



prepare
her for this

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1995 chapbook
scars publications

rape education one

I sat in on a seminar
being held at a university
about acquaintance rape

when the woman behind the podium
asked if there were any other questions,
a woman raised her hand

she was a pretty woman

she asked what a woman
could do through the university
to prosecute the man

she sounded tough
she sounded professional

and the woman behind the podium
asked if this woman was raped

and she said yes

and the woman behind the podium
empathized with her,
told her she was raped
when she was thirteen

told her that she could tell this
certain department at the university
and they would bring a hearing on him

and then the woman behind the podium
asked, well, if you don't mind my asking,
when did this happen to you

and by the tone of the woman's voice
she was so calm so collected
I expected her to say
a few years ago

and her response was
six days ago

now, I know the healing process for rape
I've studied it in books
first there's denial, then anger, fear
some of these steps last for years

and here was this woman
so calm so collected
to tough so professional
and I just knew
that one day

all of her defenses would fall
and it would all hit her
and she would fall
apart

I felt like her mother

she was my baby
and I wanted to deliver her
from the pain
but there was nothing I could do
I felt so helpless

nothing I could have taught her
would prepare her for this

rape education two

I told a friend
that I worked for
acquaintance rape action groups

she confided in me
told me that she was raped
when she was sixteen

you see, it went like this:
her boyfriend was 23
she was just in high school
and she was drunk
and she didn't know what to do

and all I could think
was that more and more people
are telling me
stories like this

rape education three

I told a friend
that I worked for
acquaintance rape action groups

she told me she tried
to start a group of her own
at her college

her catholic college

and they told her she wasn't allowed
to do it
because acquaintance rape
is not a problem
here

she tried to write an article
about it for her paper
they wouldn't print it

what else was she supposed to do

Conversations

a day of grieving, 1/22/94 one

my father was a good man
gentle kind
never raised his voice

he was an architect

one day i went with him on career day
he put me in front of a drafting table
with paper and crayons

i drew all day

i thought he had
the best job in the world
he could sit and draw all day
he had everything

and he never raised his voice

he died when i was fifteen
of a heart attack

i took classes later in architecture
i wanted to understand
his lovehis passion

i wanted everything

he smoked and ate poorly when he was younger
i guess it caught up to him

he was going through a divorce then
mom wanted it
she never even went to his funeral

they say it was
a heart attack
i say it was
a broken heart

i wish i could have said goodbye

Conversations

a day of grieving, 1/22/94 two

the first death i remember
was a friend of the family

i was five
and i always played with her daughter

our families used to go on picnics together
we were never apart

then one day
they told me
the mother was murdered

no one ever talked about it
to this day
i still don't even know why
she was killed

or who did it

but after that day everything changed
we never spoke of her
like she never existed

we never spoke of our fear
of our pain
and we didn't go on picnics anymore

Conversations

a day of grieving, 1/22/94 three

my father spoke polish
and so did we
until one day
he decided

“we’re in america now,
they should speak englishwe”

so when he wanted
to tell us something
he would speak in polish
and my mother
would translate

iwe’m thirty now,
and my father is sick
and dying

and he canwe’t understand me

hewe’s here before my eyes
and i canwe’t tell him
all the things
i wanted to

like i love you

looking back
it seems obvious

we never talked
like a family

we never asked
each other
how was our day

so now when i see him
all i can do
is hold his hand
and show him
the emotions
on my face

i think he still understands

Conversations

a day of grieving, 1/22/94 four

i was ten
when my grandfather died

we visited him the week before
and his last words to me
were,

“you’re the most beautiful girl
in the world”

i went to the funeral
his eyes closed
dressed in a suit
hands folded

he never wore a suit

and everyone
brothers, sisters,
cousins, uncles
talked about past weddings
other times together

