Dedicated to children

around the world

who suffer in

silence

each

day



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Author’s Introduction

The primary purpose of writing this book was to inform the public about the emotional and psychological damage caused by sexual abuse. However, as the story evolved, further types of abuse became evident, each resulting in trauma, anguish, humiliation, and feelings of guilt, responsibility, and worse, for the victim. This will be an emotionally difficult book for some to read. It is filled with suffering and anguish, and it contains little levity. One friendly reader described it akin to “walking on broken glass, barefoot.”

*Betrayed* is thestory of Emma Johnson and seven other women who suffered grievously from abuse as children. Feeling society little understood the pain sufferers of child abuse endured, Emma decided to make it her mission to educate the public. Using her own experiences and the narratives of others, Emma determined to write a book to enlighten the public on the havoc such violence inflicts in people’s lives. This is her story. While the characters are fictional composites of existing women and represent no single actual person, living or dead, they are based on real acts of violence.

Not all children who are abused become violent. Without help, however, many suffer from various forms of emotional pain, sometimes throughout their adult lives. When the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary occurred, I began to wonder about the young man who had committed this outrageous slaughter on society’s most innocent. I believe that no baby is born violent. Something happened to that boy to cause him to develop such rage within himself, and to act out in such a horrific manner. Perhaps he was abused or bullied as a child, we don’t know, but I believe a study should be conducted on these mass killers. What were they like as children? Who were their childhood friends? What were they like in school, from kindergarten through to high school? How was their family life? What made them tick? The results might prove interesting and informative.

Our society has become so materially oriented that, for many, money and work has become number one, family second. Every child deserves a loving home—a place where he feels, safe, wanted, and loved. But, unfortunately, that is not always the case, and it can have terrible consequences. It is challenging to have a public conversation about the violence perpetuated against children, especially sexual violence. It is easier to pretend it does not exist. But it does. Let us begin that dialogue now. We must continue to teach others about abuse: what it is and what the signs are, and how to talk with an abused child. If we, the adults, do nothing, it is my belief that events like those at Newtown, Columbine, Aurora, Tucson and others will occur over and over again, and the sorrow will be unrelenting.

LH

Chapter One: Penn State Sexual Abuse Scandal

It was a perfect autumn day, reminiscent of Indian summer. There was a refreshing chill in the air and the leaves were beginning to turn, flaming red touched with burnt orange and golden yellow. Overhead, a flock of Canada geese, flying in their usual “V” formation, were honking at each other, making a commotion that could be heard throughout the park. With their mothers nearby, several children were playing on the swings and slides, laughing merrily, having fun. Jon and Emma had spent the afternoon walking through the park, enjoying the delicious weather, the sights and sounds of nature, the laughter of playing children, and each other’s company. The path ended at their favorite restaurant, and after dining they returned home. A full moon shone brightly on the lake behind their home, a lovely sight.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” remarked Emma, as she sat down with her husband to read the evening newspaper.

After a few minutes, Jon put the paper down. “I’m disgusted! This sexual abuse scandal at Penn State—the cover up makes me furious.” He gestured to the paper. “Those students were betrayed by their teachers!”

Emma looked up. Reflecting on her life for a moment, she said quietly, “Most people have no clue about the psychological and emotional wounds sexual abuse leaves on a child.”

“I’ve watched how you suffered, Emma. I know first-hand the pain you endured. And how long it took for you to heal. I guess that has given me an awareness most people don’t have; that’s why I get so angry. The focus is on the wrong thing—it should be on the victims, helping them heal.

“Because of you, I have tried to learn as much as I can about child abuse. I know the harm created, the degrading effect it has on a child. The damage continues into adulthood. I wouldn’t be surprised if many of the inmates in our jails suffered child abuse. It’s a horrifying existence, and a huge cost to society.”

“But what can we, as individuals, do to rectify this situation? How can I help other women who have suffered as I have or help them to heal? How can we make the public aware of the emotional harm done to children?” Emma asked.

“I don’t know.” Jon ran his fingers through his hair in frustration.

Over the following weeks, Emma contemplated the conversation. How could she, one lone woman, begin a public conversation about the trail of destruction that sexual abuse leaves behind?

