to feel safe when her daughter is out of her sight in play, a loss that she feels so profoundly that she wrote about it in this beautiful poem.



## **Part 4, 'I never saw him before.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Strangers: Jade Gates, And Now; Pat Parker, Shoes; Martha Rogers, A Street Fair; Kate Millett, from Flying; and Ann Simonton, Trophy Girl**

### **Part 4, 'I never saw him before.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Strangers: Jade Gates, And Now; Pat Parker, Shoes; Martha Rogers, A Street Fair; Kate Millett, from Flying; and Ann Simonton, Trophy Girl Summary and Analysis**

Jade Gates wrote *And Now* in response to a poem about innocence she heard Ellen Bass read. In *And Now*, Jade writes about five incidents that took place before she was fourteen. Jade always blamed herself, believing that it happened too often for it not to be her fault. Another woman, Pat Parker grew up in Houston, Texas, the daughter of a frustrated, violent man who often beat his children for the slightest offense. In *Shoes*, Pat fantasized about the shoes in a new shoe store near the bus stop where she always waited after school. After staying late in class one afternoon, Pat found herself outside the shoe store alone. The owner invited Pat inside, promising to show her all the shoes and to give her a gift. In the back room of the store, the man forced Pat to perform oral sex. When he was through, the man gave Pat a quarter and told her to come back the next day. Pat stopped waiting for the bus on that corner.

Martha Rogers did not write *A Street Fair* about herself, but about an incident her mother told her happened when she was just a small child. Martha's mother had gone to a street fair with her older brother. When they arrived, they discovered a display of snakes. Distracted by the snakes, Martha's mother lost sight of her brother and found herself pressed against the fence with a strange man standing behind her. This strange man began to touch Martha's mother under her skirt. Martha's mother eventually escaped and ran home. The next featured writer, Kate Millett was a feminist who published several papers about the feminist movement. *Flying* was her autobiography. In this excerpt from *Flying*, Kate wrote about her sexual abuse in a loose, Faulkner-type prose that was meant to be more of a writing exercise than a part of a book. However, the essay turned out to be the essence of the book, so Kate included it. The excerpt talks about how Kate was picked up on a street corner by a stranger, but a man she assumed worked for her father. When the man pulled over to the side of a deserted



road, Kate fought him, beginning him to let her go while at the same time wondering what she had done to deserve his attentions. When Kate finally got out of the car, she ran and ran until she felt safe enough to stop. When she did stop, Kate realized she had lost her turtle, the brace that is meant to straighten her teeth. Kate knew her mother would be mad because they cannot afford to replace it, but she cannot look for it and risk running into the strange man again.

Ann Simonton was a model before she became a feminist and rebelled against her previous lifestyle. Ann was abused and raped many times when she was a model and in *Trophy Girl* Ann relates the first of many episodes of sexual abuse perpetrated against her because of her choice of professions. In *Trophy Girl*, Ann had gotten her first modeling job as trophy girl at a car race. Ann dressed in a bikini and went to the race track with her entire family. When the first race was won, a large, older man came to receive his trophy and he took a kiss as well. Ann felt smothered by the kiss, but she could not pull away because she felt the crowd would disapprove. The second race ended and the same man won. This time Ann was prepared, but the winner still managed to make her feel degraded with his kiss. On the way home, no one said anything about the kisses. Ann felt dirty, used, and she cried herself to sleep.

The theme of misplaced guilt or blame is seen once more in Jade Gates' *And Now*. Jade heard a poem about innocence and finally came to understand that the five sexual assaults perpetrated on her as a child were not her fault, allowing her to finally come to terms with her past. At the same time, Pat Parker felt guilty for fantasizing about shoes so much that it allowed her to be brutally abused by a shoe store owner. Both these girls thought their attacks were their own fault for something they did or said, for trusting, another theme of the novel. However, it was the adults who broke that trust, not these little girls. The same is true of Ann Simonton who was shamelessly used as some sort of sex object simply because she wanted to be a model. Kate Millett too trusted that the man who stopped to offer her a ride had good intentions, but he did not. Later, Kate found herself concerned about a lost dental appliance rather than the abuse that was perpetrated on her. None of these women seem to realize that these were crimes perpetrated against them and that the blame lies with the criminal, not with the innocent child. Not, that is, until they were told.

