

[The Writing Porch Author Question and Answer Session With Author Linda M. Fossen](#)

Editor's Note: Author Linda M. Fossen names her abuser in her book. I have deleted specifics of his identity here, but it is revealed in her book.

Book:

“Out of the Miry Clay: Freedom from Childhood Sexual Abuse” By Author: Linda M. Fossen

Self-published, 2008, 199 Pages, Paperback

Author Bio: Linda Fossen's horrific account of 10 years of childhood sexual abuse is riveting. “Naturally, this polluted my whole concept of God, father, love and trust. I grew up trying to love God but always feeling such ambivalence towards Him. As a child I had prayed so many times to be rescued from my horrible situation and when those prayers went seemingly unanswered, I felt complete betrayal not only from my abuser but from God,” she said.

Linda's accused abuser remains in children's ministry. “We confronted him about the abuse and although he admitted to the abuse, he did not apologize. His only response was ‘Who are you going to tell because you could ruin my ministry?’” she recalls. “This is not a ‘get even’ book but a frank and compelling look at a dirty secret that has been hiding in the evangelical churches for years. I want to open up a dialogue and make it okay for people to come forward and talk about their abuse within the church setting,” Fossen said.

Full disclosure: I attended high school with Linda, and we have recently reconnected. I am amazed by her candor, and found her book difficult to put down. Read it and weep.

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What The Book is About: This is the story about the carnage that sexual abuse leaves in the heart of every child. It is a story about a preacher's daughter in search of a loving Heavenly Father who would give me the courage to forgive and trust again. A Heavenly Father so unlike my earthly father that the difference would literally baffle me for years.

Why did you write this book? I actually wrote the book quite by “accident”. I never intended to write a book – these were the secrets I was going to carry with me to the grave. After years of stuffing the pain, I had a “crash and burn” experience after a work injury ended my 23-year career. Within a matter of months, my whole life was turned upside down. My heart shattered into a million pieces and I had no place to stuff the memories or the pain any longer.

I went through severe depression and the full extent of my abuse came back to me in full force as I began to have flashbacks and relive the trauma of my abuse. I could see no way

that I would ever live a normal life again and thought that I would end up in a mental institution. I wanted to die because life had ceased to be worth living.

My therapist suggested that I journal and I resisted because I did not ever want to chance anyone reading my most private pain. When I finally did journal what came out was not in diary format but in story form. I was perplexed but still did not ever dream that I would publish a book – that was preposterous!

The book was literally born out of my pain and my journey towards my freedom. When I finally was able to let go of my abuse and realized that I could not longer fix my dysfunctional abuser, I found the ability to forgive and find my freedom. Once I experienced this freedom, I simply could not keep it to myself. I had to share my story – matter what the cost.

This book is very personal -- what was it like to get so personal? This book is extremely personal and it was very painful to write. I was literally putting my pain into words and it was the most gut-wrenching experience of my life. When I was so desperate to find peace from the tormenting pain of my abuse, I read every book on sexual abuse I could find. So many of them were written from the standpoint of the child who grew up with alcoholic parents and broken homes with physical violence.

Although I found the stories to be inspiring, I could not relate to them because my family was nothing like this. We were the “perfect family” – the one where abuse is never supposed to happen. Because my abuse was so severe it was frustrating to read books that just said “I was abused” and then the author would not go into any detail of their abuse. They really did not offer a blueprint on how to get rid of the pain. I would always think to myself, “This book can’t apply to me because they don’t know what I went through.” I wanted to tell the story the way it really happened with enough graphic detail to let the abused person who read it know that they could relate to me. It was very important for me to use my real name and my family’s real names.

I had lived for decades in shame and for me to hide behind a pseudonym would not allow me to walk out in freedom. My abuser told me that if I told the secret God would send me to hell and I want other victims to know that they can tell their stories of abuse and live afterwards without the fear of repercussion from God or anyone else. In order to do that, I had to get real with the story, the details and the names.