After much thought, Emma presented an idea to her husband. “I was thinking of forming a small group, maybe eight women who have been abused—a place where they could share the consequences abuse has had on their lives, and how they survived. After gathering all of their information, I could write a book revealing their stories to the world. It would take a lot of courage on their parts to divulge secrets they have held for years. What do you think?”

Jon put down the book he was reading and looked at her thoughtfully. “It’s something to consider. Do you think you’re qualified for the task?”

“I don’t know. I’m not a therapist, but I have had years of therapy and analysis. I know from personal experience their pain, their suffering. Perhaps we could help each other.”

“How would you go about it? Would you establish rules?”

“Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I wrote up a few. Here they are.” She handed Jon a piece of floral notepaper that contained the list.

1. Everything said in the room must be confidential.
2. Treat everyone with respect.
3. Listen, but do not judge.
4. Do not ask probing questions that might embarrass the speaker.
5. Encourage and/or compliment when appropriate.
6. Do not interrupt when another is speaking.
7. Be on time and try not to miss a meeting.

“Can you think of any others?” she asked him.

Jon shook his head. “That’s a good start. Where will you hold these meetings, Emma?”

“I don’t know. Do you have any ideas for a place?”

“Maybe.”

“Do you plan to be upfront with the women and tell them you hope to write a book?”

“Yes.”

“Then give it a try.” Jon smiled and hugged his wife of more than fifty years.

Several weeks passed and Emma continued to mull over her idea. What would it achieve? What kind of format should she use? As a retired teacher, should she make the meetings educational as well? Would the women open up and reveal their secrets?

Doubts crept into her mind. What made her feel she was capable of helping women? Would she be effective or create more harm?

She decided to do some research on her own to begin the project. What she learned was horrifying. The cruelty some children had suffered at the hands of their parents, relatives, school bullies, neighbors, and supposed friends was incredible. Emma was surprised to learn that the most common form of abuse children were exposed to was neglect by their parents or caregiver. Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse followed—in that order. But if a child suffered from one form of abuse, the chances were that he or she had experienced a second as well. The consequences of such brutality were frightening. Exploited children might suffer from multiple problems: poor self-esteem, self-loathing, shame, fear of being found out, personality disorders, and much, much more. It was then that Emma realized what a monumental job she was undertaking.

She decided to discuss her idea with her friend Theresa, a woman who had been abused by her father and who was currently in therapy. Attractive and with a beautiful smile, Theresa was tall, slim, and sported a crop of beautiful red hair.

“I think it’s brilliant. I would like to be a part of it. May I?” Theresa said when Emma explained her ideas. The cobalt blouse Theresa was wearing enhanced her blue eyes, which shone with enthusiasm.

“Of course. You will be my first participant.” Emma smiled and hugged her friend. “Here are some rules I’ve composed. What do you think?”

Theresa read over the list. “They’re similar to the rules my therapy group has.”

“Do you know anyone who might like to be part of this, too?” Emma asked.

“There’s a woman named Janice who goes to my church. She’s a retired nurse. I believe she was abused as a child, but I don’t know what kind of abuse she suffered. Does it matter?”

“Not at all,” Emma replied.

“She might be interested. Let me telephone her. I’ll give you a call and let you know.”

The next week, Emma met with Janice.

“I’ve been expecting you, Emma,” Janice said warmly as she opened the door. “Please come in.”

Janice had a shock of white hair and her face was etched with deep furrows. As Janice busied herself making coffee, Emma wondered how much Janice’s past had contributed to those frown lines. Janice seemed happy enough now, but Emma knew that one never knows what lurks in a person’s past.

“Theresa said you might be interested in becoming a part of this small group.” As Janice set the coffee mugs down before them both, Emma explained what she had in mind. “It is for women who have been abused. I want to make it a place where they can share their stories, and maybe let go of their pain.”

“I don’t know. What do you plan to do with the information?” Janice sipped at her coffee and looked hesitant, avoiding eye contact.

 “I feel the public is not truly aware of the emotional and psychological damage sexual abuse does to a child.” Emma took her eyes off Janice’s face, and gazed out the window as she considered what to say. “People don’t want to talk about it. It’s too uncomfortable. My goal is to write a book that presents individual accounts and highlights the impact the abuse had on the women’s lives; to break the silence.”

“I think I’d like to participate, but no promises,” Janice replied, finally making eye contact. “What makes you feel you’re qualified to lead such a group?” she added.

