

Excerpt from the Introduction:

When I was a young child, countrywomen gathered to sew quilts for celebrations and passings. Mother took us with her when she met with her friends in the basement of the rural Methodist church, beside the dirt road at the edge of the sugar beet fields. We were told to play quietly with our coloring books while they worked. Sometimes we did; other times we did not and chose instead to run wild through the church.

The women stacked their scraps of cloth next to the folded yards of batting on the table near the wall. I saw my dresses there—pieces of them—and wondered about the other striped and flowered samples of fabric. To whom did these fragments belong?

Sometimes I snuck under the stretched material on the large wooden frame and listened as the women stitched and knotted. They talked about their families, about local people, about their hardships, and about love. When they cried, I cried—even if I did not quite understand. It was their emotion that spoke to me. Later I would ask Mom about what I had heard, but she always said it was *private*, not something for me to know. I was left with just strands of stories—and feelings.

“He grabbed me around the neck,” Bonnie said. “I can’t even wear my pearls now, can’t have anything around my neck.” *Why not?* I thought from my hiding place near her feet. As the women consoled her, I was left with questions—and fear. Who did this, and why?

“Mary lost her baby earlier this week. It wasn’t full-term. She got to hold it, though,” Dorothy explained. “When I lost mine, they took it away,” she said tearfully. Mom whispered something in return, and I strained to hear—something about another baby lost before its time. I desperately wanted to know more, but I never did, until many years later.

“Did you hear about Jane’s husband? Cut his arm on the blade of the plow and hasn’t been able to work since. Awful, awful,” Patty said.

“Do you suppose we could bring over dinner?” Mom replied. The women quickly agreed and then decided to alternate nights among them. I thought about Theresa and wondered if she was okay. Her daddy was hurt, and that made me sad. Was there something I should do too?

I learned a lot through the stories these countrywomen shared. Their cloth leftovers rhythmically sewn one to another helped me see the interconnectedness of life—though at the time, I understood only that the collected and fastened snippets created something beautiful for a family in need or for newlyweds just starting their life together.

This book is a quilt of sorts, a patchwork of stories each with its own sorrows and joys, connected by and resulting in a life that is mine. I’ve attempted to capture events that helped shape the person I am now by rereading old journals, as well as reports from doctors, attorneys, and counselors. Though the stories are linked chronologically, they sometimes span years and interweave with other events. I’ve changed the names of my family members and associates because the book is not about

them; it is about my journey, and ultimately the twists and turns of life that bring all of us home to ourselves.

While walking our life path, I think, very few of us would choose the obstacles presented to us. It is only later, after the storms have passed and the rains lifted, that we see (sometimes dimly) the blessings in our fate. We do not need to condone the circumstances to recognize the steps we have taken toward wholeness through the quandaries of our destiny. But honoring our courage, resilience, and love opens the once-closed door to the extraordinary.

One such difficulty for me was a physically and emotionally abusive marriage of twenty-five years. I tried in all the ways I could to fashion the model family of which I had dreamed, even in the face of distressing impediments. But I was steadfast. I accepted my predicament because I didn't know what to do. As the chapters to follow will reveal, over time I became less and less capable of choice. I was captive to dreams and to fear—until grace awakened me.

My hope is that in my responses to my experiences, you will recognize yourself, even though you may not have known the same difficulties. Perhaps you denied your truth in another way, thinking that you, too, were supporting a higher good.

A central component of my journey involves my children, three sons and one daughter. They are an integral part of my life story, and throughout these chapters, they travel alongside me as I wrestle with decisions that involve them.

Like mothers everywhere, I marveled at each child's birth. During those first precious moments, while doctors, midwives, nurses, and staff were busy with the birth details, I fell in love with my newborn. I would softly rub my baby's sweet head, stare into his or her sleepy eyes, and count perfect little fingers and toes. I was overcome by love, and my tears flowed. My pervasive desire at the time was very elementary: I wanted only to protect my treasured gift.

Most parents, and in particular mothers, feel unconditional love at the birth of their child. It is perhaps a human being's first glimpse of Perfect Love. Our labor may have been lengthy, the conditions of our life may have been complicated, but all such matters fade in the light of the beautiful child we behold. We are not worried about the baby's prospective career; we don't think about what schools the baby will attend. We are not even concerned about our own personal troubles—financial or otherwise. We simply want what is best for our child. Because of this fervent desire, a mother's soul is wounded if her child is harmed.

When my daughter recalled being molested by clergy, she was thrown into an abyss of despair—and I with her. The horror of what she endured sent shock waves throughout our entire family, and my devastation was overwhelming. There is no greater sorrow for a mother than to see her child in pain. I would gladly have suffered in my daughter's stead. As you read the chapter with this testimony, my hope is that you will pay homage to the anguish you have endured and see anew our collective, hallowed journey.