In *A Street Fair*, the mother of the writer was the victim of a stranger attack. The little girl was minding her own business and a man took advantage of the distraction of a crowd to molest her. This little girl had no clue what was happening, but knew instinctively it was wrong. Like many of her sisters, this woman chose to keep quiet until more than a half century had passed. Another possible theme to these stories shows up here, shame. This little girl, a girl who was brutalized without cause, felt shame for what had happened. This little girl thought that the actions of a stranger were her fault for some unknown reason. For this, this little girl remained silent until so many years had passed that it no longer mattered what people thought of her. Shame is what ruled her life and affected every thought and action she experienced for most of her life.



## **Part 4, 'I never saw him before.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Strangers: Maureen Brady, Chiggers; Mary Berger, Summer Vacation/Fifty Years Ago; Hummy, A Totally White World; Jean Alexander, Letter to a Soldier, and Jennifer Meyer, Crossing the Fence**

### **Part 4, 'I never saw him before.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Strangers: Maureen Brady, Chiggers; Mary Berger, Summer Vacation/Fifty Years Ago; Hummy, A Totally White World; Jean Alexander, Letter to a Soldier, and Jennifer Meyer, Crossing the Fence Summary and Analysis**

Maureen Brady found healing in writing. In *Chiggers*, Maureen tells the story of a girl named Ginny and the summer she, her brother, and a male friend would hang out in a treehouse. One afternoon, Ginny went to the treehouse where she was supposed to help the boys build a new couch. A man was standing under the tree. Ginny thought the man might be the owner of the lot where their treehouse was, so she stopped to talk to him. The man convinced Ginny to sit under the tree with her where he proceeded to run his hand over her thigh. The man talked nicely to Ginny and made her feel as though he might cry if she told him to stop. From that day on, Ginny would not go to the treehouse alone. The next contributor, Mary Berger, was born in the early-twenties. In the poem, *Summer Vacation/Fifty Years Ago*, Mary tells the story of how one summer she was playing on the swings at a tourist home when a man began pushing her. Between pushes, the man would touch Mary until she became frightened and ran to her parents, telling them what he had done. The man disappeared and no one ever spoke of it again.

Hummy was an Indian girl who was forced to live in an orphanage after her parents divorced. In *A Totally White World*, Hummy recalls how she woke up in the hospital, frightened, and unable to speak anything but her native tongue. When Spring Flower, her friend, came to sit with her, Hummy told how she had come to be so badly injured. The police and doctors thought Hummy had fallen out of a tree. In truth, Hummy had been lured into a storage shed by a couple of handymen. These men raped and beat Hummy over and over, eventually leaving her to bleed on the floor. The men had



intended to come back and burn the shed down around Hummy, but she managed to escape. Hummy made it to the shade of a tree before the pain of her injuries finally caused her to pass out. Hummy was only five.

In order to clear her head from a recent depression, Jean Alexander sat down to write *Letter to a Soldier*, a story that has become a catharsis that brought to the surface memories Jean had not thought of in years. In *Letter to a Soldier*, Jean met a soldier who promised to make her a swing out of rope and wood if she would go with him to the home his squadron was using as their headquarters. Once in the soldier's room, the soldier offered Jean sixpence if she would take off her underwear. When Jean refused, the soldier forced his hand into her pants until Jean was able to escape.

Jennifer Meyer was once molested by a tailor while her mother and sister were just feet away. Jennifer never told, but this experience caused her to act out as a teenager. In *Crossing the Fence*, Jennifer describes an incident that happened when she was in high school that helped her regain some of the sense of safety she had lost. Jennifer was walking to school when a stalker came up behind her, showing his penis, and asked her to perform oral sex on him. Jennifer told him to go away and then yelled every obscenity she knew. Jennifer then ran away.

