

Surviving Your Worst Nightmare

A Guide for  the Betrayed

By Patti Snodgrass

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Journal Entry, October 6, 2002

Today my life is over.

Today my husband confessed of being unfaithful to me.

*Twenty-three years ago on this day my husband told me
that he loved me for the very first time.*

Today he told me that he never really loved me.

What is real in my life?

What is happening to me?

When will my heart stop bleeding?

Excerpt from Chapter I

Why?

Now What?

At the time of my emotional and physical collapse on hearing those revolting words, "I have been unfaithful to you," I was desperate for answers to my heart's cry. "What do I do now? How do I get through this tragedy? Who will walk through this with me?" I wanted someone with similar experience to tell me what to do, someone who could tell me whether all the emotional craziness I was feeling was normal or not.

My counselor tried to assure me that the wide range of roller coaster emotions that I was experiencing was typical and was a part of the natural process for healing from such a devastating event. But that assurance was not enough, not in the beginning, at least for me. I needed more. Unfortunately I didn't even know what I needed, so for a time I floundered miserably in my confused state of mind.

During the first few weeks after my husband's disclosure I desperately tried to learn how to live this new life. Feelings of emptiness, overwhelming sorrow, and isolation consumed every sleeping and waking moment. A sense of being lost in a dark, terrifying wilderness of despair with no way out became my life now. Confusing emotions continually harassed my mind. I wanted to know whether it was healthy or unhealthy to hate my husband beyond the ends of the earth and to wish that he had died. Then suddenly, as if someone simply flipped a switch, I would feel intense feelings of love and compassion. I wondered whether the powerful thoughts of wishing that the other person involved would die and be condemned to hell for her part in my husband's betrayal were okay. I wanted her to suffer like I was. Was it odd or just plain crazy to want to have sex so soon after my husband's confession, even though I despised him intensely? What was wrong with me for even having those desires? I felt so unsure of who I was, now that my world had exploded into a thousand fragmented pieces. I wanted to run away from all the responsibilities of motherhood and life. I felt I couldn't handle one more thing, one more task. Why, why did I think I had to know all the details of their trysts? And how many details would be enough? Repulsive images would literally

leave me weak and vulnerable to the constant insecure thoughts of my own unworthiness and shame. I felt I could die of a broken heart. I became angry with God. I blamed God for my unfortunate life and wondered why God would allow me such pain and misery ...

Bleeding Heart

... I often wondered whether the constant affliction of my body and mind would ever go away. I worried about possible future diseases because of the continuous stress from a wound such as this. I wondered if my heart would ever stop feeling like it had been ripped into shreds and trampled on repeatedly. Would the ache always be a part of me? Would my heart ever stop bleeding?

Then without warning, just when I thought that I might be able to pull my life together, cunning mind games would creep in and chaotic madness would invade my emotional well-being. Once again I would question my sanity. I remember one of those insane episodes a few weeks after my husband confessed. I found myself aimlessly driving down the highway into town, not even sure how I got from point A to point B. The traffic light turned red and I pulled to a gradual stop behind an older white Chevy pick-up truck. With sunglasses concealing my tear-swollen eyes I gazed off into nowhere, which was something I often did as I struggled to survive the constant assault on my mind—my husband's betrayal consuming my every thought. During those moments as I sat and waited for the light to turn green, uncontrollable thoughts erupted. I caught myself secretly looking at the man in front of me through his rear view mirror, my tinted eyewear hiding my stare. I could only see a portion of his face; his dark eyes were staring back at me. I wondered in that moment whether he thought I was attractive. I wondered whether anyone would ever love me or was I destined for this life of despair and sadness forever? I then began fantasizing how I would flirt with the man who stared back at me. Could I let go of all my inhibitions and ride off into the sunset with this stranger in front of me? "*Could I possibly do it? Did I dare?*" I so desperately wanted to feel what it would be like to be touched romantically by another man, to feel the rush that my husband had felt. In that brief moment I tried to imagine what it would be like to have an affair and discard the vows that I had made twenty-two years before. I wondered and even smiled at the thought of how my husband would react to such objectionable behavior. In my mind, I was enjoying the spiteful taunt, "*How does this make you feel now, me in the arms of another man?*" Just as quickly as that fantasy ignited in my mind, mental aerobics once more began robbing me of my ability to think clearly. I suddenly exploded with anger. My quickened emotional outburst must have caused my face to flush; the redness that surrounded my eyes now joined the heated blush that covered my face and chest. I was livid! I began to think that every man on planet earth was as deceiving and untrustworthy as my husband had been. I furiously glanced around and glared at every driver in every car that was waiting for the signal to change. I began to wonder what his or her secrets were. How many homes were going to be destroyed because of their devious lives? I shook my head as the light turned green, trying to shake the loathsome thoughts away. I continued on my purposeless drive to nowhere, resolving in that moment that I would never again trust my heart to anyone.