i wanted to tell them
to pay him some respect

don’t laugh
don’t be happy

he’s in that coffin
up there
in the front of the room
he’s dead

they’re going to bury him tomorrow

but this is how things were
and i was only ten

Conversations

a day of grieving, 1/22/94 five

i am a teacher
i teach high school in the suburbs

it's not like the city
there aren't gangs and drugs
but it's so stressful

i also try to counsel my students
one girl
pregnant by her boyfriend
got an abortion

that night
he raped her

i sit in bed
awake
and worry

that was his present to her
after she aborted his baby

what do i say to her

and what do i say
every day
when i see
the rapist

he's a student
in my seventh hour class

this week alone
i did two suicide interventions
i counseled two teenagers

how am i supposed
to go to sleep at night

Conversations

a day of grieving, 1/22/94 six

i sit in my house
i've been so tired

i can't take being alone

i'm too scared
too many things
weighing on my mind

one day
the child from next door
came over

i was working in my kitchen
he told me to look
outside my front window

i didn't want to stop my work

he begged me to look
so i got up
walked over to
my living room

and outside
the picture window
in my front lawn
was a row of little
snowmen

"those are little children
out there
to make you
happy"

he said

and they did

Conversations

a day of grieving, 1/22/94 seven

there has been a lot of
death
in my family

my brother died
when he was three
i was seven

his appendix exploded
they operated
then they realized
a sponge was missing

it was inside of him

they gave him
some extra penicillin
opened him up again

there was an infection
they removed
the sponge
closed him up

gave him more
penicillin
but they didn't know
he was allergic

he died within two weeks

my other brother
overdosed on drugs
when he was twenty-seven
i was twenty-six

then a year ago
my son died

he was hit by a car
he was thirteen

at my brother's funerals
everyone ended up
going to a restaurant
and getting drunk
for hours

i didn't want that for my son

i made sandwiches and coffee
at my house

in the church it was
standing room only
everyone from the seventh
and eighth grade was there

everyone from every
fire department my
husband ever worked for
was there

there was even a fire truck
for a bed of flowers

there were lines out the door
to the church
there wasn't any drinking

and people flooded me
at my house

all in all
it was a
very nice funeral

Conversations

a day of grieving, 1/22/94 eight

when their mother died
they asked me to
deliver the sermon

i make it a policy
to meet with the family
try to understand the deceased
before i give a sermon

they met with me
told me how she made
ceramic nativity scenes
for all of her grandchildren

i asked if a grandson
could bring me a set to see

i kept them in my office
for two days

when i first picked them up
and looked at them
i noticed there were
no brush strokes

then i looked more closely
and saw fingerprints

at the service
i placed the figurines
on pillars
each with one candle

and said her prints are on
these figures
and her mark has been made
on all of us

two weeks later
they gave me a madonna
with her prints on it

it is a work of art

Childhood Memories one

I was in the basement, the playroom
that's where all my toys were, you see

and I had just run in there
after yelling at my family
sitting in the living room
“I hate you”Ä“

now, I've never said that before to
my family, nor would I ever say
it again I knew better

and I had just run into the playroom
slammed the door shut
I couldn't have been more than five

and I ran in, and I looked for things
to put in front of the door so they
couldn't open it and find me

I took one of my chairs
from my little play set
and dragged it over to the door

then I took the little schoolhouse for
Fischer-Price toys, the side opened
up, it had a blackboard and everything
I took that little schoolhouse, put it
on the chair guarding the door
patiently obeying my orders

I was running around looking for
something else I could carry
to the door
when I heard the door knob turn
and my sister, with one arm
pushed all of my toys away
and opened the door

I knew I had been defeated

Childhood Memories two

I was in the basement, the playroom
that's where all my toys were, you see

and Sheri was with me
and we were playing house
or maybe it was office, we did that

instead a lot of the times. I had old forms
that businesses were throwing away,
we had two desks, dead calculators
my sister even made a switchboard for me

well, we were playing grown-up, whatever
the specifics were, I don't remember. Why
do children want to grow up anyway?
Because it's a different kind of pain, I think.

