

BREAKING THROUGH SILENCE

A No-Nonsense
Love Letter
to Women

*Dearest Sweet
and Tender Heart...*

matter what personal my...

Dear Sweet and Tender Heart,

"emotionally? — and

*merete
— that
brough*



Dedicated to:

Mary Patricia Evans

—

Catherine Weaver

Nellie Weaver

Dorothy Spicer

—

and all the little girls who never stood a chance



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“I will no longer be made to feel
ashamed of existing.

I will have my voice...

I will have my serpent’s tongue—
my woman’s voice,
my sexual voice, my poet’s voice.

I will overcome the tradition of silence.”

Gloria Anzaldúa



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PREFACE

What you are about to read is tough. Sometimes *very* tough. You wouldn't be the first to want to hurl this book across the room. Before you do though, please be sure to take proper aim—children, pets, and antique vases have a way of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. And you don't need more guilt to carry.

At the outset I will tell you that I don't like writing books that trigger such fierce reactions. I like having a head and intend to hold on to it, despite readers that want to lop it off. However, I understand their anger. When I came to a catastrophic crossroad in my life—that do-or-die moment—when I *knew* it was time to confront what I did not want to confront, when I *had* to find the courage to see what I did not want to see and acknowledge what I did not want to acknowledge, my anger could have exploded the earth into teeny, tiny, satisfying bits.

The tender, intrepid soul guiding, tugging, encouraging, leading, and pulling me through the process of breaking through my calcified silence was my husband, Phil. Never once did he let go of my hand. Never once did he chastise me for my fury, even when I spewed the F word at him and every deity I could think of daring all of them to cast me into hell where I would gladly burn with a smile on my face just for spite. Nor did Phil ever wince when my anger blew off his limbs—he simply kept limping along beside me, holding my hand. And never once, no matter how much he was hurting for my hurt, did Phil spare me the truth.



That, I have come to understand, is the highest order of love, the authentic purpose of the soul: To discover the truth. To bear the truth. To know the truth. To speak the truth. To live the truth. The soul's yearning for truth, for knowledge, for evolution far beyond what we—in our physical embodiment—think we know, rises from the divine; from profound, timeless love; from the deepest spiritual respect; and from the soul's sacred longing to be liberated from disabling fear and to be united with its true expression of its eternal, divine self. As we learn to listen to our soul's deepest whispers and brave the hardest truths, we are transformed in a way that we—that I—could never have predicted or anticipated.

Yeah, yeah, yeah... Nice words, but really, soul whispers? Forget it! That, and a few eye rolls for drama, would've been my reaction many years ago at the start of a journey I did not want to take. A whispering soul had no chance of getting my attention. Neither did a shouting and yelling soul. I didn't even spot the extreme antics my spirit was staging as warnings. Had I summoned the courage to heed those alerts, the catastrophic emotional explosion that forever changed the course of my life and the dynamics of our family would have been avoided. But I was completely blinded by terror, totally immersed in deep-rooted shame, and utterly convinced of an unforgivable sin buried far in my past. I absolutely believed that I knew the truth about myself and that I deserved condemnation for “what I had done.” It turns out I was wrong. Dreadfully wrong.

When Phil first took my hand to begin that long, long battle to unlearn the lies and misteachings that had so crippled my life, I could not see beyond my anger. My fury would spike whenever I



encountered something I did not want to look at, something I did not want revealed to me. But those were also times of acute awareness. I knew that what I did not want to look at was *exactly* what I needed to confront in my struggle toward emotional and spiritual freedom I wasn't even convinced was available for me. (It was. As it is for you.)

Should *Breaking Through Silence* generate a visceral reaction within you, there is a reason beyond what is written in its pages. Something within yourself is pleading for your compassionate attention. If a particular chapter unleashes recollections that pose hard questions about matters you have always chosen to ignore, your honesty will lead you to greater knowledge and onto the path to undreamed of freedom. If certain phrases or perspectives trigger fundamental, inner conflict, know that this presents an opportunity for exploration and growth. Maybe the tension represents a critical disharmony between your spirit and an entrenched belief system. Perhaps you are being called to *see* in a new, more open way.