Excerpt from Chapter 9

Have A Plan

Discerning True Remorse

There is a juncture in this process where the wounded faithful can get stuck or frozen in their pain. When that happens, discernment is vital in order to move forward. This confusing point in time can be brutal to an already fragile mind. You must ask and answer this question: Is my spouse truly repentant for their actions? How do I know for certain? In order for the relationship to move toward healing, this issue must be addressed—not only for the wounded, but for the one who caused the wound as well. I have known many betrayed spouses who made the decision to stay in their traumatized marriages in spite of the lack of that crucial piece of honesty. Typically, the unfaithful one claims to believe his or her affair was not of any consequence. The offending spouse often blames the faithful one. Games continue and their manipulative stories tend to trip up the fragile emotions of the faithful partner. It is imperative that the wounded one is convinced that their spouse's confession, sorrow, and pain are authentic. You will know if it is sincere; trust your heart here. The vow-breakers must fully grasp the impact of the losses that resulted from the infidelity. They must grieve the pain that they have caused your relationship, your lives.

Please remember this: the grieving is not a one-time event. The betrayed and the betrayer will and must mourn, until both reach a sense of renewed peace based on forgiveness. There are many phases in this wilderness walk. You will make many strategic choices to take difficult "steps" before you find complete restoration. This process will take time. You and your spouse will need to learn to be patient with this mourning leg of the journey. During this stage it is common for you to feel lonely, disconnected, and angry ...

Excerpt from Chapter 10

Endurance

Embrace the Pain

One of the most excruciating and abrasive parts of recovery for me was practicing the plan of action I had chosen: face it, embrace it, mourn it, and move on. At times facing my pains head on and allowing the mental images to be right in front of me was some of my most difficult work. It would take all the courage and willpower I could find to go to that place in my mind, to force my brain to visualize my husband's cruel betrayal.

After trying either to numb myself or to distract my thoughts, which never worked, I learned to stare down the pain. I would face it. Then I would say out loud, sometimes even scream, "Okay, bring it on!" This would happen numerous times a day, even during inopportune times, such as driving. I learned to seize the pain, hold on to the loss, visualize the offense, and feel the repulsion, anger, and disgust of the actions!

I know this method sounds crazy, but this practice worked for me. I had to feel the pain and agony of the tragedy that had invaded my world and tormented my mind. I had to become skilled at not minimizing it; if I did, it would only prolong my grief. I learned to embrace the pain!

Journal Entry, October 31, 2002

*I have struggled all yesterday, and today.
I realized in the last couple of hours that the shock
of all of this is starting to wane. The reality has set in
and I AM ANGRY! I AM ANGRY!
How could Rick have done this to me, to the boys, to our life?
Why?
I don't even know who my husband is.
I can't stand the pain. Sometimes I wish I could die.
Who were you? You led a double life.
How could you do that?
How could you pretend that you loved me?
How could you?
I know that your childhood has a lot to do with it and
I will have to learn to deal with that, but it is hard
to separate the man who could have said "No."
God tried to help you, but you would not listen.
Why? Will I ever understand?
I am so angry that you destroyed my world and I have
to be punished over and over again.
I have to do all of the work of packing up the house to move,
I have to clean, and I have to decide what to do with
our pets.
The shock has worn off.
Now I feel the raw emotion of what has happened.
My heart is broken.
How could you have been so stupid, so selfish? And all the
while you made me look bad; like it was my entire fault.
What abuse—to my mind—to my heart!*

Journal Entry, February 2, 2003

*I have been robbed of EVERYTHING!
I feel like I will never have the joy I could have had.
Will this ever, ever go away? I am hurting so badly.
I am so tired of this rollercoaster ride, I WANT TO GET OFF!
I now know why Rick would not hold me at night, why he
didn't want to be with me. He didn't want me.
He didn't want me. Oh God, I feel so much pain, so much loss.
I know; I know I need to forget about the past, think about my
future.
How can I think about our future when everything we do as a*

couple I know he did with her? How can I continue to live this life?

It seems like I am always messing up our dates.

Do we not go out anymore?

I do not know what to do; I want desperately to have a new life.

How can I do that, when all I can think about is what he did with her?

I need help!

I want off this ride!

I am sitting here thinking and thinking—and I realize—I need to put the blame where blame belongs.

I have been saying all along that she robbed me.

NO! My husband robbed me!

Now, what do I do with that thought?

Rick robbed me. What do I think about that?

It makes me angry, sad, and depressed.

I am afraid.

Mourning To Move Forward

Once I faced the offenses and embraced my pain, I would then mourn my many losses. I had to feel the emptiness that had taken me captive. I cried, I wept, until I had no more tears. I allowed the mourning to flood my soul ...

Excerpt from Chapter 14 Take Hold of Courage

Dislodging Emotional Debris

If I had chosen not to trust again and not to be vulnerable to love, I would have begun the unhealthy practice of stuffing my emotional pain and memories of my husband's betrayal. Then, just like a raging river after a heavy rainstorm, the swift waters of denial would have swallowed the debris of my pain that had been collecting on the riverbanks of my life. As the churning waters tossed and the ravaging thoughts churned deep within, I may have dismissed the warning signs of unprocessed pain and anger. My mind would have repeatedly tried to bury the grief of the betrayal, but eventually my body would not have been able to withstand the pressure that was building deep inside. My body, my health would have suffered greatly. I have seen it over and over in many wounded people ...