“I am a survivor of abuse. I have had many years of therapy and analysis. I know the pain victims suffer and how difficult it is to heal.”

“I’ll give it some thought and let you know.”

“Thank you. Here’s my phone number. By the way, do you know anyone else who might be interested?”

“I have a friend, Kelly, who was raped by a priest. She’s an amazing artist. She paints native birds and fowl using watercolors and she’s well known for her work. She lives not far from here.” Janice took her address book out of her purse and flipped through the pages. “Here is her phone number.” She read the number aloud and Emma carefully copied it into her mobile phone. “You might like to call her.”

“Thanks, Janice. I appreciate your help.”

That evening, Emma told Jon about the women she had interviewed. “I have two prospective members for my circle, and I’m going to interview a third woman tomorrow. I’ve made an appointment to meet her tomorrow. I’m really excited. Theresa looked over the rules I had written and said they were similar to her therapy group.”

“I’m impressed,” said Jon, “but then, I shouldn’t be. You’re a remarkable woman, Emma. I am so very proud of you.”

The next day, Emma found Kelly busy in the garden. She was about five foot five with dark brown eyes and brunette curls. She looked up and smiled as Emma approached the gate.

“Hi,” Emma said. “Beautiful roses.” She gestured towards the blooms. “I’m Emma Johnson, we spoke on the telephone.” Emma began to explain her mission.

Kelly stood and pulled off her gardening gloves to shake Emma’s hand. When Emma had finished explaining, she said, “May I think about it? I really don’t like dwelling on my past or reliving the pain. It’s over and done with.” She drew a rose she had just snipped off the bush to her nose, and sniffed it.

“I understand, Kelly. Your friend Janice is considering participating, and we’d love to have you join. Here’s my number. Just give me a call. I think you could offer much to the group.”

As Emma was leaving, Kelly said, “It might not be for me, although I’ll consider it. But I have a friend, Barbara, who suffered from abuse. You might like to speak with her. She lives a couple of blocks from here.”

“Oh, that’s super. If you give me her address, I’ll stop by this afternoon. Would you call her and tell her I’m coming first?”

“I’d be happy to.”

Kelly ducked inside and returned with Barbara’s address.

That afternoon, Emma paid a visit to Barbara—a petite strawberry blonde and retired social worker.

Barbara thought the group was a great idea. “May I be a part of it?” she asked. “I’ve lived on the West Coast all my life, and it would be nice to have some more female friends out here.”

“I would like that,” Emma replied.

“By the way, I have a friend, Jean, who suffered abuse by a family member. She might like to join.”

“Thanks, Barbara. I appreciate the tip.”

“I’ll give you her phone number and call her to let her know you will be telephoning her. Jean Bartley is her name.”

“Thank you.”

On her way home, Emma stopped at the local coffee shop for a latte and saw a woman sitting alone, staring out the window. She seemed deep in thought and her expression was melancholy.

“May I join you?” Emma asked, hating to see anyone looking so lonely.

“Of course,” she replied.

“Emma Johnson.” Emma extended her hand and pulled out a chair with the other.

The woman shook her hand warmly. “My name is Jean Bartley.”

“Jean Bartley.” Emma shook her head a little at the coincidence. “Are you, by any chance, a friend of Barbara Bond’s?”

“Yes, I am. How did you know?” She looked surprised.

“What a coincidence! I spoke with Barbara just this morning. Actually, she suggested you might be interested in my project and gave me your telephone number,” Emma said, and proceeded to tell Jean about the circle of women she was forming. “Do you think you’d like to attend?”

“I would,” Jean agreed immediately. “I was abused years ago, but I have told only one or two friends. It might be time that I did.”

“Great, Jean. I look forward to having you as a member of our group.”

The two woman continued to enjoy their hot drinks while they chatted about Jean’s former work as a computer information specialist and Emma’s days as a teacher. Emma found Jean sociable and friendly, but she was also a wise woman who measured her words carefully. She would fit in well. Emma was pleased she had decided to join. *You just never know who you’ll meet when you extend a hand in friendship*, Emma thought.

That evening, Emma told Jon, “I have three more women who might be interested in my circle. You should see Kelly’s watercolors—they are spectacular. And she led me to Barbara, a former social worker from California, who told me about Jean, a retired computer tech. It’s all coming together.”

