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Book One - Purple Sky Survivalist – Growing Up a Victim of Illusions – Chapter 1

Two Little Worms in a Bucket of Mud

I was born in Maple Ridge, British Columbia, on January 28, 1968. Maple Ridge was the first of numerous residences where I'd live over the coming years. I was a healthy, bouncing baby girl with all of my fingers and toes and the newest addition to the family of a mother, father, and three-year-old brother. It was on that day that my life officially started, and the very same day I believe that the nurturing ended. Or perhaps it never began at all.

I was an accident after all. I learned over the years that having children was not at the top of my mother's priority list when she got pregnant with my brother or me, yet the act of making babies by mistake was at an all-time high. Much later, my mother told me that my brother and I were the only two children out of six pregnancies that actually came to term.

At the time of my birth, my father was running with the Grim Reapers Motorcycle Club. He was in and out of jail for a better part of my earlier years. I had even less of a relationship with him as a small child than I did with my mother. He was around, though, because he had us living a highly transient lifestyle as he outran the law. We moved fifteen times by the time I was eighteen. I also know he was around when I was small because my mother would threaten me with him as a punishment when I became an annoyance to her.

With her face red and pinched with anger, she'd point in the direction of my room. She kept her voice low and menacing and each syllable was punctuated as she'd say: "Get to your room now! Your dad will be in to deal with you when he gets home."

The thought of this frightened me. I didn't want to be dealt with. I'd scurry to my room, hide under my blanket, and cry while I waited in fear of the unknown. Her threats were hollow though. By the time he'd get home, I'd already cried myself to sleep and was no longer an annoyance.

My brother, Ryan was three years older than me and, in the beginning, was a loving, sweet older brother. When I look at pictures of us from that time, I can see the joy and innocence in the smiles on our cherub faces. He was a beautiful, exuberant little boy, and I was his adored baby sister. In our earlier years he was at times my only friend, my closest ally, and my fearless protector.

My first lucid memory of this protection came to me as a recurring dream that haunted me frequently as I was growing up. I was three years old and he was six. We were alone in a kitchen that had a large window making the room bright. I was standing on a step stool at an island in the middle of the room, facing the back door of the house.

Ryan was on the opposite side of the island from me with his back was to the door. He was struggling with a can opener to open a can of fruit cocktail far enough so that we could scoop some out, but his attempts weren't going well. He continued to pry the can open; the determination evident on his face.

I was intent on watching his every move and grinning from ear to ear in anticipation. I knew that if he could get it open, we would eat something. We were both so focused on the task at hand that we were oblivious to what was going on around us.

I heard the snick and ting of tin-leaving-tin. Success! At the same instant there was a loud crashing noise that distracted me from looking at the partially open can. I jerked my head up and looked towards the back door where the noise had come from. I saw that it was being knocked off the hinges by men dressed in black who were carrying guns. As the nightmare ended, I'd bolt upright out of bed. I was ripped from sleep and lying in a pool of cold sweat with an accelerated heart rate and a face soaked with tears.

The reality of that day is that Ryan and I were taken into foster care by British Columbia's provincial government for protection from the neglect of my parents. The men kicking in the door were doing a drug bust on our house and found two children left alone by the babysitter. Somehow, my parents were later allowed to take us back home only to fend for ourselves again. My father was in jail, my mother returned from partying with her friends across the border, and we all returned to our purple-hued skies.

My mother is a small but powerful woman who stands around 5'2". For most of my childhood she was quite abundant in girth. She had large, natural breasts that were left unrestrained to sag disturbingly under the colorful muumuus she'd wear. More times than not her fine, sandy blonde hair, usually worn at ear length, was permed to the perfect frizz. Like a mood ring, her eyes changed from blue to green to black with how she felt and her levels of intoxication.

In 1973 when I was five-years old and Ryan was eight, we moved to residence number three: a house with a big front yard in Abbotsford, BC. My brother and I shared a large bedroom upstairs but had separate beds. At that point in our lives, he and I were still very young and not yet too tainted by the family we had been born into; thus, we had a playful, innocent relationship.

Based on my recollections from this age, it's apparent that being spanked by our mother was not a new thing for either of us. We'd both been hit by her before, and it wasn't uncommon for us to get smacked repeatedly, with or without various implements. It all depended on where we were in the house and what was within our mother's reach.

If she couldn't get to something fast enough, she would just smack us with her hands and at other times with wooden spoons or belts. Given her actions, it would seem that we were an aggravation for her at every turn.

I could mince words here, but I won't because what she inflicted on my brother and I would not be classified as a spanking in any sense of the word. She beat us. Her beatings were always accompanied with a verbal barrage of insults.

She spewed hate with every word. "You're bad, fucking bad! I should have aborted you! No one wanted you, wants you, or will ever want you! Shut up, shut up, shut up!"

She'd repeat these atrocities numerous times throughout my life.

One beating in particular stands out above all the rest. It would've been a normal afternoon that we were left to entertain ourselves, which wasn't an unusual situation in our house. Our mother was either in bed taking a nap while high on morphine, watching her soap operas, or just wasn't there at all because she was taking what I would later call her "mini vacation," which meant she was in the psychiatric ward or mental hospital.