Rather than imagining you hurling this book across the room, I envision you embracing and taking advantage of whatever arises as an opportunity to illuminate the path that will ultimately connect you to the fullness of your beautiful soul. It is your choice. All your answers, all the resolutions dwell within you.

Yes, what you are about to read is tough. Sometimes very tough. But the process of confronting what was hidden deep within, of questioning and challenging what I thought I knew, of seeing and acknowledging what I did not want to know, is what saved my life—*saved my life*. I am passing it on.



FIRST WORDS

Dear Sweet and Tender Heart,

Chances are you were abused — sexually? physically? emotionally?— and you suffer still from the unresolved trauma. Does this notion shock and offend you? Are your defenses igniting, rising up? Are you ready to attack me, a stranger, for making such an observation that feels to you like an accusation? Or are you frozen inside this insinuation because simply daring to question past untoward incidents feels like a monstrous betrayal of someone you know? Of someone you love? Or do tears rush to your eyes in an instantaneous, unexpected ambush? Or did you die long ago from the poison of guilt and humiliation, destroyed along with the bad memories, and here you are now, detached from all emotional pain, quelling your idle curiosity by musing over the odd construct of words and disgusting suggestions laid out on this page?

Dearest, take a deep breath, because, yes, you—*you*—were abused. But who am I to assume the right to make such a harsh and contemptible statement? About you? About your family? About certain unnamed misdeeds committed in private—or worse, right in front of unseeing eyes? I say this, tender heart, because I am you. I say this because you chose this book for a reason. Because something deep within you resonates with this validation of private, painful violation—a lingering, unidentified haunting that survives despite your insistence on ignoring it even as you mysteriously reach for something you deliberately reject.



While the logical you—the dismissive and unyielding you—might balk and argue, your body and emotions have brilliant memories. They maintain and tell your story daily—in creatively destructive ways, I might add. Dearest, no matter what personal nightmare you think you've completely erased, no matter when the disquieting/harrowing/bruising incident(s) occurred, no matter what your age now—maybe you're the oldest woman on record—your spirit still longs for peace, longs for validation and comprehension, longs to be whole, fully connected to all that is you, including experiences you dare not remember, dare not admit, dare not confront.

Yes, I was abused. Yes, I was raped. Impregnated by rape. And I never knew it was abuse or rape. Imagine...*I never knew it.* For over thirty-five years I had no perspective, or factual definition, no external comprehension of my “dark years.” My personal and emotional boundaries lay destroyed by parental, religious, and cultural authorities, and I lived resigned to their demands and crumbled beneath the power lorded over me and against me. In the end, the abusers enjoyed free reign at my expense while I silently absorbed all the chaos, including crippling guilt and crushing blame and self-loathing that paralyzed any hope of my becoming the best of who I was meant to be. I split in two. Half of me plunged into deep hiding where all memories were forbidden. The other half lived a good, solid life. Except for the silent torment—torment that was not permitted to reveal its true identity, but instead skulked inside me as a nameless darkness, screeching endless accusations.

I am outraged that this lifetime of torment did not have to be



for me. Outraged that this silent torment does not have to be for any girl, any woman, but still is. Outraged that it did not have to be for you. Outraged that this intimate torment is inflicted upon victims of abuse, of sexual assault for no other purpose than to shield cowards.