Well, we were playing this make-believe,
when I proceeded to go the the toy chest,
pull out my sister's old communion veil,
and walk around the pool table in the center
of the room, take a step, feet together,
take a step, feet together.

What are you doing? she asked. Getting
married, I answered. Chris Caravette and I
were getting married, I said. Chris was a friend
of my sister's, you see, an older man, in high
school, unlike us poor slobs who were still
children.

and she attended the wedding, and I threw her the bouquet, and she caught it, just like she was supposed to do, and when the whole thing was over I walked my imaginary groom to the corner of the room and put away the veil, and that's when she took the veil, put it on, and acted like she was getting married, too.

What are you doing? I asked. Getting married, she answered. To who? I asked. To Chris Caravette, she answered. And we argued and argued, but I just married him, you're not supposed to do that, and before you knew it we were in a shouting match.

Why did we want to grow up anyway? Because we wanted a different kind of pain, I think.

Childhood Memories

three

I was in the basement, the playroom
that's where all my toys were, you see

and that's also where I kept my bubble gum
you see, whenever I saved money I
would buy bubble gum

and my friends would come over, and
they would ask if they could have some
gum

and I would say that I didn't have any
and they didn't believe me

you see, I hid it
and I hid it so well that even when
they went looking all around the playroom
they couldn't find it

and all the time it was right behind
my play desk on a little shelf
in a little box
with a rose on top

it was one thing I had that they didn't
it was one thing I had that no one could
take from me

they would ask over and over again
I would laugh and laugh
but I just wouldn't give them any

Childhood Memories

four

I was in the first grade, in Mrs.
Lindstrom's class

and every morning, probably
around ten-thirty, we would have

snack-time. And everyone would
get their snacks that their mommies

made for them, and we'd all
sit and eat. But me and Lori

Zlotow, we would take our math
books, hold them up like a tray,

throw a napkin over our arms,
put all of our snacks on our books,

and walk around the room
bartering for better snacks. "I'll

give you this apple for your
candy bar." We'd finish trading,

come back with a quarter of an
orange, an extra piece of gum.

We'd put the orange quarter in
our mouths, peel and all, and

act like monkeys. And laugh.

Childhood Memories

five

I was in the fifth grade, and I had
Mr. Roop for spelling and english.
He was a great teacher, but there

is something I'll never forget from
his class. You see, he had this
honors spelling team called the

“tough ten” and once we had to
learn the word “pneumonoultra-
microscopic silicovolcanoconiosis.”

It was a form of black lung disease,
the longest word in the english
language, the second largest in the

world. I still remember it to this
day. And when giving us weekly
spelling tests, he would say a word,

then use it in a sentence. Whenever
the word “doctor” came up, he
would say the word, then recite

the lyrics: “doctor, doctor, give me
the news, I've got a bad case of...”
and he'd get embarrassed and laugh

and wouldn't be able to say “loving
you.” And we'd laugh too, write the
word down, and wait for him to say

the next word.

Childhood Memories six

It was Sunday night, I was
put to bed for school
the next day at around noon,

but by now it was already
eleven-thirty,
after a weekend a fun I
could relax enough to go to sleep.

So it was late, and I was in
bed, listening to my clock-radio,
like I always did. And suddenly
there was a news report

and John Lennon was shot.
A few minutes later
and the reports were
that he was dead.

And the next morning I walked
downstairs and my mother
was reading the paper.
And the news was there, it
wasn't a dream, I knew
the news before my parents did.

After he died I remember
in school one of my teachers wrote in
calligraphy on a piece of paper
and put it on their bulletin board,
"You may say I'm a dreamer,
but I'm not the only one.
I hope someday you'll join us
and the word will live as one."*

and my seat, the chair with the little
basket under the seat
for my books, the chair
attached to the desk,
my seat was in the front to the side,
right in front of that bulletin
board.
And every day I would look up
and see it there, my first
brush with death.