Innocence again is the theme of three of these stories. In *Chiggers*, Maureen Brady was just at an age where she was experimenting with sex and a stranger came along and stole the innocence, the safety out of this play. Maureen was left feeling abused, feeling as though she had done something wrong when in reality she had done nothing wrong. In Mary Berger's poem, she expresses her anger at the man who stole her innocence, but also her confusion in the way her parents refused to ever speak of the incident as though Mary had done something wrong. In *A Totally White World*, referring to the feet of plaster Hummy found herself in after her brutal rape, a five year old child was used and tossed away as though she was a piece of trash simply because of her race. This is the second story to include an added insult due to race, and perhaps the most brutal and outrageous story of them all. Hummy did nothing wrong but to trust an adult, and she was left to die for her actions.

*Letter to a Soldier* and *Crossing the Fence* both are about empowerment. *Letter to a Soldier* allowed the author, Jean Alexander, to finally recall the incident that has remained just below the surface, but has colored the emotions and actions that rule her life. With the writing of this story, Jean was able to take control of her life again and to let go of a secret past she no longer needed to conceal. *Crossing the Fence* is more about the empowerment of self-defense. Jennifer Meyer had been molested just feet from her mother leaving her feeling doubly betrayed, first by the molester and second by the mother who did not notice what was going on right in front of her. Jennifer was able to get back her sense of security and to feel as though she did not have to be afraid.



# Characters

## Ellen Bass

Ellen Bass is the editor of this book. Ellen Bass ran writing workshops for women. Often during the course of these workshops women would write about sexual abuse that took place when they were children. These stories and poems seemed to be cathartic for the writers, making Ellen Bass wonder if perhaps these women needed a larger outlet for their stories. Ellen Bass decided to publish a collection of these stories with the help of a few other writers who had attended some of these workshops with the hope that getting these stories out into the public arena she might be able to help other women tell their stories.

Ellen Bass was never sexually assaulted herself. However, when Ellen Bass was a young child she was forced to kiss a handyman working for her parents. Ellen Bass told her mother immediately and was happy with her mother's response. Ellen Bass's mother immediately threatened the man with prosecution and fired him from working anywhere near her business or her home. They never saw the man again. Ellen Bass believed that this was the way a mother should react and it was the difference between the parent of a woman who was never molested and the mother of a child who was repeatedly abused.

Ellen Bass had a daughter of her own. As she began to edit this book, Ellen Bass became aware of how vulnerable children are, including her own child. Ellen Bass found herself changing the way she dealt with strangers who wanted to talk to and touch her daughter. Ellen Bass taught her daughter it was okay to tell people no, that it was not OK to touch her. Ellen Bass helped her daughter feel empowered, to feel as though she could protect herself. As a result of this and other things she learned editing this book, Ellen Bass went on to create writing workshops and a book that were intended to help child survivors of sexual abuse heal.

## Louise Thornton

Louise Thornton was in one of Ellen Bass's writing workshops when a fellow student read a story she had written about the sexual abuse she suffered as a child. After the class, Louise approached Ellen Bass about putting together an anthology of these types of stories. Louise wanted to help edit such a book and did, in fact, become an editor of this book.

Like Ellen Bass, Louise Thornton never personally experienced sexual abuse. However, when Louise was an adult she learned that one of her mother's brothers had attempted to sexual abuse her own brother and did abuse one of her male cousins. Louise was outraged by this action on the part of her Uncle Karl and further outraged when she learned her mother had no intention of ever telling anyone what had happened or



confronting Uncle Karl. As a result, Louise felt powerless and almost like a co-conspirator. A few years later, Louise learned that Uncle Karl was making frequent visits to the home of a cousin who had a small boy. Louise contacted this cousin and warned her about Uncle Karl, saving that boy from the abuse. Later, when Uncle Karl lay dying in a hospital, Louise went to visit him. Louise left conflicted, saddened that Uncle Karl never admitted to what he had done, but sad at the loss of an uncle she had adored as a small child.

## Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou is an award winning poet and writer. When Maya Angelou was eight years old, her mother moved the family to St. Louis where they lived with her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. On several occasions Mr. Freeman molested Maya. At first, Maya liked the attention because he would hold her in his arms and she felt loved. Maya wanted to be held and she would try to find excuses to be alone with Mr. Freeman. However, Maya soon grew uncomfortable with Mr. Freeman's attention and began avoiding him. One afternoon, Maya found herself alone with Mr. Freeman. Mr. Freeman raped her and then threatened to kill her beloved brother if she ever told.