Dearest, rage is a wonderful thing. A magnificent tool. An amazing pathway. And it just so happens that rage is my middle name. As it should be. Rage is exactly why I am sitting here writing this love letter to you. Rage at the falsehoods and deceptions regarding abuse and sexual violation that we have been indoctrinated to believe and uphold. Rage that those lies and vile prejudices deformed my life, my health, my well-being, my creative energy. And yours, as well. Rage at the silencing of girls and women whose bodies and spirits *know*. Whose bodies and spirits comprehend. But whose intellect and understanding are so successfully propagandized, so extrinsically twisted, that we—dismissed victims—accept without question and even defend the ignorant, concrete social and religious misteachings imposed upon us. I am enraged that I—that you—that as victims of abuse, of sexual violation, we are conditioned through these lies to condemn ourselves. Enraged that we are not even permitted to see ourselves as victims.

The restrictive, exacting regulations and attitudes that define and govern sexual violence continue to be shaped and created by a male-dominated government, a tight patriarchal arrangement that is not supposed to be noticed as convenient and unjust. Especially by women. Most especially by the bootlicking women who fervently



support those laws and opinions that refuse victim status to all but the most visually physically battered victims of sexual crimes. Bootlicking women who see themselves as warriors but have no awareness of their own bondage.

I am outraged by arbitrary social criteria that must be specifically met before any traumatized girl or woman is granted even the smallest emotional comfort of having the sexual trauma she endured validated. That if her ordeal falls short of these strict, pious measures—say for instance, she did not scream; or she was drinking; or good god!, there's not a bruise on her; hey, she knew the guy, didn't she?; and *oh, come on*, it isn't rape if the rapist is her husband—she is immediately convicted of being a willing participant and is dismissed, blamed, and savaged. And even a few simple words of consolation—*I'm so sorry that happened to you*—a balm tending to an open wound, are intentionally withheld as added punishment.

I am outraged that any politician, especially a female, would utter the words, “She'll just have to make lemonade out of lemons,” referring to an impregnated rape victim. I am outraged that a grandmother would say of her granddaughter who was gang raped, “I wouldn't mind if she got pregnant.” I am outraged that any woman—women I brand Mary Queen of Rapes—would join forces against other women and fight for laws that would strip girls and women of personal rights to their own bodies including their internal organs.

Oh yes, dearest, I am outraged. But I am also profoundly saddened. Saddened that beautiful women like my elderly mother nearing the end of their lives will never experience the intense



relief of being lifted out of unvoiced suffering into the light of comprehension and validation. Because the vast, punitive power of sexual violation is so penetrating and so lethal that it rots a woman from the inside out and destroys her ability to truly see and value her own loveliness. So that all she perceives when she looks in the mirror is her ugliness. And unbeknownst to all who surround her with love, a silenced woman, no matter how delightful, how gentle, is deeply broken and wears the invisible cloak of her personal failure.

I am sickened every time I hear a young woman cry, “Do you think I was raped?” That she even has to pose the question is atrocious. That she is forced to rely on anything other than her own suffering to validate her ordeal is in itself criminal. It is immoral that she is banned socially and psychologically from claiming and labeling her own ordeal. Societal and religious compliance is so enforced that a girl who is raped in an unsanctioned manner will consume her ordeal as her own fault and plunge into lifelong silence and emotional death. And worse.

If you understand the pull of profound despair, if you have ever endured humiliation so intense you were unable to rise from your own bed, if your spirit has ever been so defeated that all light has been obliterated, you then know the dear, sweet girl on the front page of every newspaper on this very day I am writing this: November 11, 2010. A young teenager, devastated by rape—the violence she suffered cast as a consenting affair by the rapist and public officials—silenced her own voice and executed herself. One precious, sweet, innocent girl... and one swinging noose.



Dearest, a heart can ache in so many ways. My heart breaks that countless women—young, middle-aged, elderly—with sexual trauma hidden in their pasts are not even aware of their innocence. It is appalling that these silenced women are permitted no awareness, as I was not, that what they endured—the mauling and raiding of their tender bodies—is sexual violence and that they are blameless. My dear, know that a woman who is mute and has firmly locked away such nightmares has zero understanding of its significance in her present life, even as the hidden unspeakable continues to abrade her spirit with acid.