We were in our bedroom and were goofing around on my bed, rolling around, having a pillow fight, tickling, laughing, and being silly children. To entertain me, Ryan was rolling himself off the side of the bed pretending he was fainting onto the floor and would make an ooof sound, as he'd grab his knee or tummy.

His antics were funny to me, and I'd start giggling, quietly at first. He repeated it over and over again making each time more dramatic than the last, making me laugh even harder and louder. We'd let out excited squeals of laughter in spite of the fact our mother was trying to take a nap downstairs. We knew this because she'd yelled from her bedroom a few times already telling us to keep the noise level down. When she yelled, we instantly stopped what we were doing and listened intently for sounds of movement below us; we'd been in this situation before.

After a few minutes of silence from downstairs and with us being children, boredom took over and within minutes the hush was broken again by stifled giggles. These turned into laughter, which ultimately lead to more yelling from our mother.

Her yelling turned into screaming. "You are fucking bad kids, and if you can't shut the fuck up, I'll teach you a lesson!"

Then we heard her start to move downstairs, open a drawer and then close it. Ryan and I looked at each other. We knew this was not going to be good. We knew we were safe in the yelling stage, but we'd made the mistake of letting it surpass that. We'd elevated her anger to the moving stage, and we both knew what that meant: it was time to get a lickin'.

We heard her thumping loudly up the stairs, and judging by the aggression in her stomps, we knew that we were in for some trouble. She burst through the doorway with a look of hatred on her face, power in her stance, and a new implement in her hand.

This form of punishment we'd never seen before. The unfamiliar strap was a three-foot long, quarter-inch wide section of conveyor belt. As she moved toward the bed, my brother and I quickly scrambled against the wall. I saw fear on his face as we looked to each other for courage.

We both tried frantically to get under the thin blanket on my bed. Ryan's body curled around mine like a ball, protecting me from what we both knew was about to come. We knew from experience that if we could get under the blanket it wouldn't hurt as badly when she repeatedly hit us until her anger was expended.

We lay there, our tiny bodies intertwined like two little worms in a bucket of mud, squirming under the thin blanket trying to evade her strikes. With every lash, in a panicked rush of whisper, we told her we were sorry for being loud, repeating that we would be a good. We would be quiet.

We learned fast to apologize quickly and profusely and then just take the pain, not yell out, and stay as still as we could. She ran out of steam soon enough and left like nothing had happened, leaving my brother and I alone to sob ourselves to sleep, hoping to wake up to a better day. We always did, and just the fact that we had made it through another bout of our mother's rage was blue sky enough for me.

Some days I'd play outside in the yard and entertain myself with bugs and other creepy crawlies of all shapes and sizes hiding in the dirt. I'd escape into their tiny world and explore. I'd chase them down or catch them because I didn't mind getting up close and personal with insects—except for spiders, which I observe from more of a distance.

Most days, however, were spent in the isolation of my bedroom with the creativity of my imagination as my only toy, but there were insects there too. I'd sit on my bed with a shoebox resting ever so lovingly on my lap. Nestled in the bottom of the shoebox was a layer of paper towel, and on that paper towel was a quiet activity that could entertain me for hours when I had no humans around: my flea collection. They were so tiny but seemed so strong, and could jump so far. I was fascinated by them and too young to know that they were not a good thing to have around.

I'd find them jumping around in the blanket on my bed. I'd catch them and gently place them into the shoebox, one at a time. I'd quickly close the lid so they couldn't escape. I'd take them out of the box one or two at a time, examine their tiny bodies, and have a pretend little flea circus. I'd place them on my fingertip and watch as they'd jump back into the box. Sometimes I'd put them on different parts of my hand, the outside of my leg, or pretend race them in the box where I could see them better against the white of the paper towel. Most times, however, they flung themselves further than I expected, and ended up lost in the tumble of my bed again. This didn't bother me because I could simply look through my blankets and find another one.

It makes a person wonder what kind of child was so desperate for activity and companionship that they played with fleas. My heart breaks whenever I think of this because that kind of child was me. I didn't have toys to play with or know what a friend was yet and learned how to entertain myself early on. I was comfortable with my isolation because there was no pain or hurt when I was alone. Pain and hurt were all I knew under an already darkening sky.

In my early years, my love and appreciation had extended to larger living things like plants and animals, domestic and wild. We had a red-tailed hawk named Rahja for a few months that watched me with amber eyes as closely as I watched her. One of her wings was broken and healing and my father had been asked to teach her how to fly again so she could be released back into the wild.

While training her he would wear two thick, leather gloves on the hand that she rested on so that her razor-sharp talons wouldn't pierce his skin. To calm her he would slip a small leather hood, much like a bonnet, over her head and tie it under her chin. To restrain her he would loop a simple tether to her leg. I was always eager to help him with the training and use of these intricate tools whenever he let me.

I'd examine her closer and gently stroke her silky feathers and wings to soothe her. I wondered how they worked and what it felt like to fly. I'd felt feathers before but never on a living, breathing predator. Though I'd been part of her rehabilitation and was happy to see her healthy enough to leave, I was also sad to see her go. This was also about the time that I found my nurturing nature had begun to bloom.