Maya walked to the library afterward, but was in so much pain that she decided to return home. For a full day Maya's mother thought she was ill and allowed her to lie in bed. However, when Maya's mother moved her the next day to give her a bath, her brother found her bloodied underwear. Maya was treated in a hospital and Mr. Freeman was arrested. During the trial, Maya lied on the stand about the number of times Mr. Freeman had touched her because she was afraid the court would think it was her fault he had raped her. Mr. Freeman was found guilty, but only received a year and one day. Mr. Freeman was released from jail the day the trial ended and was killed a day later. After this experience, Maya changed. The lie she told in court lay heavily on her and she lost some of the innocence she had once had.

## Billie Holiday

Billie Holiday would grow up to be a much loved blues singer. However, as a child, Billie suffered the indignity of rape that was worsened by the racial prejudice of the police force who placed Billie in jail when her mother took her to make a report against the rapist. Billie returned home from school one afternoon when she was ten to find a neighbor waiting for her. The neighbor claimed Billie's mother had sent him to pick her up. The man took Billie to his home where he attempted to rape her in his bedroom. When Billie resisted, the man's wife came into the room and held her down. Before the incident was concluded, Billie's mother rushed into the room with a policeman and she was rescued. However, when Billie's mother took her to the police station to make a statement, Billie was placed in a holding cell.

Billie never understood why the police placed her in a jail cell. Billie thought maybe the police sergeant saw that she had breasts and was a beautiful child and thought she had





seduced her attacker. Billie was kept in the jail for several days before she was sent to a Catholic institution. This arrest had a profound impact on Billie. Billie felt haunted by that day. Billie would later write in her autobiography that she would have nightmares for years about that day. Billie also could not handle a relationship with a man, especially a man who would become angry with her and throw things back at her during a fight. Finally, Billie would tell the men in her life about this experience, but if they held it over her head she would leave them immediately.

## Hummy

Hummy was an Indian child born in the thirties who was living in an orphanage following her parents' divorce with occasional visits to her mother on the reservation. While roaming the woods around the orphanage one day, Hummy, who was only five, was grabbed by a man who occasionally worked as a handy man at the orphanage. This man and a buddy of his raped and beat Hummy mercilessly, leaving her bleeding on the floor of a storage shed where they intended to burn her to death. Hummy managed to escape despite several broken bones, a broken jaw, and a disembowelment.

Hummy spent many weeks in the hospital recovering from her attack. Hummy's recovery was aided by an Indian Medicine Woman. Hummy's recovery was miraculous; she was left with almost no lingering effects. However, Hummy's emotional health was deeply scarred. Hummy would eventually marry, but it would take years of counseling before she could become intimate with her new husband. Hummy would grow up to become a successful business woman, but she continued to live with a single question regarding her sexual attack: why.

## Jennifer Meyer

Jennifer Meyer was born in Arkansas in the early-fifties. Jennifer was molested by an Italian dressmaker while her mother and sister stood a few feet away. Jennifer never said anything about this incident to anyone, afraid of causing a scene. This episode left Jennifer feeling powerless, as though she could not defend herself from the evil in the world. As a result, Jennifer became a rebellious teenager, often acting out against her parents and teachers in an attempt to feel as though she had some control over her own body and her own fate.

Jennifer would be attacked again as a young girl. Jennifer was walking to school and a stalker accosted her, asking her to perform oral sex on him. Jennifer fought him off. Sometime later, another man attacked Jennifer, threatening to rape her. Again Jennifer fought him off. Jennifer had become an assertive young woman because of her experiences and was proud of the strength she had developed as it gave her back her sense of safety, her ability to protect herself.



## Jude Brister

Jude Brister was born in the late fifties in California. Jude's parents divorced when she was young and both her parents remarried. Jude would see her father often. Jude's father began molesting her when she was only four years old. Jude would later learn that her father, a high school science teacher, also molested her stepsisters. At the age of nineteen, Jude wrote *The Window's Netting*, a story that relates how her father molested her over a weekend that they spent working on a cabin her father was building. Writing this story and publishing it in a brochure helped Jude feel empowered. As a result Jude was able to discuss her abuse with her mother and brothers. Jude would also learn from an aunt on her father's side that her father's father had been accused of raping a twelve year old girl and her aunt on her father's side had been raped by an uncle on their mother's side. For Jude Brister, writing about her abuse was the first step in healing.