I was a teenager—publicly and privately condemned, voiceless and suicidal—and became a silenced woman unable to even fathom myself a victim of sexual assault, so indoctrinated was I to absorb all blame. In the world where I was programmed, there existed no accurate vocabulary to explain what happened to me; no word-perfect translation to describe the dreadful incidents I'd endured; no social context to even identify as violence the ordeal I'd suffered. And certainly no means to understand that the inflictor of the trauma was an abuser, a rapist.

Withheld from me, as it is for all victims of dismissed abuse, was the personal understanding that comes with seeing the truth, the empowerment to release myself from blame, permission to point the finger of responsibility outward, the prospect for the disabling shame to dissipate. What other reasons could there possibly be to deny a sexually traumatized girl or woman her humanity, except to uphold the demands and fantasies of the spineless and to protect the guilty and their defenders? That and, oh yeah, satisfying the bloodlust



for punishment. Vicarious punishment is, after all, still punishment. Landing a few hard kicks into a dog's ribs or into the gut of a girl cowering in the corner feels the same as clocking a rapist. And it's so much easier: the quivering dog and the broken girl won't fight back.

Oh, my dear, how I'd love to strap on a flak jacket and take to the streets and battle the mind-set of the cruel and ignorant masses, slash their ruthless attitudes to ribbons with my razor-sharp fingernails, all the while puffing on a fat Cuban cigar. Sadly, that would be about as productive as kickboxing the wind. And unfortunately, my nails are a hopeless mess and I've never smoked a cigar, much less an illegal one. Then there's the stuffing-myself-because-I'm-really-pissed problem. Blink my eye and I'd be 600 pounds of imploding fury huddled under a mountain of plush comforters licking potato chip grease and chocolate smudges off the remote control, cursing at reality TV. No, my mission is not to brawl with the bloated self-important.

My concern, dearest, is you and your personal misunderstanding of abuse, of sexual violence. And all its covert manifestations. My hope is to offer you the structure and perspective that saved my life. *Saved my life.* My intention is to clarify for you how violence can be veiled and quiet, cunning, confident, perpetrated along the edge of perception where definitions and outlines are abstract and fluid, inflicted in an abyss where the lifeline of comprehension is unavailable to its victims. Others—the learned, the privileged, the astute, the wise—may know this. I did not. And I could not have—not while I was cowering under a rock for most



of my life.

My struggle to recognize this unheeded, concealed brand of violence perpetrated against me cannot even carry the noble, orderly label of struggle. No. It was terrifying, unrelenting emotional warfare—screeching self-blame, frenzied confusion, and paralyzing doubt. It was over a decade of clawing and hammering away at the accusations and condemnation forced upon me as a girl until I finally saw and began to accept the truth buried beneath the noise. It is not melodrama to admit that I was fighting for the right to my life, for my right to dignity, for my right to the truth. For my right to speak.

How could I ever come to see, much less understand, that I was not what “they” said I was? That I did not do what “they” condemned me for? How could I ever comprehend or prove to myself that which is claimed not to exist—that which society refuses to name? Dearest, it’s like punching air—like flailing at a disembodied cackle. What possible chance did I have to grasp how my spirit had been destroyed? And then to understand why? And then to claim and re-create the beauty that was ripped from me? Me, immobilized by shame. Me, terrified into absolute, impenetrable silence. And then me, in the ultimate irony, speaking publicly of it, of the conspirators? Well, just drag me off to hell.

Dearest, what I didn’t understand when I began the battle was the power of truth. That truth—and sometimes it was only the thinnest thread—bolstered my resolve and at last led me to see and understand that covert violence is rampant and the damage it inflicts is lifelong. The truth finally revealed to me my innocence



and ushered in an unexpected path to emotional strength and renewal, empowering me with the courage to demand all rights and authority to my own life. It's been a long, long way from total, petrified silence to speaking out loud.