* "Imagine," John Lennon

Poam: Militant Man With Schizophrenia

I

the problem with people
in this country today
is they don't love
the US of God damn A anymore
All these yuppie faggots
riding their trains to work
their bmws their jags
and I went to war for 'em
went to hell and back
we chanted
Sodomize Hussein for 'em
and we loved the God dman wars
WWI, II, Korea, Nam, Nicaragua, Iraq
cause we were fighting for something
something real
what the hell
what has this country
come to

II

*Ha. He thinks he's really funny. Strong.
I'm Jennifer. I know him. He hasn't been laid in
years, and most of the times were with foreign
women. What does it mean when you have to pay
for sex? It means you're not a man, and he knows
it.*

*He doesn't usually let me come out. But, you
see, I'm really stronger than him. Oh, and that
kills him, a woman being stronger than him.
But, you see, he never lets himself be loved.*

He tries to hide himself in his stupid war talk.

But I come out every once in a while, put on my little red dress, put on the lipstick. Mmm, you know, lipstick feels so good gliding across your lips.

III

I shanked a nigger faggot
when i was in the clink
the faggot tried to rape me
but he didn't know who he was dealing with
I'm a man, Goddamnit
I've robbed stores
I've killed men
I've had women
and there's always an enemy
and I can beat 'em all
once
when I was in grade school
a kid called me a pansy
and I beat him so hard
they had to take him
to the hospital
nobody messes with
jimbo breen

IV

I know I'm better looking than all those Hustler magazines he keeps.

He keeps these old magazines, you see, old car and drivers, old soldier of fortunes old hustlers.

Some of 'em gotta be ten years old.

Usually when I take over I just look through those sex mags and laugh. They don't know what they're doing. I could make a man happy. I could give it to him any way he wanted it.

God, I want a man inside of me, in my mouth, in

me now.

*I could even climb the corporate ladder, if that's
what would turn them on, if only I could overpower
that bastard's mind. I could be fucking every man
I saw.*

*I could walk out on the streets and be whoever I
wanted. God, I could be something.*

V

women are such bitches
they can't be trusted

VI

Who is he hiding from? Let me come out.

VII

this is a good country
nobody's got no
God damn pride anymore
and I'm sick of
all the faggot yuppies
these God damn cowards
corporate cogs
they don't stand up
for what they believe in
and people
don't fear the Lord
anymore
know who they should
look up to
I have a picture of Ollie North
it's an eight-by-ten
it's framed in my kitchen

VIII

I wish he'd clean this place up. I'm not going to do it. What, does he think I'm gonna cook for him too?

Why doesn't he get a job, one that lasts for more than four months, one that's not in a liquor store so he can get drunk every chance he gets.

Thank God he doesn't have the guns anymore. He used to have a ton of 'em, keep them hidden in every corner of this one-bedroom hole above some old bag's garage. If the guns were still here, I'd kill him.

No, I couldn't, I'd be killing myself then. He's all I got. I just wanna get out, I wanna live, I wanna stop hiding.

I want him to take down his guard for just one minute, that guard of his that is still stronger than his sargeant's from Korea. Damn it.

I wish his mind would just rest, so I could take it over again, but it seems to always be there, on the defensive, darting around, looking for ways to protect himself.

IX

there's a war
behind every corner
you're gotta learn
to fight
people don't know
who to trust anymore
what to
believe in
but I do

my love for you will stay the same

everybody's dreaming
everybody's screaming

everybody's looking for some shelter from the storm
and everybody's looking for someone to keep them warm
but I don't wanna play if you're a temporary game
my love for you will stay the same
my love for you will stay the same
(my love for you)

now the tide is turning
the fire embers burning

everybody wants to find a way to shed the shame
everybody wants to find a way to share the blame
but you can put me through the heartache, I can take the pain
my love for you will stay the same
my love for you will stay the same
(my love for you)

the rhythm in your fingers
the memory still lingers

listen to your flowers now, the petals scream out loud
and all these seasons come and go without a single sound
i can hear the flower petals calling out your name
my love for you will stay the same
my love for you will stay the same

prepare her for this

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