## Lynn Swenson (A Pseudonym)

Lynn Swenson was born in the early fifties. Lynn's parents divorced when she was young and she was raised by her abusive mother. Lynn and her siblings would often visit their maternal grandparents where they lived on a farm. One night Lynn's grandfather came to her bed and touched her in a sexual manner. Not long after, Lynn could recall seeing her grandfather watching her younger sister. Lynn never told anyone, however, because her grandmother was a good woman and she did not want to hurt her. Lynn would become promiscuous as a teenager, often equating sex with love. Lynn later wrote a poem about her abuse that helped her deal with the issue and begin to heal.

## Desi

Desi was born in the early fifties. As a small child, Desi would often be left alone with her grandmother. Desi's grandmother was obsessed with the idea that women's vaginas smelled and she would compulsively clean Desi's vagina whenever she gave her a bath, often leaving Desi sore and swollen. Desi never understood why her grandmother treated her in this way. Desi knew her grandmother grew up in a world where women deferred to men, which perhaps explained her grandmother's dislike of Desi's latter radical feminist beliefs. However, Desi never confronted her grandmother about the abuse and never learned a reason for it.

## Ann Simonton

Ann Simonton was born in the early fifties. Ann always wanted to be a model and began modeling school when she was a pre-teen. Ann's first modeling job was as trophy girl at a car race. In front of her family, Ann stood on the race track to hand the trophy to the winners. Despite the fact that she was only fifteen, Ann was forced to accept the kisses



of the winner, an older man who took advantage of this fact and forced Ann to give him a deep, lingering kiss every time he won. Another man, an official at the races, grabbed Ann's bottom as she walked past him. Ann was horrified by what had happened, but was even more upset when her parents said nothing about the attacks they witnessed. Ann expected her mother to insist that she never take another job like that one, but her mother remained silent, leaving Ann to experience many more episode like that one as a model.



## Objects/Places

### Spearmint Scented Breath

Hummy's attacker had just been chewing spearmint gum when he attacked her. From that day on, Hummy would have flashbacks whenever someone would kiss her with spearmint on their breath.

### Alcohol

Louise Thornton's Uncle Karl would give his victims alcohol to relax them before attempting to molest them.

### Treehouse

Maureen Brady was molested one afternoon when she went to meet her brother and a friend at the treehouse they had built in a tree that stood in an empty lot between their housing developments.

### Swing

Mary Berger was playing on a swing when a stranger molested her.

### Window Netting

Jude Brister's brother gave her a tent to sleep in to escape from her father, but the window netting was torn. Jude sewed it up and spent the night staring happily up at the stars. Later, Jude would write her story and name it Window Netting.

### Shed

Hummy was attacked and left to die in a storage shed. The attackers had intended to come back and burn the shed down around Hummy, but she escaped before they could.

### Car

Louise Thornton's Uncle Karl would molest his victims in his car.



## **Stream**

Hummy made it to a stream where she immediately washed herself clean despite her devastating injuries.

## **Tourist Home**

Mary Berger and her family were staying at a tourist home during the Depression when she was attacked by a stranger also staying at the home.

## **Tent**

Jude Brister was molested by her father as they slept in the same tent while building a cabin in the woods. Jude's brother, who noticed Jude's unhappiness, gave her an old, ripped tent to sleep in their final night in the woods.

## **Courtroom**

Maya Angelou was forced to testify against her rapist in an open court at only eight years old. Maya lied about the number of times her attacker touched her, causing her to live with unbearable guilt for many years.

## **Jail Cell**

Billie Holliday was placed in a jail cell for several days following her rape only to be sent to a Catholic institute afterward as though the rape were her fault.



# Themes

## Trust

The stories in this book are as varied as the women who have written them. One theme is continuous through them all. That theme is trust. In the first part of the novel, stories based on abuse by fathers, all these women should have been able to trust their own fathers as small children. Many of them did. However, these fathers abused this trust by touching their daughters in ways that left them scarred both physically and emotionally for the rest of their lives. Fathers are supposed to be supportive, affectionate, and strong. These fathers were corrupt, angry, and abusive. Many of these fathers hid their abuse in the guise of love, leaving their daughters confused and unable to trust again.

