

The Biggest Secret Ever Told

by Claresa Baggs

We are on the edge of a slippery moral precipice. The politics of today has had the, albeit unintended, effect of bringing to the forefront of our collective consciousness the hidden taboos we keep secret within the walls of our hearts and minds. Something to be accepted as normal. Boys will be boys. And surprising to many, girls will be girls. Often these become self-sustaining and self-propheying events. Something to be expected as a rite of passage.

The question which should be posed and honestly addressed is, why now? What had been the true catalyst to cause such an outcry? More importantly, will this supposed indignation fade to black as “old news” or something we can discretely move away from when a shiny new object catches our eye?

In order to truly find meaning behind what is happening today, we must be willing to have open, honest and dynamic conversations. Then we must move toward making significant impacts on how sexual assaults and rapes are addressed.

Although I appreciate the media’s attention, the unfortunate truth is, they are easily distracted by the “next big thing.” Survivors and the people who love them are left to pick up the pieces.

Is it the countless told and untold stories of so-called powerful people who have been accused of sexual assaults that which makes this so newsworthy? Is it because of the presumed power the accused possesses? Is it because he/she is not a very likable person?

Would the response be different if he/she were likable?

Truth is, we have become comfortable with rape. We expect as a matter of life, that a priest might rape a child. We are not surprised by the idea of a “dirty old man or the creepy uncle.” Where is the outcry for victims of sexual assault by an assailant who is an “everyday” thief? A thief who violates or steals that which is not his nor hers to take.

Perhaps it is the long ritual of burying secrets and re-victimizing the accuser while giving a pass to the accused. After all, if one secret gets out, the entire contents of the compacted closet may tumble out. Then, you who are guardians of such closets, may be held accountable.

We are too quick to assume ulterior motives, when the claim is not made in a “sufficient” timeframe. Who decides that if such a case is not brought forth or at least shared with another, it has no validity? After all, no one in their right mind would keep silent about such a horrific violation. If you were truly raped, you should have said something.

We would have believed you-until you said something.

We want you to tell your story; we just want to verify that you have no skeletons in your closet.

We want to prosecute, but you waited too long. Unfortunately you took too long to build up the psychological, emotional and spiritual strength you needed in order to speak up.

Who decides that the pain suffered in silence is of no consequence?

Much of society has been misled into visualizing a victim of rape or sexual assault as one with cuts and bruises. Perhaps that is the cause of such passivity. After all, if you didn't get beat up, it could not have been so bad. Possibly just a misunderstanding.

What about the interior scars that don't heal? What about scabs that are savagely stripped away when a victim has to look in the face of their assailant on a daily basis? Do those scars count?

Does not seeing visible proof help you sleep at night? When you admonish a victim's decision to come forth, when you shame them into silence, you then become another assailant.

You then become that which allows such actions to move in secret and darkness, and through generations.

When you know something wrong is happening and choose to stand in silence, you then are the one who shares blame for the unceasing violations against the hearts and minds of victims.

There are countries where a woman is stoned to death because she had the audacity to cause herself to be raped. When you hurl slurs and nasty accusations at a rape or sexual assault victim, you are no better than the people throwing the death stones. Words can cut deeper than stones.

Sadly, when I tell my story of almost daily rape beginning in the third grade, so many other people reach out to me and want to tell me their story. I am continuously astounded by the fact that this is the biggest secret ever told. How in the world can variations of the same story that is repeated for hundreds of years, still be a secret?!

We will all at some point in our lives, be called to answer for our contribution to this indignity. There is no option to straddle the fence.

You must pick a side... come down on the side that your conscience allows you to rest your head peacefully at night.

We are at a moral crossroad. How will history remember you?