And now, incredibly, after a lifetime, I am whole. Not the sanitized, fantasy version of adult female demanded both culturally and religiously, but a woman reassembled and integrated, gratefully united with all my parts, including the shattered fragments that were once in deep, deep hiding.

I am learning to own and capitalize on my strengths. Now that my long-lost spirit has reemerged, speaking—not silence—is my goal. I recognize that I am stronger than my fear. I no longer indulge in the passive wishing and desperate praying for healing that kept me imprisoned and debilitated emotionally and physically. Healing is a fantasy, dear one, perpetuated by the media and daydreamers—a gimmick used to tie up loose ends, to furnish the tragic saga with the happily-ever-after finale: the leg grows back; the cancer is cured; really, no one was harmed in that fatal catastrophe. I am clear in my understanding of my anger and celebrate its power for good. I finally liberated myself from the burden and obligation of forgiveness imposed upon all victims of assault. The responsibility to forgive is not mine, and indeed, cannot be mine. I don't have the power to forgive evil or wholesale destruction. None of us do. It is always the personal obligation and spiritual life challenge for the perpetrators of violence to find their own way out of the darkness they created.

The statement *That which does not kill you makes you stronger* is



a lie. “It” does not make you stronger. I know too many living corpses for this to be true. It is *you* who makes yourself stronger. You kick. You scream. You do the heavy lifting. It is always you and your courage. Courage you think you do not have.

Yes, it took twelve long, long years for me to finally recognize that a skillful abuser instinctively understands the social liberty of inflicting violence at the edge of perception. And exploits that violence ruthlessly. I never knew that an abuser deliberately traps his victim in this nameless void, intentionally immerses her in an emotional bait-and-switch game she cannot identify, as he disables her with his shrewd rhetoric. I did not know that the abuser, who goes by many names—dad, boyfriend, priest, teacher, neighbor, cousin, brother, uncle, mister—but never abuser, is fully aware that it is impossible for his victim to point to assault that has no name. Obviously, the abuser never calls his victim a victim; he, of course, paints her as a raunchy and enthusiastic participant.

I didn’t know, as you might not, that predators have a nose for sweet blood. And like all predatory animals, can sense a shiver of weakness in a pinch of air. I didn’t grasp how savvy predators operate; how they immediately spot the compliant, the oh-so-easily controlled as if WILL OBEY is stamped in red across a naive girl’s forehead. I was blind to the abilities of abusers, at how adept they are at confusing their victims so that we unquestionably blame ourselves for *their* actions.

How could a woman, emotionally traumatized and stunted as a young girl, ever see the ruse of her abusers, even many decades later, when the culture refuses to see? How could any girl possibly



recognize that she is trapped in the killing field there at the edge of perception when that vague and ghostly space has no accurate name or factual description? How can a girl or woman understand that the hurt she endured in that concealed void was not self-created but was inflicted upon her, when all that is said to exist in that nether ground of sweaty sexual conquest is her fault? In truth, a silenced woman will never know unless someone tells her. Unless someone shows her. I didn't know any of this. I know it now. I want you to know it, too.

Dearest, violence—rape, battering, threats, intimidation, demoralization—committed so cleverly along this edge of perception is particularly evil. Because these acts of covert aggression, these acts of concealed sexual violation, are patently ignored, rejected, and as predators have blissfully learned...unprovable. Violence that is unrecognized and unclassified by society does not count as violence. But society is dead wrong. Violence *always* counts to the victim. Overt. Covert. Violence always perverts a victim's life. And the damage is permanent.

Dear and tender heart, you are one of its victims. I say this because you are still here, still reading, drawn to this truth that has been denied you. As it is denied me and every other woman and girl who has suffered the sly, concealed abuse that is deliberately and callously labeled mutual desire and forces us silent while drowning us in the emotional agony it leaves behind.