In the second part of the book, the women who tell their stories were abused by other relatives beside their fathers. Maya Angelou suffered at the hands of a man who almost her stepfather while another woman was abused by her own grandmother. Like a father, these relatives are supposed to be trustworthy, to be people who offer support, companionship, and affection. However, these relatives abused that trust and left their victims unsure who they could trust. In the third part, the stories are of those abused by acquaintances. While these people do not instantly receive the trust a relative does, these people are welcomed into a child's family by adults who are there to protect the children. Many of these women were abused by friends, by childcare providers, by people the children were told they could trust. Again, trust was violated, leaving the adult victims unsure who they could trust.

Trust is about feeling secure, about feeling as though a person is safe to be around. All the women in these stories lost their ability to trust the people in their lives, relatives, friends, and strangers alike. Trust was broken in a fundamental way, leaving these women without the ability to feel safe in any relationship. It is because of this abuse of trust that trust is a theme of the book.

## Misplaced Guilt or Blame

Many of the bios and stories in this book have a line like, I didn't tell because I thought it was my fault, or I didn't tell because I thought they would blame me. Children are told they can trust the adults in their lives and when they are abused, often the abuser will blame them for dressing too sexily or for acting out in an undesirable manner. Children, even abused children, trust the adults around them to such a degree they will believe anything they are told, even when they know deep down that it is wrong. A child who is sexually abused will think that they did something to warrant the adult's action even when the adult does not blame them. It is simply the way the world works for a small child. Adults are always right.



Maya Angelou lied in court when she testified against her rapist. Maya did not want her mother to know that she had liked it when Mr. Freeman would hold her in his arms. Maya had an unstable childhood and she moved around quite often. Maya had few male role models in her life. It was understandable that Maya would enjoy the affection Mr. Freeman showed her, even if his touches were a little odd. However, Maya did not know that and believed that it was her fault that he raped her because she liked it when he held her. Maya would live with this guilt for many years.

Most survivors of abuse, whether it be sexual or physical, feel they deserve some of the guilt for one reason or another. The reason this book helps so many abuse survivors is because they can see the guilt others have suffered and learn from it. No one, even an abuse survivor, can read a story in which a young woman raped on the way home from school is to blame for the actions of her rapist. No reasonable person can believe that Maya Angelou was to blame even if she enjoyed the affection her abuser showed her. However, she felt that blame, as do many survivors of abuse. It is for this reason that misplaced blame or guilt is a theme of this book.

## Sexual Abuse

A requirement for appearing in this book was that the stories and poem contain incidences of sexual abuse. This book was intended to be a showcase for women who survived sexual abuse, to allow the public to see that these things do happen and to perhaps spur people into action to help these women. Sexual abuse is more prevalent than people wanted to believe at the time this book was published and the editors felt it was time to bring it out into the open.

Sexual abuse is difficult to define. Some of the women in this book were raped, forced to have sexual intercourse with their attackers. Some of the women in this book were forced into oral sex acts. Others were touched inappropriately, while others were simply kissed. Some women felt abused by a look, a touch, an sexual innuendo. No one can truly define what sexual abuse might be to a single person. Ellen Bass mentioned in her introduction that she allowed her child to touch her genitals and name them. To some, this might be sexual abuse.

Children are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. Children trust others and often blame themselves when something does not feel right. The women in this book all suffered at the hands of adults who should have known better, who should have been able to restrain their impulses. These adults did not protect these children and have left all these women hurting and in need of a way to heal. This book is intended to help these women by allowing them to tell their story and to get the information out there for other women who do not know how to begin healing. The theme of this book is sexual abuse and it is intended to help, not exploit, these women. For this reason, all these stories are powerful testaments to the power of a single voice, a single theme, of healing.