How did you get this book published? We pitched the book to several publishers and got a lot of rejections. Some felt that this was a topic that did not apply to the evangelical Christian community (like what rock did they crawl out from under?).

Others wanted me to do it anonymously and wanted to protect my abuser’s reputation and I was unwilling to do that. So we ended up self-publishing and I am happy with the decision because it gave me complete freedom to write the book exactly the way I wanted to write it.

It was quite ironic that the people who helped me to publish the book were friends of my abuser for many years. The woman is a professional editor who has seen many of her books become NY Times Bestsellers. She was impressed with my writing ability and recognized that the book had the potential to reach millions of hurting people who suffer in silence. She is my greatest fan and mentor in this unfamiliar territory of being a first-time author.

What was the biggest challenge for you about this book? Being willing to publish it. I had already written the story as part of my healing process but I had to overcome my fear of publishing the book when my father is still alive. I had to overcome my childhood fear of breaking the promise that I made to my abuser never to tell the secret. My abuser scared me within an inch of my life never to tell the secret. I vowed to keep the secret and felt it was my duty.

As a child, I feared him and that childhood fear kept me silent for decades. I realize that I have nothing to gain and everything to lose by publishing this book but I simply could not keep silent when there were so many other millions of people who suffer in silence. Knowing that my book might help even one person made it worth the personal cost to me.

What's your favorite kind of writing and why? Up until this book I did not do much writing at all, I considered myself more of a public speaker than a writer. I am a novice when it comes to writing and I never considered the idea of being an author. Because of my injury, I am unable to work a "normal job." I have now figured out "what I want to be when I grow up - and that is an author." I find a certain enjoyment in being able to tell a story and make the reader feel as though they are experiencing it with you. I am most content when I am writing.

What advice would you give other writers? Write straight from your heart and your gut. In order for a book to be authentic and real, you have to have lived it. It has to be something that you give birth to so to speak. It is the sharing of your innermost thoughts and feelings that will make the reader feel a part of your experience.

What projects do you have coming up? I am actually working on a follow-up to this book, which is my husband's amazing life story. He was one semester away from becoming a Junior High Social Studies teacher and instead ended up serving 20 years in prison for triple murder.

I married him in prison and spent 18 years waiting for him to come home. I want to tell the story of what it was like behind those walls.

Prison is unlike any place on earth. It left an indelible mark on my heart to have come to know and love some of the most heinous criminals and understand that in the eyes of God, I was no better than any of them. It rocked my evangelical upbringing to its core and made me come to realize that my whole belief system was so shallow and full of

platitudes. Things that I thought I believed were challenged when I was face to face with life and death situations.

Linda's question: Why would I out my abuser at this late stage in his ministry? Would I be doing more harm than good to the evangelical community? I know that I run the risk of offending some Christians because of my forthrightness in bringing to light a subject that has long been taboo within the evangelical church. When the Catholic Church scandals broke, I saw how so many evangelicals smuggled viewed the issue as “not affecting us.” I want to blow that myth to pieces.

The research shows that a child is much more likely to be sexually abused in a rigidly religious home than in one in which there is no mention of God. I think there is something wrong with this picture. Unless people come forward and blow the whistle and say “enough is enough” the statistics just keep growing.

I have forgiven my abuser for what he has done to me but that does not mean that I am required to keep his dirty secret. I will no longer carry the shame and guilt that was never mine to carry in the beginning. I want to show others by my example that there is nothing to be ashamed of in admitting that you were abused as a child. The thing that is shameful is that someone would do such hideous things to a vulnerable child.

What are the statistics on abuse? It is estimated that there are 60 million survivors of childhood sexual abuse in America today. Statistics estimate that 30-33% of boys are sexually abused and 38-40% of girls by the time they reach 18. The statistics show overwhelmingly that the abuser is not the stranger down the street but a person the child trusts and is close to.

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Posted by J. Louise Larson at 12:02 AM