Every girl and every woman who is coerced into blaming herself for being sexually violated, or who has ever had her innocent demeanor savaged and twisted to accuse her of being guilty,



aches for the simple offering of validation of her ordeal. You, dearest, are entitled to this and deserve more—much more. Validation of my innocence unlocked my heart. Understanding helped me find peace of mind and emotional freedom and the confidence to embrace the opportunities available to me.

At this very moment you can decide to access your courage—courage I know you possess—and confront the secret unspeakable hiding in your past. Or maybe jumping in feet first is simply too intense. But what you can do is allow for possibilities. Possibilities do await you. They awaited me, though in the beginning I could not fathom a concept that looked way too much like pigtails braided with sunbeams.

Trapped in the emotional darkness of my past and the real-time devastation of my present, I was incapable of envisioning even a pinpoint of light, much less summon the strength to consider “lovely” possibilities. Allowing myself to believe in something I could not even imagine posed a dangerous risk. Hope had a bad reputation with me. It had a habit of not living up to its potential and could never stand up to my fear. If I’m hungry, I don’t sit around hoping somebody will make me a sandwich. It seems such a precious waste of time and energy, hope does—a stalling tactic that only delays the inevitable. And I get really irritable waiting for a chef that never shows up to stroll through the front door with my foot-long Italian hoagie. But over and over again, my husband Phil would plead, “Can’t you believe for just one week?” He was kidding, right? Then, “Can’t you believe for just one day?” Well... no, I couldn’t. Hmm... What I decided, though, was that I could



allow myself to believe for a few minutes. And that's what I did: minutes here, minutes there. That's all I could do. So that's what I did: I dreamed in minutes.

And perhaps, dearest, that is what you can do. Perhaps that is all you can do: allow yourself a few minutes to believe in possibilities. Give yourself permission to enjoy, even briefly, the dream that maybe—just maybe—the personal darkness you live in, the imposed burden you carry that you believe is yours, can be lifted...you can put it down. What would that be like—to not be controlled by fear? To not live with potent, wholesale anger and its lingering bitterness? Do you know what it's like not to battle demons? I didn't. I do now. Perhaps you can dare to allow yourself a few short minutes to believe that beyond "the secret unspeakable" hidden in the dark cowers someone who has been waiting a very long time to be rescued. It is she—the sweetest part of you, the part of you that has been so damaged, yet the same part of you who is stronger than you ever imagined—who will usher you into the light. But she needs your outstretched hands.

Yes, dearest, I know you can believe for a few brief minutes. And right now, that is enough. I'd love for you to stay around for just a little while longer. You can do it. You have the courage. I know you do.





Kathleen Hoy Foley wrote *Breaking Through Silence, A No-Nonsense Love Letter to Women* for women — like she was — who do not recognize that they were sexually assaulted; who do not recognize the permanent, living consequences of physical, emotional and sexual abuse; and who do not recognize that they are profoundly silenced.

Breaking Through Silence is for women whose lives are unknowingly dictated by corrosive, invisible fears and who do not understand that emotional freedom — an inherent spiritual birthright and an absolute spiritual necessity — is available to them, no matter what their age. Only when a woman discovers and accepts her authentic voice will she be able to accomplish her true destiny and reap the amazing rewards awaiting her.

Breaking Through Silence, A No-Nonsense Love Letter to Women is an invitation. It is a call to courage. It is a call to see a new way. It is a call to be a new way. *Breaking Through Silence* is straight talk. For a woman willing to fully embrace its challenge, *Breaking Through Silence* offers her support as she struggles to discover her voice, repair her spirit, and fulfill the deepest longings of her soul.

For every woman willing to fight for herself, *Breaking Through Silence, A No-Nonsense Love Letter to Women*, is a promise of transformation into wholeness.

Kathleen Hoy Foley is the author of *Woman In Hiding, A True Tale of Backdoor Abuse, Dark Secrets and Other Evil Deeds*. She has been featured in newspapers and magazines and on television and radio shows across the country. Kathleen and her husband, Philip, give seminars on spirit repair.

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