# Style

## Perspective

This book is a collection of stories written by individual women. Each woman has written a story that describes an event or a series of events from their childhood that are related to sexual abuse. Every story in this book is non-fiction and contains the theme of sexual abuse. Some relate the woman's fear and uncertainty at the time of the abuse, some reflect the changes these events had on their lives and some talk about the strength some of these women gained when they learned to empower themselves in the aftermath of their abuse. Each story is highly personal, therefore each story is subjective and personal.

The perspective of this book comes from the individual women who contributed their very personal stories to the collection. The perspective of the book is subjective and highly personal with each story containing the theme of sexual abuse. The perspective works because each woman who contributed to this book has experienced this abuse and is sharing their story as it directly relates to some form of this abuse. In this way the perspective works because each person remains true to the theme by sharing a deep, dark secret through their prose, be it in the form of an essay, a short story, an autobiography excerpt, or a poem.

## Tone

The tone of the book varies from story to story. Some of the poems are filled with anger or a need for revenge, while others are simply sad or questioning. The stories have tones that range from optimistic innocence to sadness, to anger and rebellion. Some of the stories are filled with confusion, others with a sense of loss, as though the writer has no idea how to react to things going on around her. Although the tone differs from story to story, many of the stories in this book share one common thread, that of confusion. Many of the writers do not understand why their perpetrator hurt them the way he or she did and this question is revealed, if not by direct statement, then by a tone of confusion.

The tone of the book works because each tone as presented in each individual story is appropriate to the story being told. Each woman who has contributed to this anthology had a clear story to tell with a clear message. This message often comes through loud and clear not only in the literal translation but also in the tone. Some women are angry and their anger is clear in their tone. Others are sad, depressed, and feel as though they are to blame. This too comes through in the tone. Not one story has the same exact tone as not all these women had the same exact message to get across, but every tone is clear in the writing and highly appropriate to the subject being discussed.





## Structure

After a forward, preface, and introduction, this book is divided into four sections that group the stories and poems into categories based on the perpetrator discussed in the story or poem. These sections include a group of stories about the father as perpetrator, other family members, friends and acquaintances, and, finally, strangers. Each section includes a handful of stories written by individual women. Some of these stories are about specific incidences of abuse, others are about a general overview of years of abuse, while still others are about the aftermath of abuse. Some of these stories are in the form of a short story, some are essays, some are excerpts from autobiographies, and others are in the form of poems.

The stories are all different, each one written by a different person who is telling their story from their own individual point of view. Although each story is different, each contains the same theme of sexual abuse. The look at this abuse is as individual as the women who write them, some reporting it without emotion, others expressing confusion as to why the abuse took place, and others expressing a sense of empowerment that resulted from the abuse. Therefore the structure of each of these stories is different. Some include dialogue while others are completely told in exposition while others are simple rhyming poems that focus on the emotion of the abuse as well as the physical action.

## Quotes

"She smells the canvas walls, the plastic floor, and looks straight ahead, concentrating on the rubber bands, saying Go away, go away to her father in her mind, go to sleep. He is waiting."

Part 1, 'I had thought it was over.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Fathers: Jude Brister, The Window's Netting, pg. 66

"My God. He thinks I want to...Jesus. He thinks it's me that..."

Part 1, 'I had thought it was over.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Fathers: Maggie Hoyal, These Are the Things I Remember, pg. 81

"Finally now at the age of twenty-nine I have all of the pieces of myself back again.

Through hypnosis and age regression, a skilled therapist gave me back my memory. If the experiences of my past taught me anything, it is that I survive."

Part 1, 'I had thought it was over.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Fathers: Jill Morgan, It Began for Me, pg. 111

"I began to feel lonely for Mr. Freeman and the encasement of his big arms. Before, my world had been Bailey, food, Momma, the Store, reading books, and Uncle Willie. Now, for the first time, it included physical contact."

Part 2, 'Yesterday I saw him watch my sister.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Relatives: Maya Angelou, Excerpt from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, pg. 125

"I didn't want to admit that I had in fact liked his holding me or that I had liked his smell of the hard heartbeating, so I said nothing. And his face became like the face of those mean natives the Phantom was always having to beat up."