“That is great news.” Jon grinned at his wife’s enthusiasm. “Look at you, you’re alive with excitement.”

“Oh, I am, Jon, and a bit apprehensive too.”

“Don’t be,” Jon said. “I might even have found a place for you to meet, but I’ll tell you more about that once it is a little more definite.”

Emma smiled at her husband. She was so grateful for his help, and not just with her new project. There had been a day when their marriage had been rife with trouble, but her therapy had helped with that too. Leaning over, she placed a hand on his and squeezed it tight, and then she returned to her needlework with a smile.

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The next day, Emma went shopping for thread at the local fabric shop. The store was showcasing quilts made by locals, one of whom was a petite, auburn-haired woman named Tia Bakka. Tia not only enjoyed quilting, she was quite good at it too. A few of her beautiful quilts were on display. During their brief conversation about quilting, Emma explained that she would soon have less time for needlework because of the group she was trying to put together. She explained a little about it to her new friend.

“What you’re planning sounds good. Could I be a part of it?” Tia asked. “My husband and I only recently moved to the region from Milwaukee, and I’d love to spend some time with like-minded ladies.”

“That would be great! I’ll call you with the details later this week.” The two women exchanged numbers and Emma paid for her thread.

“By the way,” Tia called as Emma was on her way out of the store. “I know a woman named Ruth who might like to join. She’s a single mother with three teenagers. I’m not familiar with her story, but she could be interested. I’ll have her give you a call.”

“Thank you so much, Tia.”

That evening, Emma told Jon, “I’m becoming a little anxious about my new career. I have done some research on abuse, and I’m beginning to question my own capabilities. Who am I to take on such an assignment?”

Jon smiled. “You’ll do fine. You make people feel comfortable, you have suffered the pain they endured through your own experience, and you have recovered. Don’t underestimate yourself. I have confidence in you.”

The next day, Emma drove to Ruth’s house. Ruth was a striking, tall woman in her early fifties. With her long, thick black hair, she looked like a model. To begin with, they chatted about career and family, as Emma could tell Ruth was a little uneasy. Ruth had worked for a large medical firm before having her children, but she now worked as an accountant. When Emma explained what she was trying to do, Ruth appeared uncomfortable.

“I don’t know. I’m not much for sharing my personal life with others. I’m a very private person.”

“I totally understand. It’s difficult to come to grips with your past and to share it with strangers,” Emma agreed. “But, if you think you would like to join us, just let me know. Here’s my phone number.”

“Thanks,” said Ruth. “I spoke to Tia and she told me she’s thinking of attending. I suppose I might be more comfortable if I knew at least one person in the group.”

\* \* \*

Later that evening, sitting in her recliner, Emma thought about the seven women she had met. Thoughts of her own past engulfed her mind, and long-forgotten memories emerged. She had agonized for so long and now she was finally free of the emotional anguish that had dogged her for decades. Now, in her twilight years, she was embarking on a new adventure to help victims by educating others. Emma wanted society to understand the emotional pain victims suffer, and to share the knowledge she knew to be true: that the wounds caused by sexual abuse are not healed by time alone. Without help, Emma knew that the pain would just burrow into the psyche and fester like an abscess. One day, it would explode, wreaking havoc on the individual and those close to them. Therapy with someone who was trained in dealing with sexual abuse was essential. And how much assistance a person needed depended on their childhood, their family, and their home life. As for Emma, she had been in therapy for more than fifteen years. The ringing phone startled her out of her reverie.

“Hello, Emma?

“Yes.”

“This is Ruth. I’ve decided to participate in your project. Is it too late to accept?”

“Oh, no. I would really like to have you as a member. I’ll call you with the details once we secure a venue.”

“Sounds great, Emma.”

“Thanks for calling.” As Emma hung up, Jon walked into the room.

“How’s it going?” he asked.

“Really well. Seven women have agreed to be part of the group and I need to schedule our first meeting. You said you might know a place where we could meet?”

“There is a brownstone on 4th street, not far from here. There’s a large room on the first floor that is vacant, and the owner told me you can use it until he finds a tenant.”

“That’s perfect, Jon. Thank you so much for your support. I’ll call all of the women with the details right away.” She smiled.