Part 2, 'Yesterday I saw him watch my sister.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Relatives: Maya Angelou, From I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, pg. 127

"I couldn't say yes and tell them how he had loved me once for a few minutes and how he had held me close before he thought I had peed in my bed. My uncles would kill me and Grandmother Baxter would stop speaking, as she often did when she was angry. And all those people in court would stone me as they had stoned the harlot in the Bible. And Mother, who thought I was such a good girl, would be so disappointed. But most important, there was Bailey. I had kept a big secret from him."

Part 2, 'Yesterday I saw him watch my sister.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Relatives: Maya Angelou, From I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, pg. 132

"It was not all right what he had done. It would never be all right. I felt he knew this but



could not say what had never been spoken of, never acknowledged, never told. This was the fear that threatened to swallow him whole: that he would die in silence, unforgiven."

Part 2, 'Yesterday I saw him watch my sister.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Relatives: Louise Thornton, Uncle Karl, pgs. 154-155

"Things happened to me that no amount of time could change or heal. I had gone to jail when I was ten because a forty-year-old man had tried to rape me."

Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Billie Holiday, from Lady Sings the Blues, pg. 177

"Many years later, I told my friend and lover about the incident. It was like a ghost returning as the familiar grin came to his face and he said, 'You must have been a sexy little girl.'"

Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Karen Asherah, Daddy Kanagy, pg. 181

"Now that I am older, I wish Freddie would be thrown in jail for what he did to me, or his penis cut off since he doesn't know how to use it. Grown men shouldn't be allowed to go around hurting little girls with their penises."

Part 3, 'I trusted him.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Friends and Acquaintances: Jana Vincenti, Daughter, pg. 196

"All the while I never talked about these times. There were too many for them not to be my fault, they had made me dirty, but I heard you tell me I was innocent—the young girls are innocent—and I believe you. I believe you and I will write."

Part 4, 'I never saw him before.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Strangers: Jade Gates, And Now, pg. 202

"Damn you, why can't I wish for your hurt, your mutilation? What did you care for mine? How many children?...How many sixpences?"

Part 4, 'I never saw him before.' Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Strangers: Jean Alexander, Letter to a Soldier, pg. 253



## Topics for Discussion

Why did the editors decide to put together and publish a book like this one? What is sexual abuse? How do the editors and their contributors define sexual abuse? How common is sexual abuse, according to the editors of this book? What is the intention of this book on the reader? Does this book achieve its intention?

Who is Maya Angelou? Why is an excerpt from her book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, included in this collection? What is significant about the events described in this section? How is Maya abused? How does she react to this abuse? What lingering effect does this abuse have on Maya's life?

Who is Billie Holliday? Why is an excerpt from her book, *Lady Sings the Blues*, included in this book? What happened to Billie when she was only ten? How did the police react? Why? What would have been a more appropriate reaction? How did this event affect Billie for the rest of her life? How did Billie's life end? Did these events have an impact on that end? Why or why not?

In *These Are the Things I Remember*, why does Maggie's father believe she enjoys the abuse? Did she? Why did Maggie agree to let her father take her virginity? What choices did Maggie have? What might have been different for Maggie if her abuse had taken place at a later time, such as modern days? Do victims of this type of abuse have more choices than victims being abused in the time in which this story was written? Why or why not?

In the poem, *My Brother*, the writer seems to almost feel sympathy for the man her brother has become. Why do you think this is? What is meant by the statement, my brother lives in a box of cigars? What is the box a metaphor of? How does this metaphor the writer's current state of mind as compared to the brother's? What is symbolic of the crayon picture mentioned in the last stanza of the poem? What does the writer mean that she will wrap around her brother's coffin?

In *Uncle Karl*, why does the writer, Louise Thornton, never go to the police about what she knows her uncle has done? Why does her mother never confront Uncle Karl with his actions? How does this secret cause further harm to the victim? What should they have done differently? What might have happened had they told Uncle Karl they knew what he was doing? Why were they afraid Uncle Karl would commit suicide? How would this suicide have affected Uncle Karl's victims?

In *A Priest's Kiss*, how does Beverly's refusal to ever go to church again change her relationship with her father? Why does Beverly refuse to tell her father the truth? How might this truth have changed the relationship Beverly's father had with the church? Would this have been preferable to the change it created in his relationship with

Beverly? Why was Beverly so damaged by this one kiss? What might have happened had Beverly returned to the church?